

The Place of Japan among Tianjin's Occupiers as Defined through the 1923-1924 and 1930 Combined Action Plans

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Tianjin (天津) is both one of the less studied and one of the most important “treaty ports,” or Chinese cities opened to trade by treaty. There were nine imperialist nations in the city: Japan, Great Britain, France, United States, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, and Belgium. Of these nine nations, eight owned concessions. This “microcosm” was concentrated in a very small area. The high strategic importance of the city made it threatened by many crises and most Chinese civil wars of the first half of the twentieth century. In this particular context, this article considers what was the role of cooperation/collaboration, and what was the role of rivalry among these imperialist powers to protect and defend their different national interests and concessions. The exclusive military point of view is justified by this very real necessity for foreigners to face grave crises on a regular basis, and the hapax constituted by the high concentration of different national occupation corps in the city, whose mission was to put into force the 1901 Protocol and facilitate a potential new anti-Boxer expedition. This article intends to reveal the real place and role of Japan in the combined action plans for northern China that were elaborated in 1923-1924 and in 1930 during the “warlord era,” using documents which have not been studied until now, but are very revealing of the collaboration schemes and the internal hierarchy among occupiers in Tianjin.

Keywords: China, Japan, Tianjin, concessions, imperialism

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Tianjin's Place in History and Historiography

Tianjin (天津) is a city in northern China situated roughly at mid-distance between the capital of Beijing (北京) and the Bohai (渤海) Sea. From the first establishment of a foreign concession in 1860 to World War II, nine imperialist nations had a military presence: France, Great Britain, the United States, Japan, Russia, Italy, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and even Belgium. Eight of these countries owned concessions, either subsequently or simultaneously, which made Tianjin the most endowed “treaty port” as Chinese cities became open to foreign trade by treaty.¹ The city was also a key location in the Boxer War of 1900, opposing a multinational German-commanded expedition against Chinese xenophobic rioters. The 1901 Protocol that officially ended the war granted a number of occupation

I am most thankful to my research director of the M.A. thesis on which this article is based, namely Professor Hugues Tertrais, who is now directing my PhD thesis, as well as Mr. Pierre Singaravélou, both of University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne.

¹ See Figure 1. The United States formally had a virtual concession for some time, for which claims had been abandoned after the Boxer War.

points to foreign troops, among which the most points were allocated to Tianjin due to its military and strategic importance.²

Until very recently, however, the city was quite neglected within the “concessions studies” and amidst the study of Western and Japanese colonialism in China compared to other Chinese treaty ports such as Guangzhou (广州市) or Shanghai (上海).³ Even now, a comprehensive study of a national concession in Tianjin only exists in the case of Italy.⁴ The Japanese concession was studied under the scope of sociology,⁵ and

² Article 9 of the 1901 Protocol stipulated, “The Chinese Government has conceded the right to the Powers in the protocol annexed to the letter of the 16th of January, 1901, to occupy certain points, to be determined by an agreement between them, for the maintenance of open communication between the capital and the sea, The points occupied by the powers are: Huang-tsun, Lang-fang, Yang-tsun, Tientsin, Chun-liang Ch’eng, Tang-ku, Lu-tai, Tang-shan, Lan-chou, Chang-li, Ch’in-wang tao, Shan-hai-kuan.”

³ Pierre Singaravélou, “Dix empires dans un mouchoir de poche: Le territoire de Tientsin à l’épreuve du phénomène concessionnaire,” in *Territoires impériaux: Une histoire spatiale du fait colonial* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011). Two research groups led respectively in Bristol and Paris by Robert Bickers and Hugues Tertrais focus on the question of Tianjin’s colonial history. For studies on Shanghai, see Christian Henriot, *Shanghai 1927-1937: Elites locals et modernisation dans la Chine nationaliste* (Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 1991); Frederic E. Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai: 1927-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Robert Bickers, “Shanghaiers: The Formation and Identity of British Settler Community in Shanghai 1843-1937,” *Past & Present* 159, no. 1 (May, 1998): 161-211; Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁴ Maurizio Marinelli, “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror: Colonial Italy Reflects on Tianjin (1901-1947),” *Journal of Global Cultural Studies* 3 (2007): 119-150; Maurizio Marinelli, “Making Concessions in Tianjin: Heterotopia and Italian Colonialism in Mainland China,” *Urban History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 399-425; Maurizio Marinelli, “Tianjin’s Worldly Ambitions: From Hyper-Colonial Space to Business Park,” *Open House International* 34, no. 3 (2009): 13-27; Maurizio Marinelli, “The Genesis of the Italian Concession in Tianjin: A Combination of Wishful Thinking and Realpolitik,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15, no. 4 (August, 2010): 536-556; Maurizio Marinelli, “Italy And/in China: Remaking the Urban Form and Rewriting History in Tianjin,” in *National Belongings: Hybridity in the Italian Experience of Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2010), 65-87; Aglaia De Angeli, “Italian land auctions in Tianjin: Italian colonialism in early twentieth-century China,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15, no. 4 (August, 2010): 557-572.

⁵ Marjorie Dryburgh, “Japan in Tianjin: Settlers, State and the Tensions of Empire before 1937,” *Japanese Studies* 27, no. 1 (May, 2007): 19-34.

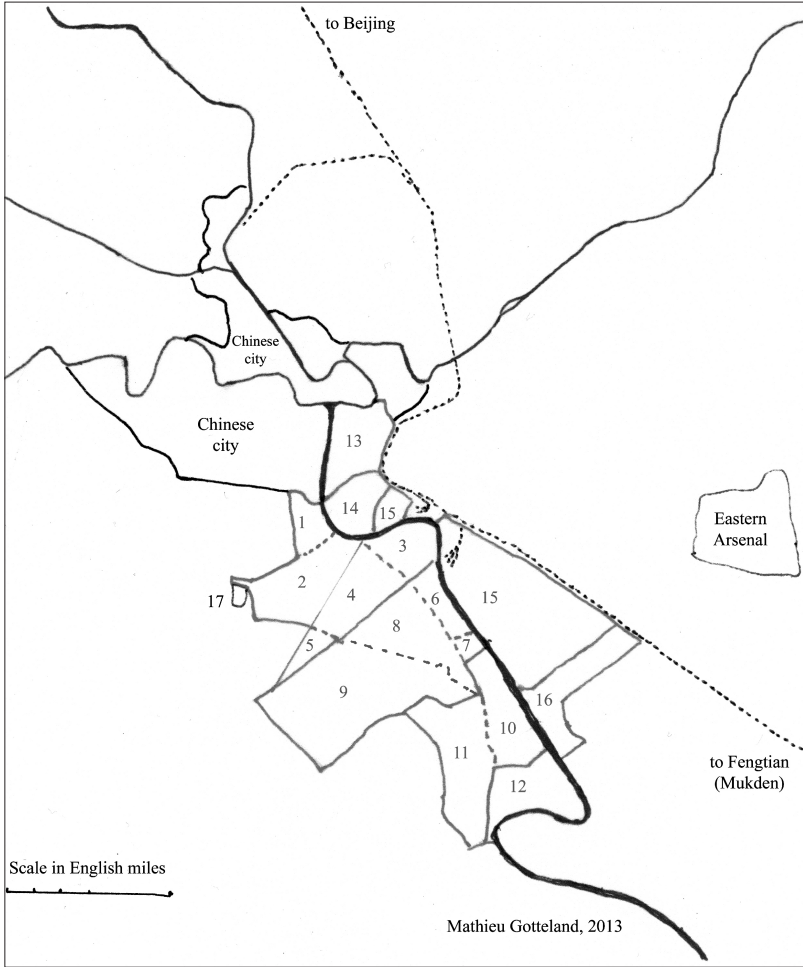


Figure 1. Sketch of Tianjin and Its Concessions in 1902

as far as the history of the American presence in northern China, only the early stages have been studied.⁶ Much still remains to be done with

