This paper will examine the Japanese empire as experience, not as policy, through a study of the Japanese community in Tianjin, north China, before 1937. Recent scholarship on Japanese settlers in East Asia suggests considerable variation within and between communities and Tianjin’s location at a key point of Sino-Japanese conflict arguably encouraged a view of China and the Chinese that mirrored the rhetoric of empire. However, settlers valued personal and economic security and status over more abstract questions of national interest, and settler engagement with empire and with the Japanese influence in China varied according to the perceived impact of political developments on personal interests. This engagement can therefore be understood as an extension of the quest for economic opportunity and social capital that was manifested also in factional struggles in concession organisations and in the highly transactional approach to relations with the Japanese state.

Japan’s empire, like Britain’s, was produced and inhabited by groups with differing preoccupations and interests. While the official rhetoric of empire, and some post-war narratives of Japanese expansion, presented empire as an uncontested national project, in reality it did not win universal support within the wider Japanese polity. Moreover, the empire varied in temper and in practice across time and space, and our understanding of its various forms is still developing.1 A key objective of this paper is to continue the complication of our understanding of the Japanese informal empire in China,2 through an examination of the civilian Japanese resident in Tianjin before 1937, and their perception of the world of empire.

The Japanese concession in Tianjin was established in 1898 after the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Later tensions and conflicts marked the history of both the city and its people and Japanese settler attitudes to China. In 1900, Tianjin was besieged by ‘Boxer’ forces and the foreign concessions were shelled.3 The treaties subsequently imposed on China allowed the stationing of Japanese and other foreign troops in the area and the violence and irrationality associated with Boxer activity served as a powerful and durable metaphor of Chinese inferiority.4 The political instability that followed the 1911 revolution produced outbursts of Chinese civil conflict and periodic international tension accompanied by strikes, demonstrations and boycotts of foreign goods.

Comparisons between Tianjin, Shanghai and the northeastern city of Harbin reveal significant regional variations in patterns of settlement, settler experience and in settler

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1 See Wilson, ‘Bridging the Gaps’.
2 Duus, ‘Japan’s Informal Empire’.
3 Cohen, History in Three Keys, 53.
engagement with China. Harbin grew up in the late nineteenth century around imperial Russian pursuit of oil and railway rights; it was a ‘city of pioneers’, where everyone was an incomer, and where Japanese, Chinese and Russian communities were relatively closely integrated. Tianjin was a major port and a commercial and administrative centre before the advent of the Japanese. Nonetheless, Tianjin did not enjoy the investment in commerce and urban infrastructure lavished on Dalian, Shenyang and Changchun by the South Manchurian Railway Company (SMRC), nor could it match Shanghai’s wealth and cosmopolitanism.

As described by Henriot, the Japanese community in Shanghai was ‘a microcosm of Japan on Chinese territory’, where settlers lived concentrated in one sector of the city, isolated from the Chinese, and spoke, ate, dressed much as they would have done at home. Relations with officialdom were close: settlers were shipped back to Japan for safety at the outbreak of war in 1937, and community organisations became, increasingly, the ‘docile instrument’ of the Japanese authorities in the wartime mobilisation and organisation of settlers. However, that microcosm embodied tensions visible in Japan. There were economic and political divisions between senior employees of major Japanese companies (the kaisha-ha ‘company clique’) and a larger group of lower-ranking employees and small businessmen (the dochakunin ‘settlers’) who formed a majority in the settler community. There were also tensions between settler hostility to rising Chinese nationalist activism, and the sympathetic engagement in those same struggles of student radicals and individuals such as Uchimura Kanzō during the 1920s and 1930s.

While Sino-Japanese conflict and Chinese civil unrest undoubtedly affected Shanghai and cities in Manchuria, Tianjin’s exposure to Sino-foreign interaction and conflict was direct, extensive, and unmitigated by the substantial foreign presences that characterised Shanghai or the quasi-colonial order established in Manchuria after 1931. The Tianjin community therefore offers insights into the collision of Japanese civil and imperial dimensions of the China experience. The formal reunification of China under the Guomindang (GMD) and the anti-imperialism of the mid-1920s brought further tension, alarming foreign settlers and prompting explicit comparisons with Boxer anti-foreignism. Sino-Japanese tension rose sharply as the GMD’s Northern Expedition armies clashed with Japanese forces at Ji’nan, Shandong province, in May 1928, an incident perceived—as we will see—by the Japanese in Tianjin as a direct threat to their own security. Thereafter, the north remained a site of resistance to the central government and Sino-Japanese conflict. The occupation of Manchuria after 1931 was followed by armed disturbances in Tianjin that directly affected the settlers. In late 1935, elements within the Japanese garrison worked to extend their own political influence by promoting ‘autonomy’ for north China, and establishing the ‘puppet’ East Hebei Anti-Communist Autonomous Council between Tianjin and Beiping. The city remained unsettled until war broke in 1937.