⁶ Edward M. Coffman, "The American 15th Infantry Regiment in China, 1912-1938: A Vignette in Social History," *Journal of Military History* 58, no. 1 (January 1994): 57-74.

respect to Tianjin studies in the discipline of historical research.

Key to Figure 1:

In black, the Chinese city; in black dots, the railway line; in red, the concessions' borders; in red dots, the former concessions borders, before extensions; in blue, the river.

1. Japanese concession (1898)
2. Extension of the Japanese concession (1900)
3. French concession (1861)
4. First extension of the French concession (1900)
5. Second extension of the French concession—Laoxikai (老西開) (1915)
6. British concession (1860)
7. “American” concession (then integrated into the British concession)
8. First extension of the British concession (1897)
9. Second extension of the British concession (1901)
10. German concession (1895-1917), then First Special District
11. Extension of the German concession (1900-1917), then First Special District
12. Southern Settlement of the Japanese concession (1900-1903)
13. Austro-Hungarian concession (1902-1917), then Second Special District
14. Italian concession (1901)
15. Russian concession (1900-1920), then Third Special District
16. Belgian concession (1900-1928), then Fourth Special District
17. Western Arsenal (Japanese)

Japan, in this scheme, was one of the few countries which owned concessions in the city before the Boxer War. The Japanese concession was founded by the Agreement of August 29, 1898, following the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, and its territory was extended two

years later.⁷ Japan, as well as the other nations involved in the Boxer expedition, was granted in 1901 the right to keep troops at certain points between Beijing and the sea and between the sea and the Great Wall. However, the Japanese military presence was especially strong in the key location of Tianjin (636 officers and soldiers in 1902, as opposed to 896 men in the British corps and 666 men in the German corps) where the military headquarters of different nations were also situated.⁸

Some Historiographical Remarks: A Call for an International Dialogue on the Question of Imperialism in the East Asian Region

Upon submitting the conclusions of this study on the “combined action plans” negotiated by the different occupying powers in Tianjin in 1923-1924 and in 1930 with the purpose of presenting Western historiography to Korean, Chinese, and Japanese scholars, critique can be anticipated, rightfully from East Asian points of view. In order to defend the idea of this paper and explain the process which led to this study and its conclusions, some remarks will be briefly made here. Hopefully, these remarks will be interpreted as an invitation to a larger international debate, which is a dialogue missing in current historiography between the West and East Asia on the question explored here through the study of a city such as Tianjin, one that has truly been an international question since the nineteenth century, which is more than a mere confrontation between the West and East Asia.

The main remark concerning this paper is that it does not intend to

⁷ T. O. Matemura, “History of the Development of the Japanese Concession, Tientsin,” *North China Star*, August 12, 1920.

⁸ “Rapport annuel du corps d'occupation de Chine (COC), année 1902” [Annual Report of the French Occupation Corps in China (COC) of 1902], série H, sous-série 11 H (Chine), carton 73 (11H73), Service historique de la défense (SHD).

challenge or deny East Asian historiography as it has been done to date. On the contrary, this paper is an attempt to revive the subject in Western historiography and to open a dialogue between the West and East Asia, as our historiographies remain mainly nation-centric and are not complementing each other on such questions as they could or should. Thus, the point of emphasis here is that this paper is based on a Western perspective and aims at being viewed as a complementary study to East Asian historiography, to the extent that a Western scholar can possibly reach. It is also an invitation to a dialogue between scholars on an international scale.

It is not that Western historiography may be regarded as particularly complementary or inviting. Just as East Asian historiography has largely remained nation-centric, the leadership taken by English-language scholarship in the study of imperialism in East Asia is also a threat to obtaining a global, true understanding of the history of imperialism in East Asia. In China, at least from 1905 and for another 40 years, a strong Japanese-American duality existed, which will be mentioned below. Despite what could be invoked by limiting our examination to only international treaties from that period, Great Britain gradually slipped away from a pro-Japanese position and toward integration into an American anti-Japanese block.

From what has been revealed through French archives, France took a dual position: partly neutral and as a mediator between the two blocks, but also holding a strong pro-Japanese position on certain matters. We know for example that the deep Boxer trauma, which was followed one decade later by the early and efficient pro-Entente position of Japan in World War I, contributed to the elaboration of a very strong but *informal* and mostly *objective* alliance between France and Japan, at least in the microcosm which was the city of Tianjin. Such was the position French officials still remembered as they invited Japan in 1937 to less harsh politics towards French interests in Tianjin and in China during the war.

What is mentioned above is the specificity and interest of a truly

national French point of view on the matter. On the one hand, we have national Chinese, Japanese, and Korean historiographies, paired with English-language academic journals attempting to make them cooperate with and complement each other. On the other hand, we have a Western historiography very widely dominated by research produced in the English language (mainly using American and British archives), leaving no room for further debate by actually forming an anti-Japanese bloc in China during the period being researched. Other imperialisms, ones as strong as those in France, Russia, or Germany, are often overlooked or forgotten due to the variety of languages one is required to master in order to properly and comprehensively address them, but also due to the lack of interest among these respective former imperialistic powers toward such questions, until now at least.

Another point that seems predominant in East Asian historiography is the thought that Japan took independent steps from 1915 onward and became truly independent from its imperialist “partners” in China with the Manchurian War, although a collaborative approach between imperialistic powers officially existed after the Boxer War. Western historiography, hopefully including this paper, as well, could and should nuance that thought, which is a point East Asian scholars might find interesting. Naturally, at least from the Republican Revolution onward in China, Japan (or the Japanese army or navy authorities present in China) took independent steps to strengthen its own imperialism, as did every other imperialist power in the country, including France. In fact, we could also say that the Manchurian War of 1931-1933 officially brought Japan into a special position within the imperialistic system of Tianjin, as other foreign powers wanted to take a neutral stance in the Sino-Japanese conflict. However, this was a very long process that began in 1931 with many ups and downs in the relations between Japan and the other imperialist powers, especially in Tianjin, where, after the armistice of Tanggu in 1933, foreign powers saw no reason to exclude Japan from a collaboration process. As noted above, after the second full-scale

outbreak of war between China and Japan in 1937, French authorities held on to the vestiges of this at least informal alliance and formal collaboration to call upon Japan for better treatment of French interests in Tianjin. That is why this paper takes the view that up until 1931 it is acceptable to talk of a true “equality” (not excluding an underground competition) between the occupying powers of Tianjin, at least in terms of the *form* in which it was kept in principle through each plan here presented, despite the overwhelming Japanese military capacities in China compared to other powers and the large concessions made to Japan in 1930, even by the United States and Great Britain, because such talk exhibits the evolution of Japan’s position in the city and furthermore the Western view of Japan as a (possible) ally or at least as a (possible) partner.

The above remarks do not pretend to be exhaustive on the subject, but rather strongly invite international and interregional debate on the question posed through this paper as it has been posed toward historiography at national levels, especially since such complex and sensitive questions involve many powers and actors from all over the world, which the case of the city of Tianjin most clearly illustrates.

Early Collaboration and Cooperation among Occupiers

The major stake in colonial studies regarding the case of “dying empires” such as the Ottoman Empire and especially the Chinese Empire, where many imperialist nations were present, is to determine whether they collaborated, cooperated, or fought to preserve and extend their national interests. A traditional point of view is to consider the colonial expansion as a rivalry for prestige, trade opportunities, and territories, and as a highly competitive enterprise. However, cooperation or collaboration against colonies also occurred, and is now widely recognized among scholars as a part of the colonizing and imperial process. This article aims

to determine which part was for collaboration/cooperation among colonizers and which part was about rivalry. Also, the place Japan occupied in this scheme shall be identified by studying the case of Tianjin in the warlord era through the so-called “combined action plans in Northern China” negotiated and approved by the commanding officers of the main occupying corps in Tianjin, namely, France, Great Britain, the United States, Japan, and Italy in 1923-1924 and in 1930.⁹

The main strategy of foreign imperialisms in China was to divide the empire into so-called “influence zones” more or less precisely and definitely determined by treaty. Thus came Russia’s influence over Manchuria, which Japan took over from 1905, as well as Japanese influence over Fujian (福建), German influence over Shandong (山东), French influence over Yunnan (云南), and British influence over the Yangzi (扬子) basin. In these zones, every other imperial power than the one being granted privileges was a rival to be kept away. Northern China, understood as the region of Beijing and the Great Wall in the northeast, was in this respect a kind of *terra nullius*, with no sole recognized master. The siege of the Legations Quarter in Beijing in 1900 and the military expedition which followed brought many masters to the region.

The birth of a new cooperation model among colonizers was justified by the military and strategic importance of keeping such an occupation so as to facilitate a new anti-Boxer expedition if needed; the economic and commercial center that is the city of Tianjin, notably for salt or cotton; and the political advantages of virtually controlling the capital of the Chinese Empire for each of the occupying powers.¹⁰ The numerous foreign concessions in Tianjin after the Boxer War, and their very small territories also brought consular and military authorities to

⁹ Italy was already concerned by the first plan, but did not negotiate it because the country’s permanent occupation corps had only been set in place in 1924.

¹⁰ A. H. Rasmussen, “The Wool Trade of North China,” *Pacific Affairs* 9, no. 1 (March, 1936): 60-68; *Guide to Tientsin* (Tientsin: Astor House Hotel, 1907), 3-4.

closely collaborate for the sake of defending foreign interests in Tianjin and more widely in the region of northern China.¹¹

On a political level, a multinational government, the first of its kind in history, was created in Tianjin from 1900 to 1902 to deal with common issues raised in the administration of any municipality such as those involving security, urbanism, river conservancy, or building an international bridge between the French and Russian concessions. The diplomatic corps in Beijing, as well as the consular corps in Tianjin and the senior-ranking military officers of the most important occupation corps, the so-called “inter-allied conferences,” met on a regular basis so as to determine a common attitude toward issues raised by the Chinese. On a military level, and up to 1913, international maneuvers took place around Tianjin and saw Japanese, American, British, French, and German troops virtually fighting side-by-side to prepare for the eventuality of a new Boxer-like xenophobic rebellion in the region.¹²

In fact, the trauma that was the siege of the Legations Quarter in Beijing cannot be emphasized enough in the context of imperialism in China. Even decades after the event, when such a riot was not to be expected again, the first priority of each occupation corps and of authorities of concessions was defending foreign interests against such a xenophobic rebellion. Only World War I slightly changed the configuration of the semi-official alliance system in place in Tianjin.

A much more complex system emerged from the new international situation created thousands of miles away by the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Bosnia. In fact, every colonizing nation present in northern China entered the war at some point: seven of them in 1914, Italy in 1915, and the United States in 1917. Blocs such as the Triple Entente and the Central Powers naturally appeared during this

¹¹ British (established in 1860), French (1861), German (1895), Japanese (1898), Russian (1900), Belgian (1900), Italian (1901), and Austro-Hungarian (1902).

¹² Photographs of the 1913 maneuvers may be found at <http://gallica.bnf.fr>

time. Some other more subjective blocs came from racist considerations separating the West from Japan and China, or objective alliances, especially between France and Japan as opposed to China in several crises.¹³ The position of Japan at the time was unique. Japan stood between two worlds, the Western colonizing powers and the Asian powers, and risked losing trust from its Entente allies, and more generally from the Western colonizing powers.

It is worth noting that during World War I an urgent issue was already coming to light: Japan, as the geographically closest colonizing nation, was the most able to take over and secure the region. This endowed Japan with extra credit and power from its Western counterparts, especially when the largest part of the Western troops had returned to fight the war on the European front.¹⁴ Despite the already defective Anglo-Japanese official alliance, it was also time for a rapprochement between Japan and France, which became Japan's first ally in this region, and the emergence of a growing duality between

¹³ A good example of racist considerations can be taken from a French report about the Japanese presence in Manchuria: "As you can see, every yellow man is the same," in "Colonel Merienne-Lucas, commandant le corps français d'occupation en Chine, au ministre de la guerre" [Colonel Merienne-Lucas, commanding officer of the COC, to the Ministry of War], August 15, 1917, 11H53, dossier 2, Service historique de la défense (SHD); Mathieu Gotteland, "The Japanese Order Forces in Tianjin, 1914-1940: A French Point of View" (Master's Thesis, University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne/CHAC, 2013), 40-41. For the alliance between Japan and France, see *ibid.*, 43-44. As for objective alliances in crises, notably through the "Shandong question" (1914-1920), the "21 demands" (1915) on the Japanese side, and the "Laoxikai (老西開) affair" (1915-1917) on the French side, Japanese and French military authorities held special informal meetings, maintained a liaison post, and shared information.

¹⁴ During World War I, Japan became the first occupying power in Tianjin in terms of the size of its occupation corps, whereas a very large part of the European corps was composed of "indigenous" soldiers (Indochinese for France, Indians for Great Britain). An example of this supplementary power Japan gained from the new international situation is when France passed on the formerly Russian-protected part of the railway to Japan during an "inter-allied conference" in 1916. One of the main reasons France chose Japan was because Japan was the most able to protect the said part of the railway, which was to be returned to France at the end of the war. Gotteland, "The Japanese Order Forces in Tianjin, 1914-1940," 37-38.