6 Ibid., 47–49, 52, 55–56.
8 Henriot, ‘Little Japan’, 146–169; quotation from 159.
9 Fogel, ‘Shanghai Japan’, 932–935. I have chosen here to translate dochakunin relatively freely as ‘settlers’, which is a fair description of their position in China, though the Japanese term appears to carry other connotations.
11 Cohen, History in Three Keys, 251–256.
12 Coble, Facing Japan; Dryburgh, North China and Japanese Expansion.
The growing literature on settler and sojourner communities reveals the fissures and contradictions within empires, and demands that we reappraise the relations between states and their overseas citizens. Examining the planter society of northern Sumatra, for example, Stoler notes that ‘What stands out in memoirs, the contemporary press, period novels and government archives is the disjuncture between a dominant rhetoric of unity and a subjacent concern with the reality of sharp social and political division’. British settlers in Shanghai identified themselves as ‘Shanghailanders’ and maintained an understanding of settler identity and interests quite distinct from those of the imperial state, and recent scholarship on Japanese communities in China and Korea suggests considerable variation within and between communities.

Our understanding of how settlers engaged with the empire depends largely on where we look. The materials used here—Residents’ Corporation publications, government archives, the settler press—reveal the corporate life of the settler community, its public self-representation and its collective relations with officialdom. Japanese journals produced in north China reveal a discomfort with life in China and a sense of distance from the Chinese that reflects the assumed hierarchies underlying empire; an examination of settler politics and settler–state relations reveals deep divisions within the Japanese community. Tamanoi notes the difficulties that settlers in Manchuria might have experienced in reconciling official rhetoric with personal experience, and further meticulous research is needed to illuminate the complexities of individual engagement with a collective or national project. The corporate sources on which this paper is based suggest that the disjuncture in Tianjin between rhetoric and reality was very close to the surface indeed.

**Japanese Tianjin as Treaty-Port Society**

Before exploring the relation between settler community and national project, let us consider who those settlers were. The Tianjin Japanese community numbered over 6,600 in 1935 and was the third largest Japanese settlement in China proper. Most settlers lived in the concession, with small numbers of Taiwanese and Koreans and an estimated 26,000 Chinese, and were mostly engaged in small-scale commerce and service enterprises. This was largely a community of families: numbers of adult men and women were roughly equal, and nearly four out of ten settlers were underage, though later changes in the composition of the growing community prompted consular staff to lament the influx of ‘less respectable’ Japanese. The Tianjin community was part of an expanding network whose other members were more exposed to the hardships and uncertainties of life in China: while most Japanese in central China were concentrated in Shanghai, by 1935 around 7,000 Japanese in the north lived in smaller settlements

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13 Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories’, 325.
16 Shanghai and Qingdao had settlements of 29,056 and 14,536; Peattie, ‘Japanese Treaty Port Settlements’, 170; in 1931, Manchuria’s largest communities included Dalian (102,768) and Shenyang (24,094), though many were smaller, such as Harbin (3,823) and Yingkou (3,073). Toa Keizai Chosakyoku, Manchuria Yearbook, 1932–33, 14.
17 Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
18 Katsuragawa, ‘Sokai zaïjū Nihonjin’, 361; Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
and the establishment of residents’ associations in Hebei coincided with the expansion of Japanese political influence.\(^\text{19}\)

The collective life of the settler community was symbolised and managed by the Residents’ Corporation (kyoryû mindan) in cooperation with the Kyôseikai, a trust established in 1930 to supervise health, education and religious institutions. Nominally autonomous, Residents’ Corporations were established only with Foreign Ministry permission, and depended on official recognition that a community merited a degree of self-government and official funding for its own activities and on behalf of such organisations as the Youth League, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Imperial Veterans’ Association. Adult males were eligible for Residents’ Corporation membership and there were Korean residents on the executive committee by 1936.\(^\text{20}\)

The community prided itself on its prosperity, supporting five schools, five Buddhist temples, a Shinto shrine, a church with a Japanese pastor, and a daily newspaper.\(^\text{21}\) However, Tianjin made fewer fortunes than Shanghai, and economic surveys of the city produced by settler organisations and by the SMRC show considerable ambivalence over the opportunities available there. A narrative of Tianjin’s history in a Japanese

\(^{19}\) Peattie, ‘Japanese Treaty Port Settlements’, 170; residents associations in Hebei province outside Tianjin included Shanhaiguan (established 1904); Tangshan and Gubeikou (1933); Qinhuangdao and Luanxian (1934); Tanggu and Fengtai (1936); Tongzhou (1937).


\(^{21}\) Katsuragawa, ‘Sokai zaijû Nihonjin’, 352.
Chamber of Commerce survey placed equal emphasis on the economic benefits brought by foreign intervention—including telegraph facilities, rail links and foreign management of shipping—and the instability that had ‘demanded’ intervention in the first place.\textsuperscript{22} A 1935 SMRC report was more overtly negative, comparing Tianjin unfavourably to Shanghai and describing the local economic culture as ‘crude’ and ‘feudal’\textsuperscript{23}.