Japan and the United States.¹⁵ The decision to adopt a specific military point of view on the question of what position Japan held among occupiers during the 1920s in Tianjin is mainly justified by the fragile position in which Western nations were placed in northern China, and the consequently important role of the foreign occupation corps. Such a decision would also be justified by Tianjin being the only treaty port, alongside Shanghai, where foreign land military units were stationed, and the opportunity it represents for historians to determine a hierarchy among occupiers.

Entering the Warlord Era and Elaborating a Closer Collaboration Between Colonizers

The “warlord era” is a common term referring to the period around the 1920s in China, even if the concept of “warlordism” itself as well as the Chinese civil wars existed prior to and after this decade. The era is usually roughly defined to have begun in 1917 with the attempt of imperial restoration by the Manchu general Zhang Xun (张勋) and ended between the “reunification” of China by the Guomindang (國民黨) in 1928 and the beginning of the Manchurian War in 1931. The combined action plans discussed here were designed as a reaction to warlordism and civil wars that especially put all foreign interests and concessions in danger, as an answer that could only be found in international military collaboration. This article’s aim, though, is not only to show what kind of cooperation/collaboration existed between the imperialist nations and Japan’s particular position in their schemes. It is to also show that rivalry was not

¹⁵ Japanese-American tensions appeared with the California Land Tenure Law, which is also known as the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1904, the American interruption of the Russo-Japanese War with the signing of the Portsmouth Treaty in 1905, and as the United States began a very pro-Chinese policy (the *Wilhelmstraße* of the German concession of Tientsin was renamed Woodrow Wilson Street after the war). These tensions led to a strong Japanese-American duality about and in China. Ibid., 41-43.

forgotten and was a matter to be kept outside the concessions in Tianjin without being formally recognized in any case.¹⁶

The 1923-1924 combined action plan was a response to two major Chinese civil wars that occurred in northern China: the Anhui (安徽)-Zhili (直隶) War in 1920 and the Zhili (直隶)-Fengtian (奉天) War in 1922. Only once before 1920, during the Chinese revolution of 1911-1912, were measures of collaboration taken. The railway line from Beijing to the sea was divided into four sectors and foreign troops patrolled within their specifically assigned areas. For the war in 1920, it is safe to admit that Japan supported the so-called Anhui (安徽) clique, after its leader Duan Qirui (段祺瑞) fled to the Japanese concession of Tianjin following his military defeat.¹⁷

As for the 1922 war, there is evidence implying that Japan and France sided with Zhang Zuolin (张作霖), the Fengtian (奉天) clique's leader, while the United States and Great Britain sided with Wu Peifu (吴佩孚), the Zhili (直隶) clique's leader.¹⁸ On October 3, 1922, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs even had to express a formal protest against its own national General Staff which "sent officers to Mukden to help Zhang Zuolin" (张作霖).¹⁹ Even so, individual national intelligence services were quite aware of these underground activities. This was actually a secret war for China that led the foreign imperialist nations to choose to support one or another particular warlord and where, again, a Japanese-American duality can be found.²⁰ Nevertheless, even before the

¹⁶ Anthony B. Chan, *Arming the Chinese: The Western Armaments Trade in Warlord China, 1920-1928*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Henry G. W. Woodhead, ed., *The China Year Book, 1925* (Shanghai: North China Daily News & Herald, n.d.).

¹⁸ Gotteland, "The Japanese Order Forces in Tianjin, 1914-1940," 52-55.

¹⁹ Mukden is today's Shenyang (沈阳). See Chronology May-October 1922, SHD, 11H52, 1, B.

²⁰ In its report about the 1922 war, the French intelligence service did not have any doubts about the actual situation: "The policy of Zhang Zuolin (张作霖) is supported by the Japanese, and Wu Pei Fu's (吴佩孚) policy is supported by the Englishmen and especially by the Americans." See "Rôle

elaboration of the combined action plans, this situation made colonizers collaborate more closely.

As usual and in response to the new crisis caused by the Anhui-Zhili War, an inter-allied meeting was held in July 1920 at the house of the senior commanding officer, the Japanese officer Major-General Minami (南), as it was on most occasions, along with commanding officers of the United States, Great Britain, and France, the three other most important occupation corps in Tianjin.²¹ Confronted with an unprecedented situation, their first concern was maintaining among the belligerents respect for the 1901 Protocol, as well as protecting the Beijing-Shanhaiguan (山海关) railway and the foreign concessions of Tianjin. The idea of sending international military trains along the railway line emerged at that time, and for this sake, two trains would be requisitioned in Tianjin and Shanhaiguan between July 15 and July 30. An equal proportion of soldiers from the four corps would board the trains with the mission of affirming the Western presence, calling to observe the 1901 Protocol and repair and protect the railway and telegraph lines. Defense sectors were also allocated to the four occupation corps, wider than their own national concessions and including the Chinese city. The French, on their side, occupied Tianjin's two railway stations. Finally, common instructions were given to the troops of every corps in case Chinese soldiers went through the defense lines: disarmament, internment, and, in case of necessity, use of armed force.²²

du corps français d'occupation de Chine au cours de la guerre civile de mai-juin 1922" [Role of the French Occupation Corps in China During the Civil War, May-June 1922], 11H52, dossier 5, Service historique de la défense (SHD).

²¹ "Résumé des propositions, observations et décisions prises dans les conférences tenues à Tien-Tsin (13-29 juillet 1920)" [Summary of the Propositions, Observations and Decisions Taken During the Conferences Held in Tianjin by the American, British, French and Japanese Occupation Corps Commanding Officers (July 13-29, 1920)], 11H53, dossier 6, SHD.

²² "Major-Général Minami, commandant les troupes japonaises, au consul doyen—consul général

In April 1922, when the Zhili-Fengtian War threatened to reach Tianjin, another inter-allied meeting took place at the house of the Japanese commanding officer. A common attitude was adopted, mainly to collaborate in putting together three military trains to repair and protect the railway and telegraphic lines. One of the trains could carry up to a total of 250 men assembled in equal proportions from the four corps, who were to inform Chinese commanding officers of their obligations to comply with the 1901 Protocol, and to issue a common protestation against eventual infractions of the Protocol.²³ The retreat of Marshall Zhang's (张) troops to the north brought a real threat to Tianjin, prompting yet another meeting on May 6. Some further measures for international collaboration were adopted through the meeting, which was mainly to establish an international post at the electric station with troops from the four occupation corps in equal proportions.²⁴

The 1923-1924 Combined Action Plan in Northern China

Until that point, though, crises had been dealt with case by case through decisions made unanimously in four-sided inter-allied meetings, with a special care for both neutrality in the Chinese conflicts and equality between the foreign occupation corps in collaborating in the observation of the 1901 Protocol and the defense of the concessions. There was reaction to crises, but no prevention of them. The idea to develop a so-called “combined action plan for Northern China” prior to any crisis

anglais à Tientsin” [Major-General Minami, Commanding officer of the Japanese occupation corps, to the English General Consul in Tianjin], July 17, 1920, 11H53, dossier 1, SHD.