In these conditions, the pursuit of a decent living and social capital required flexibility and enterprise. Much of this enterprise was channelled into small businesses. Most Japanese businesses in Tianjin—pharmacists, food retailers, laundries—employed at most one or two Japanese and a handful of Chinese workers. The largest Japanese factory in 1930, the China Match Company, employed 1,200 workers, and a few other plants had workforces of around 300, though Japanese manufacturing interests in Tianjin did not expand significantly until 1936.\textsuperscript{24} The pronounced division between long-term settlers and the more affluent and influential employees of major Japanese companies that marked Shanghai was therefore lacking in Tianjin.\textsuperscript{25} Predictably, the socio-economic division between Japanese and Chinese was maintained. Whereas Japanese servants were the norm in Seoul, Tianjin Japanese who could afford domestic staff typically employed Chinese, and settler children returning to the metropole were bewildered at the sight of Japanese labourers.\textsuperscript{26} Yet there were also social and economic hierarchies within the settler community, as a closer look at settler lives will reveal.

**Settler Lives: Who Were the Tianjin Japanese?**

Directories of prominent Tianjin residents reveal a community where social leadership remained in the hands of settlers, rather than of company men. The personal histories recorded in these directories suggest the professional openings that migration offered and the weight attached to economic status. They also reveal the opportunities open for service in organisations such as the Residents’ Corporation, and in sub-official posts that engaged individuals with the political dimensions of informal empire. The careers of Katsuta Shigenao, Usui Chūzō, and Nakajima Tokuji, three settlers who figured prominently in the internal politics of the concession, indicate something of the range of settler experience.

For Katsuta Shigenao, law graduate of Tokyo Imperial University, his arrival in Tianjin was a step towards self-establishment, as he set up an independent practice serving Japanese companies in Tianjin and Shandong in 1922. He later diversified into ice-making and refrigeration—combining commercial opportunity with public service—when the use of ‘natural’ ice (frozen, untreated water cut from the ground in winter, perceived as a source of disease) was banned by consul Okamoto Takezō. From 1932 to 1935, Katsuta was legal adviser to Manzhouguo Foreign Minister Xie Jieshi; he served on the executive, regulations and tax committees of the Residents’ Corporation.

\textsuperscript{22} Tenshin Nihonjin Shōgyō Kaigisho, *Tenshin gaikan*, 1–2.
\textsuperscript{25} See Fogel, ‘Shanghai Japan’.
\textsuperscript{26} Brooks, ‘Reading the Japanese Colonial Archive’, 304–305; Tianjin may have had fewer Japanese wealthy enough to pay Japanese wages; Kitani, ‘Tenshin kyoryūmin’, 2.94, 89.
and was a Kyo¯ ekikai trustee.27 Similarly, Usui Chûzô set up his own firm in 1906, aged 26, after studying construction in Tokyo and working as construction supervisor for the Yokohama Specie Bank in Tianjin. As the business expanded, Usui’s standing in Tianjin rose steadily: by 1932, he was Chairman of the Residents’ Corporation and held influential posts in the Japanese Club, the Youth League, the Sports Association and the Nichiren temple.28

For others, Tianjin was more of a port of last resort. Nakajima Tokuji graduated from Chûo University, and worked for the Jiyû shinbun, the Imperial Railway Institute and the Tokyo Municipal Assembly. After a series of unsuccessful business ventures in Japan in kaolin and mineral oil, and in the press, he moved to Tianjin in 1921 where he acted briefly as executive director in two further enterprises. In 1932, he was manager of the Tianjin branch of Harimaya, a Tokyo-based food and medicine company and by 1937 he had moved on again and was manager to the Kyo¯ ekikai.29

Other settlers, though less visible in concession politics, were also engaged with Japan’s expanding influence in China. Fujita Gorô and Kotaka Torazô both arrived in China in 1903, Fujita to work in a Tianjin hospital and Kotaka to study Chinese in Beijing. By 1936, Fujita owned an independent clinic, was a member of the Residents’ Corporation committee, and was an adviser to Song Zheyuan, the Chinese military and political regional leader. Kotaka’s curriculum vitae included services to both Chinese and Japanese armies, and experience in shipping and newspapers, translation, research and trademark protection for Japanese firms. He also held a post with the intelligence division of the Manzhouguo police service.30

Even quieter lives interlocked with officialdom. Ito¯ Jisaburô worked in a Seoul pharmacy before moving to Tianjin, where he worked for his wife’s family and then for the Japanese garrison before opening a stationery and general store employing two Chinese workers. And ex-soldiers also had to make a living; after 17 years in the army including a stint in China, Shirogata Fumiyoshi ran the ‘Three Trades’ business association, taught kendô at a Japanese primary school and played the pipa in his spare time.31

Most settlers had more modest interests. Iwashita Nagashi settled in 1919 and took over the Kato¯ Laundry. Baba Shin’ichi came from Fukuoka in 1932 to open a dyeworks, after an earlier visit was cut short by the Manchurian incident. Higuchi Chikatada worked in the hospitality trade for 20 years before opening the SK restaurant in 1935. Obara Seibee found his first hotel job in Tianjin at 14 and at 28 took over the Hibiscus Hotel, with six rooms and a staff of 15.32 Others appear in the residents’ directories as nameless employees of Japanese businesses.

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27 The refrigeration venture employed eight Japanese and 20 Chinese, and was supported by East Asia Hospital principal Tamura Toshitsugu and settlers engaged in food import/export. Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 119–120; Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 96; Brooks, Japan’s Imperial Diplomacy, 102–103.
28 Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 244–245; Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 303.
29 Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 209–210; Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 146.
30 Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 329–330, 342; Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 213, 219. Song Zheyuan was then commander of the largest army in north China and chairman of the Hebei-Chahar Political Council, an organisation subordinate to the Chinese central government but constrained in practice by the need to avoid confrontation with the Japanese authorities. Dryburgh, North China and Japanese Expansion.
31 Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 1; Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 270. The ‘three trades’ were restaurants, geisha houses and accommodation (at times, a euphemism for prostitution).
32 Hayakawa, Hokusshi zairyû hûjin, 22, 34, 293, 64; Tenshin Kôshinjo, Kita Shina zairyû hûjin, 492.
The collective self-portrait of the residents’ directories was by no means comprehensive. Ignoring the opium trade that generated substantial personal and public revenues,33 it displayed instead a Japanese Tianjin inhabited by migrants in pursuit of legitimate and often modest personal and financial security. No one claimed the Tianjin streets were paved with gold, nor was it part of a national project of continental settlement. While the practical impact of the Manchurian ‘migration machine’ is debated, energetic state promotion of emigration to Manzhouguo as a path toward national advancement and personal economic security marked the collective mind, and state-directed investment lured reforming intellectuals and entrepreneurs to the region.34 The choice to settle in Tianjin, however, was a more independent and prosaic one.

Writing Tianjin: Settler Discourses

Settler publications show another public face of Japanese Tianjin. Brooks has noted the function of the Seoul-based journal Cho¯sen oyobi Manshu¯ (Korea and Manchuria) in articulating the Japanese experience in Korea and Manchuria,35 and Japanese journals such as Shina Mondai (The China Question) and Kita Shina (North China) offered similar glimpses into life in north China in travel pieces, articles on Chinese culture, and poems amongst commentary on political matters.36 In these journals, contacts with China were marked by discourses of Chinese inferiority that borrowed from earlier treatments of Japan’s Asian neighbours.37 These publications juxtaposed Chinese ignorance of the wider world with Japanese enlightenment. In Tianjin where even the affluent and educated Chinese might be unaware that polygamy was frowned upon in Japan,38 the institution of the Tianjin Japanese Library, with its substantial and varied collections, was treated both as a source of social education for settlers and as a means of spreading an understanding of Japan and the Japanese amongst the Chinese. Unfortunately, user statistics do not reveal how successful it was in reaching non-Japanese readers.39 At the same time, discourses of dirt and hygiene differentiated the modern Japanese from the backward peoples of the empire. As one writer commented, ‘Chinese hardly ever take baths and rarely wash their clothes . . . Lovely women keep their hands and faces beautiful, but their bodies are often dirty . . .’ Concession social policy reflected these perceptions, as Chinese households were subjected to intrusive hygiene inspections, though omitted from the meticulous recordings was deaths from contagious diseases.40

Chinese flaws went beyond the remediable conditions41 of dirt and ignorance to encompass essentialised qualities that set them apart from their Japanese neighbours.

35 Brooks, ‘Reading the Japanese Colonial Archive’.
36 Tenshin Kōshinjo, Kita Shina zairyū hōjin, 45–46; Hayakawa, Hokushi zairyū hōjin, 120.
37 See Duus, The Abacus and the Sword, 397–424, especially 401–406; Tianjin writers generally avoided the most grotesque imagery reported by Duus, but the common emphasis on dirt and ignorance is quite striking.
39 Shiroishi, ‘Tai-Shi bunka jigyō’, 51–53; user data from Tianjin Tushuguan, Tianjin Riben tushuguan.
40 Rogaski, Hygienic Modernity, 254–270.
An anonymous *Shina Mondai* editorial declared that ‘the loyal and courageous Japanese and the acutely selfish Chinese are essentially incompatible’, citing established Japanese China scholars and personal experience of China to lend authority to this argument.\(^{42}\) Even relatively sympathetic discussions identified in Chinese farmers a fatalism that left them at the mercy of their environment, and emphasised their lack of agency as compared to the ‘modern’ Japanese.\(^{43}\) That sense of difference was expressed in everyday practice, as Japanese women declined to adopt Chinese dress partly because ‘they feel superior to the Chinese and do not wish to be mistaken for them’.\(^{44}\) Again, these perceptions of the Chinese appeared in the Japanese military police’s briefing documents for new arrivals in China, as well as in journalistic ephemera.\(^{45}\)