²³ “Résolutions adoptées à une conférence des commandants étrangers (26 avril 1922)” [Resolutions Adopted in a Conference of the Foreign Commanding Officers on April 26, 1922], 11H52, dossier 5, SHD.

²⁴ “Rôle du corps français d’occupation de Chine au cours de la guerre civile de mai-juin 1922,” 11H52, dossier 5, SHD.

came from the French commanding officer Colonel Sautel in December 1923. To negotiate the arrangement of such plans, however, tremendous difficulties had to be overcome, requiring the commanding officers of the four main occupation corps to turn into diplomats. One can only grasp how herculean a task such negotiations represented and why this was never undertaken before 1923, as it took exactly eight months of multilateral discussions from December 14, 1923, to July 14, 1924, to set the common Tianjin defense plan in place, that is, to set in place a plan which can only answer to one type of crisis in particular. That is why the importance of the Boxer War trauma in Western minds is underlined in this article: a Boxer-like xenophobic riot may be seconded by the Chinese central government. The main aim of the defense plan was to protect foreign civilians against xenophobic violence, and to maintain positions until reinforcements could arrive so as to march on to Beijing and end the war.

This consideration was anachronistic. There was no more central power in China in 1924, and any configuration of occupying Beijing would not help in solving such a crisis. Nevertheless, the negotiation and arrangement of this combined action plan was the biggest step towards closer collaboration between occupiers in Tianjin since the end of the Boxer War. It was also, if not a step towards reconciling Japan and the United States over China, a formal recognition by both parties that international collaboration in defending Tianjin and elaborating a defense plan to do so was too important an issue not to be willing to negotiate and eventually reach an understanding. It had been clearly stated, though, by the French commanding officer that if negotiations took long, “it is because of the constant reluctance and objections from the Americans and the Japanese, in particular, because of their duel in China.”²⁵

²⁵ “Lettre du commandant le corps français d’occupation de Chine au ministre de la guerre” [French commanding officer to Ministry of War], June 12, 1924, 11H67, 12, SHD.

This defense plan systematically formulated some measures that had been taken during the last crisis: inter-allied meetings at the senior commanding officer's house, international military trains to protect and repair the railway and telegraphic lines, the French occupation of Tianjin's "East Station" (the railway stations in Tianjin were in the French-protected part of the line), concerted protest against infractions of the 1901 Protocol, interdiction of Chinese troops from coming within a 20 *li* radius around Tianjin and from alighting trains at stations in Tianjin, strict neutrality of the railway line and the Haihe (海河) River, and the establishment of separate predetermined defense sectors for each of the four occupation corps.²⁶ The size of the defense sectors reflected more or less the size of these four corps.²⁷ Having only become permanent in 1924, the Italian occupation corps began participating in inter-allied meetings after that year. So, while Italy did not negotiate the defense plan, it instead asked France to take charge of protecting the Italian concession. Japan had only to bear with protecting its own concession's boundaries.

The sole true novelty surrounding the plan was that the Chinese city would not be defended by the occupying powers any longer. In fact, this plan attempted to deal with a Boxer-like scenario, which meant that defending the Chinese city was like "having 10 soldiers around your house to guard it, and 300 enemies inside."²⁸ But the "combined action plan in Northern China" did not simply carry a symbolic value, nor was it only a confirmation of previous measures taken at other times of crisis. Based on such a scenario of foreign interests and concessions, and, of course, foreign troops being under attack, it was obvious that the size of

²⁶ See Figure 2.

²⁷ For the year 1925: France 1,560; United Kingdom 1,034; the United States 946; and Japan 800.

²⁸ "Colonel Sautel, commandant le corps français d'occupation de Chine, au ministre de la guerre" [Colonel Sautel, commanding officer of the COC, to Ministry of War], December 26, 1923, 11H67, dossier 12, SHD.

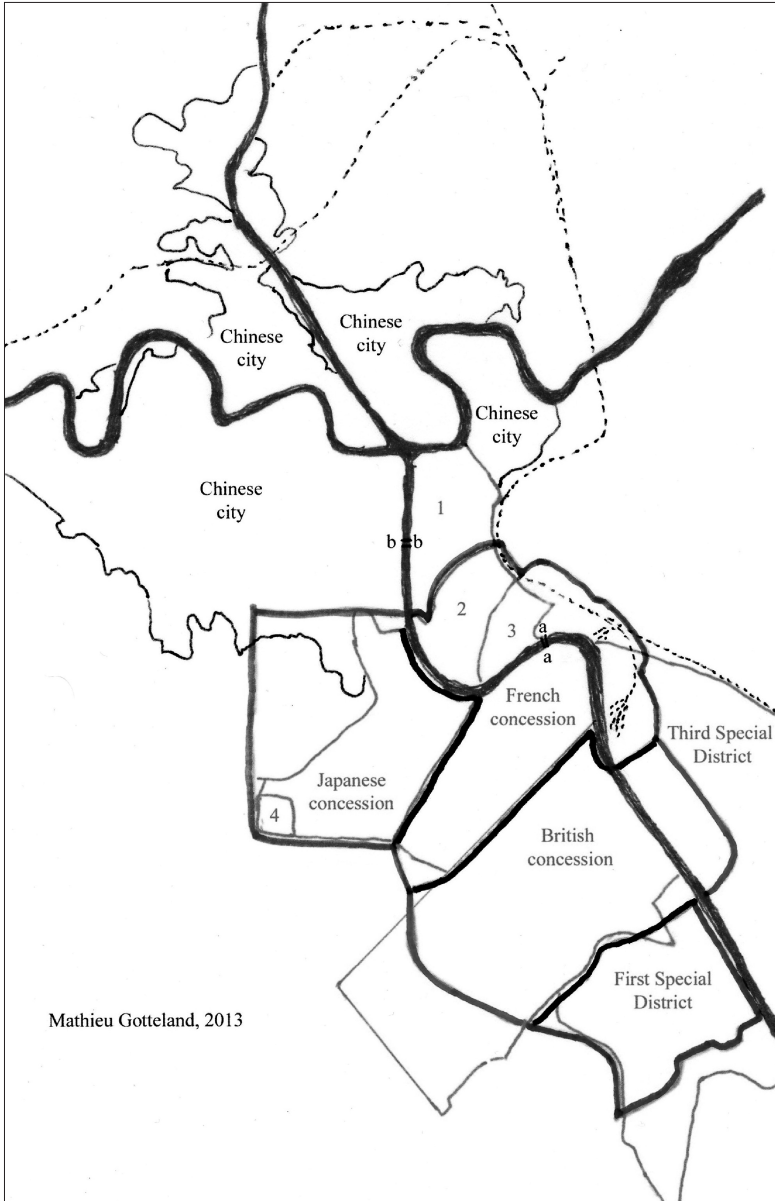


Figure 2. Sketch of Tianjin and the defense plan of 1924 (drawn after the map annexed to the combined action plan of 1923-1924)

the foreign occupation corps compared to the size of Chinese armies, to which civilian participation must of course be added, would not allow them to hold their positions for very long, even in keeping the city of Tianjin at any cost and subsequently bringing back the soldiers occupying different points along the railway line. Beyond the adoption of measures to be taken, the plan also relied on different reinforcements coming from metropolises. Based on such data, a hierarchy could be established among the occupation corps, which was officially recognized.²⁹

Key to Figure 2

In smaller lines: In black, the Chinese city; in black dots, the railway line; in red, the concessions' border; in blue, the river. In larger lines: In purple, the Japanese defense line; in blue, the French defense line; in red, the British defense line; in brown, the American defense line; in black, the defense sectors borderlines.