Both journals mined the uncertainties of the times for lessons on China, and contrasted Japanese rationality, technology and legality with Chinese activism. In 1930, as settler interests were hit by Chinese boycotts of Japanese goods and businesses,\(^{46}\) *Shina Mondai* argued that ‘the Chinese put the cart before the horse in everything they think and do. Before boycotting Japanese goods they should consider why Japanese goods come in ... and work on the manufacture of Chinese products. And as for the dissolution of the unequal treaties, rather than bargaining and blustering, they should eradicate the conditions that obliged [sic] the powers to impose them’.\(^{47}\) A later article framed the 1933 occupation of Rehe as a fulfilment of Japan’s legal obligations to Manzhouguo in the face of the Chinese authorities’ use of irregular and bandit forces there.\(^{48}\) Articles by Chinese authors typically expressing dismay over the state of China and the Chinese reinforced these impressions\(^{49}\) and the east Hebei regime was positioned as proof that China’s problems were best addressed through assertive external tutelage.\(^{50}\)

Finally, the city itself appeared alien and inhospitable: unlike Shanghai, settlers’ Tianjin was no ‘little Japan’. The climate was a source of persistent discomfort,\(^{51}\) and the psychological stresses of life overseas were recognised as health hazards, producing hysteria and nervous breakdowns, just as poor hygiene and natural aridity caused gastric and respiratory infections.\(^{52}\) Even efforts to present life in Tianjin as a cosmopolitan experience were tinged with ambivalence. A 1936 *Kita Shina* article argued that female Japanese settlers could hone their personal style by observing how western women dressed, and that all could enjoy western cuisine, luxuries such as Johnny Walker whisky and entertainments including foreign cinemas and golf courses. Yet the writer lamented the loss of much that was identified as Japanese. While the Shanghai Japanese could eat and drink as at home, in Tianjin, saké and Japanese beer were

\(^{42}\) Anon., ‘Shinajin wa kirai da’, *Shina Mondai*, 1.
\(^{43}\) Nonaka, ‘Hokushi no atsusya’, 49–50; see also Himeno, *Hokushi no seiyo*, 16–17.
\(^{46}\) Banno, ‘Japanese Industrialists and Merchants’, 314–315, 317, 326 notes that small traders (a large proportion of the Tianjin community) were disproportionately affected by earlier boycotts, and the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce was active in demanding official support against Chinese activism.
\(^{47}\) Kanezaki, ‘Jun ten jiho jiken’, 16.
\(^{48}\) Hasegawa, ‘Minkoku 22 nen’.
\(^{49}\) Wang, ‘Kokumin no sei’, Zeng, ‘Nankin tento go’.
\(^{50}\) See special issue of *Kita Shina*, January 1937.
\(^{51}\) Nonaka, ‘Hokushi no atsusya’, 49.
\(^{52}\) Tamura, ‘Hokushi no fu to’, 81–82.
expensive, rice and chicken were cheap but of poor quality, and ‘one can’t hope to find decent sashimi’. Tianjin’s Japanese entertainments were also limited, with no kabuki or cherry blossom in the spring, and outdoor pursuits such as rowing and walking were restricted—particularly for women—by the tense relations with China. Thus political uncertainty and a pessimistic (and quite formulaic) discourse on China and the Chinese marked concession life, and the possibility of division between Japanese was largely obscured by this emphasis on Sino-Japanese difference.

Security, Social Capital, and Settler Relations with Japanese Officialdom

Institutionally, practically and psychologically, the settler community was bound to Japanese official presences, yet settler–state relations were frequently uncertain. Official attitudes towards settlers were ambivalent. The authorities could be quick—and instrumental—in citing the presence of their citizens to justify intervention in Chinese affairs. However, substantial studies on northern topography, infrastructure, politics and economy framed Japanese interests in north China as the preserve of the state, quasi-official organisations such as the SMRC and, latterly, major Japanese companies. Promotion of mass migration on a Manchurian scale was impeded by population density and by the emphasis on disorder and instability in advocacy of Japanese intervention in the north, and settler interests were at best marginal to official concerns.

Settlers expected official protection at times of conflict, demanded official mediation in community disputes, and used relations with the authorities as a source of social capital. While this became particularly visible at times of conflict with China, the routine involvement of the consul-general in settler affairs is also striking. The Residents’ Corporation’s official history of 1930 emphasised the links between corporation, community and officialdom. It placed material on settlers and non-official settler organisations behind detailed description of concession administration, and located the origins of concession and corporation within China’s domestic chaos and tense international relations. This interleaving of mundane detail and a turbulent history of natural disaster, international incidents, and civil strife created an impression of natural and human menace held at bay only by meticulous organisation and regulation. Yet the corporation was not the ‘docile instrument’ of the Japanese authorities, and divisions of personal allegiance and economic interest disrupted concession business and mired successive consuls in mediation efforts.

A long-running series of disputes involving three settlers discussed earlier, Katsuta Shigenao, Usui Chūzo¯ and Nakajima Tokuji, highlights the tensions of concession politics. A 1929 report by Consul Tashiro Shigenori began, ‘Nakajima [Tokuji] is a rather impulsive man, and his character has made him enemies’... Reading further, we

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55 Nihon Kokusai Kyōkai, Shina kakkō; Mantetsu Sōmubu, Hokushi jijō; Tōa Kyōkai, Kita Shina sōran; Tōyō jijō kenkyūkai, Hokushi tsurān; Ito, Life along the South Manchurian Railway, 160–164; Dryburgh, North China and Japanese Expansion, 120–125.
57 Quotation from Henriot, ‘Little Japan’, 159. Other reports described the Qingdao Residents’ Corporation as particularly ‘disorderly’ and recorded allegations of financial misconduct in Beijing. Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
58 This report and later discussions of disputes from Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
find a web of grievances that soured relations between settlers and consulate and exposed the weak institutional framework of concession life.