The signs = are bridges.

1. Former Austro-Hungarian concession, now Second Special District
2. Italian concession
3. Part of the former Russian concession, now Third Special District
4. Western Arsenal (Japanese)
 - a. International bridge
 - b. Austrian bridge

²⁹ The following table is based upon data found in "Lettre du Commandant le Corps Français d'Occupation de Chine au Ministre de la Guerre" [Letter from the commanding officer of the COC to the Ministry of War], June 12, 1924, 11H67, 12, SHD. This document shows the possibilities of receiving reinforcements from the four main occupying nations with the number of days until arrival in Tianjin, the size of the reinforcements, and their origin.

Days	United Kingdom	United States	France	Japan
1				1 regiment (Dairen)
5				1 division (Metropole)
9				1 brigade (Metropole)
15		1 brigade (Philippines)	2 battalions (Indochine)	1 division (Metropole)
21	Undetermined number (Singapore/ India)			
42		1 division (Metropole)		

As shown in the table above, Japan had an overwhelming superiority, notably due to its military policy, and because the Japanese mainland was very close to northern China, not to mention Japan's military occupation of Manchuria. Any major crisis necessitating reinforcement would be solved within a few days of Japanese intervention, while the American, French, and even more British reinforcements, since Hong Kong (香港) could not send any, would still be on their way to China, and, in any case, much smaller in number. The 1923-1924 defense plan might give an impression of equality between the four main occupiers, or perhaps even be disadvantageous for Japan, because of the size of its occupation corps. However, one should keep in mind that unlike the other three countries, Japan never needed a strong occupation corps in Tianjin to face crises given that it could receive reinforcements from Manchuria or the metropole in less time than these other countries, a fact that was widely recognized at the time. This, we claim, beyond the words of the combined action plan, truly reveals the place of Japan among occupiers in Tianjin in 1924, while the plan is "only" the revealer of a strong collaboration set in place between colonizers, Japan included, for the defense of Tianjin.

The 1930 Combined Action Plan in Northern China

A crisis did not wait long to arise in Tianjin after the elaboration of the 1923-1924 combined action plan. As early as September 2, 1924, Lu Yongxiang (卢永祥), a subordinate warlord of Duan Qirui (段祺瑞), fought against the satellite warlords of Marshall Wu Peifu (吴佩孚) for control of the Shanghai area. After his defeat, on October 13 Lu Yongxiang fled to Japan. This triggered a new civil war in China drawn upon a wide anti-Wu (吴) alliance: Marshall Zhang Zuolin (张作霖), General Feng Yuxiang (冯玉祥), Duan Qirui, and the Guomindang (國民黨). Japan clearly played a large role in this new war and the authorities of the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway forbid Wu to use its lines.³⁰ On the other hand, in an inter-allied meeting on September 22, a unanimous decision (meaning that the Japanese voted for it) was made for “absolute non-interference” and to strictly accomplish their mission as defined by the 1901 Protocol.³¹ The principle of the 1902 note through which Chinese armed troops were not to enter a 20 *li* zone around Tianjin, became officially abandoned after having been valued up until then. Instead, it was decided to officially protest in case of an infraction, and only build protection with a physical barrier for the foreign concessions, more or less along the defense lines from the 1923-1924 plan after a Japanese plan was approved by all.

After October 24, Tianjin was gravely threatened. Some 700 of Marshall Wu’s men were stationed in the Chinese city despite official protestations by the commandants, and the Japanese intelligence service believed General Feng was coming to Tianjin to fight Wu there. The commandants then decided to protest to Feng for damages done to the railway, telegraph lines, and telephone lines, and to remind him of the

³⁰ Woodhead, *The China Year Book*, 1925.

³¹ “Minutes of the Conference of Commandants,” September 22, 1924, 11H53, dossier 2, B, SHD.

1901 Protocol and the 1902 note. They also decided to ask the legal provincial authorities for help in disarming and expelling Marshall Wu and his men from the Chinese city, which is particularly interesting with respect to the issue of imperial collaboration. Conversely, provincial authorities asked the foreign commandants for help in Tianjin when General Li Zongren (李宗仁) and 1,000 of his men threatened to enter the 20 *li* zone.³²

Due to their lack of men and material resources at the time for the purpose of enforcing treaties, not only did military authorities from various nations collaborate closely, but such collaboration also existed for the sake of neutralizing and demilitarizing the Tianjin area between foreign occupiers and Chinese provincial authorities. It is also worth noting that, aside from whether the 1923-1924 defense plan was put into practice or not, the Japanese, in various ways, actually took the lead among the foreign corps in Tianjin in that time of crisis, despite Japan itself being involved in a Chinese civil war. In times of need, and often when the occupation corps were not strong enough to fulfill their mission, Japan's advantage of having a strong military presence in China beforehand and the proximity of its mainland to Tianjin already translated into an unofficial, but real and efficient Japanese leadership among Tianjin's occupiers only a few months after the negotiation of the 1923-1924 plan.

Only one year later, during the war between Marshall Zhang and Marshall Wu on one side and General Feng on the other, the city of Tianjin was occupied for five months by Feng's army.³³ Although there are no archives in France that mention the measures taken on this occasion by the foreign corps, this event was symptomatic in two aspects. For the first time in the history of Tianjin's occupation, the

³² "Minutes of the Conference of Commandants," October 24, 1924, 11H53, dossier 2, B, SHD.

³³ Henry G. W. Woodhead, ed., *The China Year Book, 1926* (Shanghai: North China Daily News & Herald, n.d.).

different national occupation corps were called “allied occupation corps in Northern China” by the British.³⁴ Although this was not recognized as an official expression, it is in fact very revealing in terms of researching inter-imperial collaboration for this paper’s case study. It is also very revealing regarding the feeble state of the occupation corps in late 1925, notwithstanding recurring civil wars touching northern China, because Feng remained for five months in an area forbidden to the Chinese military without having any effective action taken against him.