These grievances revolved around corporation procedures, specifically a proposal that Nakajima, having exceeded the regulated term of service, be retired from the corporation executive committee. Nakajima’s allies objectied vigorously, arguing that others were also in breach of the relevant regulations, hitherto generally ignored. As Nakajima’s supporters resigned in protest, and a vote of no-confidence overthrew his opponents, Tashiro was dragged first into fruitless mediation efforts and then into arbitration when votes for the new committee chair were tied. Later, equally acrimonious disputes over electoral procedures and campaigning malpractices dragged on unresolved into the mid-1930s. Competition over economic interests was equally intense. In 1930, Katsuta’s pursuit of corporation financial support for his refrigeration venture was energetically opposed. In the same year, the establishment of the Kyōeikai, with its new budget and projected staff of 30, created further opportunities to gain status and dispense patronage; yet support for the Kyōeikai was so weak that its survival had become an election issue by 1934.

These disputes were conducted through lobbying, protest resignations, and through the Tianjin Daily (Tenshin Nippo). The entrenched divisions between the factions gathered behind Katsuta and Usui infuriated consuls who resented accusations of partisanship and felt that the conduct of both factions ‘disturbed the peace . . . obstructed the management of concession affairs’, lowered Japanese prestige, and undermined the tuleary effect that participation in corporation business was expected to have on Chinese residents of the concession. At a time when Japanese in Korea argued for the extension of constitutional rule to the colony and equated engagement in national elections with settler prestige, settler organisations in China were managed under a patchwork of electoral systems that owed as much to local conditions and factional lobbying as to Japanese practice.

Thus the corporation was a thorn in the consular flesh in peacetime, and episodes of external conflict did not force greater cooperation between Japanese. The Ji’nan incident of May 1928—the settlers’ first sight of the GMD in power—set the tone for later perceptions of China and revealed the scope of settler responses to intensified Sino-Japanese conflict, from support of official actions to defence of more specifically settler interests. Like other foreign governments, the Japanese authorities were alarmed by GMD anti-imperialism and by assaults on foreign citizens and property by Northern Expedition forces in Nanjing. Having failed to secure an agreement that the Northern Expedition would bypass Ji’nan with its 2000 Japanese residents, Tokyo sent an expeditionary force of 5,000 troops to defend its settlers. Proximity and determination on both sides to hold ground and defend national prestige produced tensions that culminated in an attack on Ji’nan by Japanese forces that drove out the remaining Chinese units.

Considering the lessons of the incident, Shina Mondai made the conventional references to Japanese forbearance and Chinese insincerity, and approved the military response as a necessary defence of Japanese citizens. To the Japanese settlers in

59 Consular staff identified (without further explanation) the factions in 1930–1931 as ‘Red’ (Usui) and ‘Blue’ (Katsuta). Despite the proximity of other foreign concessions, Consul Kuwashima Kazue, writing in 1931, seemed untroubled here by the opinions of French or British citizens. Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
60 Brooks, ‘Reading the Colonial Archive’, 298–299.
61 Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.2.2 1–3.
Tianjin, the incident unfolding 350 kilometres to the south represented an immediate threat as well as a matter for international concern. A contemporary account recalled, ‘When the Ji’nan incident erupted, Japanese in Tianjin said with one voice, “Tianjin will be next”’; and the Residents’ Corporation appealed directly to Tokyo for support and protection.

Usui Chūzo, then chairman of the Residents’ Corporation, sent a petition to Foreign Minister Tanaka Giichi that reflected and exploited the suspicions aroused by recent developments in China. Tianjin, as Usui described it, was volatile and chaotic, populated with drifters, thugs, defeated or demobilised soldiers and trade union activists barely kept in check by ineffectual Chinese officials; thus an expansion of the Tianjin garrison was essential. Usui invited Tanaka to see an increase in troop strength as an act of benevolent paternalism, and emphasised the vulnerability of the settlers, the modesty of their interests, and their distaste for political activism. However, he did not confine himself to a subordinate role, lecturing Tanaka on the changing nature of Chinese anti-imperialism, hinting reproachfully that Japanese residents might have to rely on foreigners for protection, and planting the familiar figure of the Chinese official who valued status over duty in implied contrast to his expectations of Tokyo.

Tokyo responded positively, and the corporation produced a memorial volume recreating the episode as a model of state protection of deserving settlers. Usui’s preface recalled the reported violence of the Northern Expedition armies, settlers’ fears, and their joy at the arrival of Japanese troops; a later chapter detailed the collapse of the northern Chinese armies, the violence suffered by Chinese civilians, and Japanese self-defence measures as the GMD’s blue and white flag rose over Tianjin. Although the narrative appears to build towards a traumatic conclusion, Tianjin in 1928 saw nothing like the violence that marked recent incidents at Ji’nan and Nanjing, and there were no Japanese casualties.