Awareness of the gravity of the situation provoked by numerous Chinese civil wars for foreign interests in northern China only took presence in different metropolises at the time of the “Northern Expedition” of 1926-1928. This awoke the almost forgotten trauma of the Boxer War in Western minds. In April 1927, an inter-allied meeting was organized in Tianjin to prepare for possible operations of war in northern China. Immediate reinforcements were summoned: the American ship *Ashville*, the Italian ship *Sebastiano Caboto*, 250 men for the Japanese corps, and 130 men for the American corps. They furthermore took this resolution as a common proposition for their individual metropolitan authorities as to avoid the “Sudist danger.” They wanted to immediately double the strength of each corps, and if the Sudist expedition were to carry on to the north, to make the collective size of the different corps as large as 20,000 men, including aviation and mechanized infantry (as a minimum program), or 25,000 men (as a maximum program) with their advice leaning toward the maximum program.³⁵

While a single minor battle took place around Tianjin on June 28,

³⁴ “Lettre du commandant des troupes britanniques en Chine du Nord au doyen des commandants du corps allié d’occupation en Chine du Nord” [Letter from the British commanding officer in North China to the Senior commanding officer in North China], December 13, 1925, 11H53, dossier 2, B, SHD.

³⁵ Colonel Huntziger, French commanding officer, to Lieutenant-General T. Takata (田形), Japanese and senior commanding officer, April 4, 1927, Diplomatic and consular archives, Nantes, Tientsin fonds, 19.

1928, the city knew no crisis from this “Northern Expedition.” The program was unrealistic and did not become realized, the only consequence being a substantial but very temporary increase in the foreign occupation corps’ strength in Tianjin. Even so, this event once again reveals the hierarchy among Tianjin’s occupiers and the special place of Japan, which was the only country involved in the civil war through its intervention in Jinan (济南). In fact, from being only the fourth largest occupation corps in 1926, Japan assumed the top rank in 1928 with an increase of about 906% in two years. For comparison, the increase of the English corps and the French corps in size during the same period was 162% and 78%, respectively. The Italian and American infantry corps respectively increased in size by about 21% and 4%.³⁶ These numbers speak to the ability of different foreign occupation corps in Tianjin to quickly reinforce themselves, with the leading place occupied by Japan. The combined action plan of 1930 solidified Japan’s position as leader.³⁷

An update to the 1923-1924 plan was decided after the events of 1926-1928. The new plan should not only deal with a Boxer-like scenario, but also with the possibility of Chinese civil wars, as already experienced in the Tianjin area in 1917, 1920, 1922, 1924, 1925, and 1928 during the so-called “warlord era.” This plan of course was never to be applied in such events, since the plan had been negotiated only one year before the beginning of the Manchurian War. On the other hand, regardless of the relations between China and Japan growing increasingly tense since the “Northern Expedition” and the assassination of Zhang Zuolin (张作霖) in 1928, the possibility of a Sino-Japanese war was not considered.

³⁶ Gotteland, “The Japanese Order Forces in Tianjin, 1914-1940,” 125.

³⁷ “Plan d’action combinée des corps d’occupation étrangers au nord de la Chine, 22 décembre 1930” [Combined Action Plan of the Foreign Troops in Northern China of December 22, 1930], 11H67, dossier 12, SHD.

That being said, the plan in itself was already probably the greatest accomplishment toward international collaboration for the occupation of Tianjin and the defense of foreign interests. “The necessity of the narrowest mutual cooperation is recognized.”³⁸ The plan actually put every foreign occupation in Tianjin under the authority of a senior commanding officer (the Japanese commanding officer for most of the time), except for the counter-orders of one’s embassy. The senior Japanese officer also had under his direct command a new corps called an “international reserve” composed of members and a liaison officer of each corps. International trains, which were not sent on the railway lines during the last three civil wars in 1924, 1925, and 1928, were to be sent between Beijing and the sea. The Italian corps was incorporated in the Tianjin defense plan, as well as different voluntary corps, classified by nationality (Belgians in the French defense sector, Germans in the American defense sector, and Russians in the French, American, and English defense sectors). Defense sectors were only intended to defend the foreign concessions, some parts of the so-called special districts (former concessions), and Germany’s former concession, or the First Special District, which had been considered an American-protected zone since 1916.³⁹

Two international detachments were to be sent to the waterworks under Japanese command and to the electric plant under Italian command. As a symbolic “gesture of international solidarity,” the Austrian bridge was to be kept by two men from each corps carrying Japanese, British, French, American, and Italian flags. This furthermore affirmed the central strategic position of Tianjin in northern China, its defense being “vital” as a city to be held at all costs and to be helped by every apt foreign national in case of a Boxer-like event, for example.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See Figure 3.

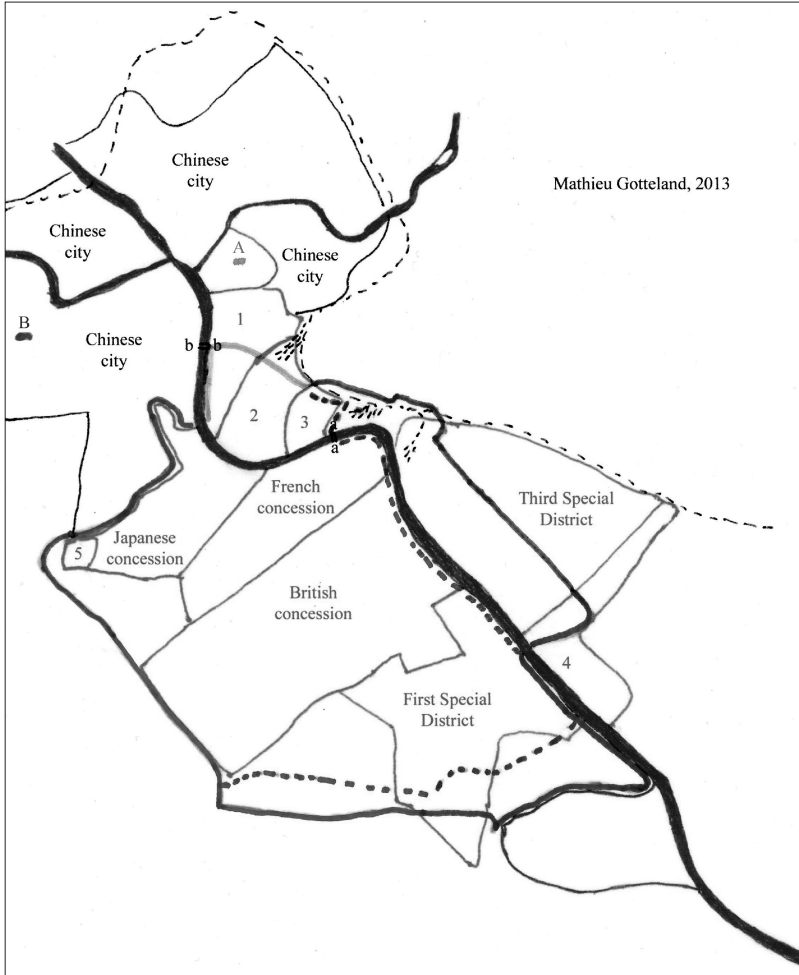


Figure 3. Sketch of Tianjin and its defense plan of 1930 (after the map annexed to the combined action plan of 1930 and signed by the Japanese, French, British, American, and Italian commanding officers)

This plan was an acknowledgement of the Japanese supremacy among Tianjin’s occupiers. If, formally, the plan only stated that Japan had to defend its own concession and arsenal, as well as command the international detachment at Tianjin’s waterworks, then the senior

commanding officer actually received many privileges in this plan, such as direct authority over every occupation corps as well as command of the so-called “international reserve.” Regarding this title of “senior commanding officer,” it is necessary to understand that at almost no time during the history of Tianjin’s occupation was the senior commanding officer someone other than the Japanese commanding officer. These privileges and great power given to the senior officer were in fact given to Japan with the approval of the American commanding officer.

Key to Figure 3

In smaller lines: In black, the Chinese city; in black dots, the railway line; in red, the concessions’ border; in blue, the river.

In larger lines: In purple, the Japanese defense line; in blue, the French defense line; in blue dots, the French inner defense line; in red, the British defense line; in red dots, the British inner defense line; in brown, the American defense line; in brown dots, the American inner defense line; in green, the Italian defense line.

The signs = are bridges.

1. Former Austro-Hungarian concession, now the Second Special District
2. Italian concession
3. Part of the former Russian concession, now the Third Special District
4. Former Belgian concession, now the Fourth Special District
5. Western Arsenal (Japanese)
 - a. International bridge
 - b. Austrian bridge
- A. International post at the electrical plant under Italian command
- B. International post at the waterworks under Japanese command

Japan's Rising Power in Northern China and International Imperialist Solidarity

Tianjin is a very special case in imperial history, not to mention in Chinese history. The Boxer War and the trauma thereof in Western minds, the political, economic, and strategic importance of the city, the geographic proximity to the (former) Chinese capital of Beijing, and Tianjin's central position in northern China made this city a very important stake for foreigners. This special situation of Tianjin among "treaty ports" made it a true "microcosm." Many nationalities, political ideas, religions, and social classes were present in the city because of the various concessions and occupation corps. They were all within an ever so small area, regardless of the city's gradual expansion up until 1915. This particular and especially high concentration of foreigners of different origins who, unlike in Shanghai, obeyed national authorities situated in this important and strategic area made it quite necessary to collaborate very narrowly on a diplomatic level as well as on a military level for the sake of defending foreign interests, far more so than in other imperial and colonial territories in and outside China. Furthermore, the Tianjin area saw many crises in the first half of the twentieth century: the Chinese republican revolution in 1912, the Zhang Xun (張勳) coup in 1917, and other civil wars in 1920, 1922, 1924, 1925, and 1928, including a five month occupation by General Feng's army between December 1925 and April 1926. These many crises and their real threat to foreign interests and concessions, as well as to the 1901 Protocol, a product of the Boxer War, made it increasingly necessary for the foreign occupation corps to cooperate in the city.

Rivalry was not missing, but merely hidden and kept away from Tianjin's concessions. This can be seen notably through the large foreign implication in the Chinese civil wars in northern China. What, though, was the real place of Japan in this particular scheme? The spirit of the 1901 Protocol was to grant perfect equality among the different

occupiers on diplomatic and military levels. This can be seen in every decision taken until 1930. The only exception officially allowed to this ground rule was to adapt the responsibilities of each country according to their military strength at the time, which was primarily estimated by the size of each occupation corps. But the difficulties for European and American occupiers in maintaining a strong enough force in northern China, their need to rely on their own “indigenous” soldiers consisting of Indians, Indochinese, Filipinos, and others, and, last but not least, their inability to quickly reinforce their occupation corps in times of crisis made their presence weaker in the context of Chinese civil wars and defense scenarios in which several tens or even hundreds of Chinese soldiers had to be fought. On the other hand, Japan is geographically very close to northern China. Japan had been militarily present there and in Manchuria since 1905, and also in Korea, which was its protectorate from 1904 and then was annexed by Japan in 1910. Japan’s military policy tended to always increase expenditures and the size of its army and navy. Through the 1923-1924 plan, which was negotiated for eight months, a will can be observed to maintain a strict equality between the four main occupying nations of France, Great Britain, the United States, and Japan. With the 1930 updated plan, however, the supremacy of Japan among Tianjin’s occupiers became recognized. Formally, Japan had not been granted any privileges, but it was officially recognized that the advantages given to the senior commanding officer of Tianjin were intended for Japan, an honorific title that Japan almost always held. And in this 1930 plan, the senior commanding officer was to command a new “6th Corps” known as the “international reserve” in addition to retaining supreme authority over the other occupation corps.

The Place of Japan in Tianjin after 1931: Redefining the Paradigm

However, this recognition was only informal, and short-lived. The place

of Japan among Tianjin's occupiers essentially, and naturally, changed with such events as the 1931-1933 Manchurian War, the so-called "Tianjin Incident" of November 1931, the autonomy of the Tianjin region under Japanese tutelage in 1935, the Second Sino-Japanese War, especially the battle of Tianjin in July 1937, and, finally, the locus of the concessions in the summer of 1939. For these reasons, the combined action plan of 1930 was never actually applied. The first attempt at calling for the plan's application came in November 1931 when the "Tianjin Incident" occurred. Japan then stepped back when France, Great Britain, the United States, and Italy claimed that the incident was purely a Sino-Japanese matter and that the other foreign interests in Tianjin had never been threatened by it. The British only allowed a small Japanese detachment to enter their national concession to protect the Japanese consulate and the Yokohama Specie Bank.⁴⁰

On February 10, 1932, a special inter-allied meeting without the Japanese commanding officer present was held at the British military headquarters. A common position of the four corps was agreed upon in the event of a Sino-Japanese incident or a declaration of war issued by either side. They decided that the British, French, and Italian commanding officers would each defend their own concessions. The French would close the international bridge to both Chinese and Japanese troops. And the Italians would be allowed to do the same on the Austrian bridge. If the First Special District was not a disputed area between Chinese and Japanese troops, American infantry would defend it.⁴¹ Collaboration in Tianjin among occupiers had not ended as Japan went to war with China. Only now, Japan's former special position among

⁴⁰ "Colonel Noiret, commandant supérieur des troupes françaises en Chine, au vice-amiral commandant en chef des forces navales françaises d'Extrême-Orient" [Colonel Noiret to Vice-Admiral Chief commanding officer of the French naval forces in Far East, November, 1931], 11H55, dossier 1, SHD.

⁴¹ "Compte-rendu de la conférence du 10 février 1932" [Account of the Conference of February 10, 1932], 11H57, dossier 2, SHD.

occupiers as the only Asian power, as the only non-white power, and as the power directly and officially fighting Chinese troops since 1931 was translated into a detachment from it by the other occupying powers from 1931-1932 onward, even though it formally, but not concretely, remained a Protocol power. From a leading role in an inter-imperial occupation scheme as regulated by the 1901 Protocol, Japan then decided to take a step forward toward actual control of the region, which it achieved in 1935, and was then ostracized by the other occupying powers. In the 1930 plan, every occupying power, including the United States, agreed to grant Japan a special position in Tianjin. From 1931 onward, Japan decided to grant itself this very position without the agreement of the other powers, and after 1937, Japan turned against them.

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