Although this was disaster averted rather than disaster survived, the comparisons made between the Ji’nan incident and the Boxer rising are telling. The Boxer rising had consolidated the Japanese presence in Tianjin, and was a potent and durable symbol of Chinese barbarity and decadence. Foreign settlers reinvented the rising ‘almost as a rite of imperial passage’. In casting later incidents in Nanjing and in Ji’nan in the image of the Boxers, they reasserted the legitimacy of imperial presence, and contested the GMD’s declaration of a new order in which imperialism had no place.

The Ji’nan incident memorial volume also offered an opportunity to restate settler achievements and remind Tokyo of its obligations. The description of Tianjin in its final chapter was bleak: ‘Crossing the bar at Dagu, we see an expanse of mudflats, and this is how Tianjin looked for thousands of years . . .’ Descriptions of pre-concession Tianjin taken from photographs showed only ‘a great expanse of ponds and swamp, swept by winds and waves; drier areas dotted with grave mounds and not a house in sight’, a wilderness once visited only by hunters of wildfowl, now transformed into Asahi Street with its crowds and tramlines. Apart from an acknowledgement that

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64 Tenshin Kyoryū Mindan, Kita Shina chūton kinen, 6.
65 Foreign Ministry Archives, A 1.1.0.2–22.
66 Foreign Ministry Archives, A 1.1.0.2–22.
67 Tenshin Kyoryū Mindan, Kita Shina chūton kinen, 1, 6–9.
69 Tenshin Kyoryū Mindan, Kita Shina chūton kinen, 32, 38.
Marco Polo had written favourably of thirteenth-century Tianjin, the Chinese city and its inhabitants were invisible in this potted history, and the construction of Tianjin as *terra nullius* asserted the settler contribution to its development.\(^{70}\)

The connection between civilian settlers and the army was affirmed by a central section listing over 250 members of the Japanese garrison, and by a ‘view from the barracks’ emphasising military stoicism in the face of the Chinese armies and climate.\(^{71}\) Essays written by settler children emphasised the central elements of the Ji’an narrative, and lent immediacy to the settler perspective, affirming settlers’ vulnerability, and depoliticising and domesticating their relations with officialdom. Nakashita Masae, a fourth-grade girls’ high school student wrote, ‘Who could be unmoved at the sight of the soldiers, with their heavy equipment … under this burning sky … thinking only of defending us? … Under their protection, we settlers could continue our everyday business even in the face of the crisis, unlike the Chinese who fled the Chinese city for the concessions.’\(^{72}\)

Yamashita Masaaki, a primary school fifth-grader, responded more directly to the garrison’s return:

The soldiers who went to Ji’an to protect people from the fighting came back to Tianjin on Saturday. I went to welcome them, and stood in front of the school with a flag … I was shouting ‘Banzai’, and so were Sasaki and Fujii. The soldiers looked at us kindly, smiling as they marched by with the buglers in front. There was blood coming out under the buglers’ gaiters, but they kept marching as if they didn’t notice.\(^{73}\)

Settler responses to later developments, as revealed in Kobayashi’s analysis of the 1931 ‘Tianjin incident’, suggest the conditional nature of settler support for the Japanese armies. As Japanese forces consolidated their occupation of Manchuria, and settlers nervously contemplated the stationing of 5,000 Chinese troops in the Tianjin suburbs, fighting broke out between local Chinese units and Chinese paramilitaries under the covert direction of Doihara Kenji and other officers involved in the Manchurian occupation; one Japanese woman was killed by a stray shot.\(^{74}\) At first, the Residents’ Corporation responded as it had done in 1928, asking Tokyo (unsuccessfully) to send more troops, supporting the militia, rehousing some settlers away from the fringes of the concession, and evacuating others to Dalian or Japan.\(^{75}\)

Later, however, widespread reporting in the Chinese press of Doihara’s activities undermined support for the army, and settlers boycotted militia service and militia ceremonies.\(^{76}\) Kobayashi argues that the Japanese garrison’s declaration of martial law (with its accompanying powers of press censorship) was designed to prevent Japanese civilian protests over Doihara’s activities, as well as restricting access to the Chinese press.\(^{77}\) He attributes settler opposition primarily to economic concerns, as the flight of Chinese residents from the concession deprived Japanese businesses of their clients and the Residents’ Corporation of vital tax revenue, leaving the

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\(^{70}\) Again, this is a common settler theme: see Bickers, *Britain in China*, 106.

\(^{71}\) Tenshin Kyoryū Mindan, *Kita Shina chūton kinen*, 11–23, 28–32.


\(^{73}\) Ibid., 25–26.

\(^{74}\) Kobayashi, ‘Tenshin jiken’, 1–5. This was intended to allow the former Qing emperor, Pu Yi, to be smuggled out to Manchuria.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 4–9, 12.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 9, 13.
concession as a ‘ghost town’ and prompting a series of initiatives by consular staff to entice them back.\textsuperscript{78}

These episodes highlight ambiguities in settler attitudes. Responses to the Ji’nan incident show a community ill at ease with the shifting political landscape of the Chinese republic, quick to request official support against perceived threats, and grateful for official protection. Responses to the Tianjin incident, however, reveal a community with a lively sense of entitlement, willing to demand that Tokyo commit troops to its defence, to expect that army activities support its wider interests, and to withhold support if this implied contract was breached. We also see variations in attitudes towards the Chinese; despite the construction of the Chinese in settler publications as disorderly and backward, their practical contribution to the commercial and fiscal health of the concession could not be ignored.

The passage of time and further deterioration in official relations with China raised the status to be gained from association with military enterprises. Whereas in Shanghai the Imperial Veterans’ Association had ‘an important instrumental role in maintaining close links with the Japanese army’, Tianjin did not establish its own branch of the association until 1939.\textsuperscript{79} Nonetheless, the 1936 residents’ directory listed military service history and commendations for public service during the 1931 Tianjin incident alongside notes on Residents’ Corporation and other civilian posts. Around one in three listed settlers had undergone some form of military service, and as many were recognised for their role in responding to the 1931 disturbances.\textsuperscript{80}

**Conclusions**

Informal empire in China was as much a range of personal opportunities as a national project. The Japanese went to Tianjin hoping to build careers, to find economic security, or to draw a line through failures at home, and the personal histories of Katsuta Shigenao, Usui Chūzo and Nakajima Tokuji show the opportunities that Tianjin offered either to succeed or to fail again. Settlers benefited directly and indirectly from Japanese interests in China, and Tianjin offered opportunities that were not available in Japan: Kotaka Torazō’s language skills and experience of China led to employment with the Manzhouguo police as well as to less secure and prestigious work in translation and commercial services; and Fujita Gorō’s experience of China and social standing led to his appointment as adviser to a senior Chinese official.

A 1936 *Kita Shina* article presented the settler existence as both noble mission and life sentence, declaring that:

*[settlers] trade in Tianjin, live in Tianjin, and expect that their bones will be buried in Tianjin ... they see Tianjin as their second home. In the past there were those who dreamed of making a fortune and talked of returning home with cash in pocket, but now they are few, and most are painfully aware that they will work there forever, and live and die with the Tianjin that was*

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 14–16.

\textsuperscript{79} Quotation from Henriot, ‘Little Japan’, 160; the Tianjin IVA existed until 1939 as a sub-section of the Beiping branch. Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.7.011.

\textsuperscript{80} Hayakawa, *Hokushi zairyu hōjin*; Foreign Ministry Archives, K3.7.011.
created by the efforts of its Japanese settlers. Untroubled by anti-Japanese feeling or conflicts, they devote themselves to raising Japanese prestige…

There is ample evidence to suggest that settler attitudes to Tianjin, and to Japanese official activity there, were more complex than this.

On one hand, Japanese journals produced in north China constructed a common Japanese experience in which the material discomforts and political uncertainties of settler life, and the collective failings of the Chinese, were prominent in a discourse that reflected the assumptions of hierarchy and difference underlying the practices of empire. On the other hand, the Sino-Japanese divide was not the only one that mattered in the management of concession affairs, and there were deep divisions between settler factions and between settlers and state.

The Tianjin Japanese were collectively fractious and demanding in their dealings with officials, and settler responses to the Ji’nan and Tianjin incidents suggest where settler priorities lay. The settler narrative of the 1928 Ji’nan conflict focused on settler security and the duty of the state to protect its citizens, and generally declined to place the conflict in a wider context of Japanese continental interests or national prestige. In the 1931 Tianjin incident, settlers worked to protect concession residents, resented the personal risks and economic hardship created by Japanese military intrigues and, in some cases, withdrew support from army-related organisations, such as the militia, in protest. That the Tianjin incident was subsequently mined for social capital in the form of awards, commendations, and posts in Manzhouguo itself indicates that such episodes were evaluated for their service to personal interests as well as national ones. Thus settler relations with the state were transactional, and loyalty and compliance were offered in return for state protection.

Settler–state relations came under further pressure as power struggles and personal tensions within the Residents’ Corporation hampered control of community affairs and challenged consular authority. The vulnerability of concession institutions and procedures highlighted the weak incorporation of the Japanese in Tianjin into a national administrative framework. Moreover, while recent studies of Japanese Shanghai have revealed the profound divide between company and settler cliques, the factional struggles in Tianjin suggest even deeper fissures within the imagined community of settlerdom.

Stoler has noted that European colonial communities ‘were neither by nature unified nor did they inevitably share common interests and fears’, and argued that the assumed binary of coloniser and colonised was largely designed to mitigate or mask tensions within colonial society. Examining the Japanese informal empire in China through the lens of Tianjin, we find little evidence of shared project or assumed community of interest between settlers and state, or even among settlers. While recent work on Manchuria has sensitised us to the gap between official rhetoric and popular engagement in empire and continental settlement, an examination of Japanese Tianjin reveals further disparities of interest between state and settler elites.

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81 Kitani, ‘Tenshin kyoryūmin’, 64.
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