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John D. Meehan. *The Dominion and the Rising Sun: Canada Encounters Japan, 1929-1941.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004. xiv + 250 pp.

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Rewriting Diplomacy in the Far East

If diplomatic historians still tend to fixate on the North Atlantic Triangle when it comes to explaining Canada's evolving place in the world, *The Dominion and the Rising Sun* is an important corrective to this "Eurocentric focus" (p. 148). John Meehan, assistant professor of history at Campion College at the University of Regina, examines Canada's response to Japanese imperialism through the 1930s, a decade which also marked the high point of Canada's business, missionary, and diplomatic involvement in the Far East. The author reminds readers that "Northeast Asia–not Europe–provided the first major challenge to internationalism since Versailles and Canadians responded by addressing issues that defined the period: collective security, pacifism, disarmament, and appeasement." It was not Mussolini or Hitler's aggression but Japan's seizure of Manchuria in 1931 that revealed the weakness of the League of Nations' collective security system and "inaugurated a decade of expansionism that would undermine internationalism" and eventually lead to the Second World War (p. 54). Meehan proves that the stormy military and diplomatic events of the 1930s so altered Canadian views that, "by the end of the decade, Japan was no longer seen as an ally but as a potential menace" (p. 4). This beautifully written and accessible book, drawing upon an impressive range of source material, reveals much about the evolving diplomatic relationship between Canada and East Asia.

Meehan begins with the opening of the Canadian legation in Tokyo on Dominion Day, 1929: the third legation abroad and a testament to Canadians' eagerness to build ties to Japan and the Far East. While most historians fixate on Canadian activities in Western Europe and the United States, Meehan notes that "Asia offered a new forum in which to project its evolving international persona. Tokyo was as much a part of Canada's diplomatic coming of age as were Washington and Paris" (p. 198). The legation was established to regulate immigration and to stimulate trade, and although opposition arose on the

grounds of imperial unity and the "Yellow Peril"–the latter particularly amongst British Columbians worried about an "Oriental occupation" (pp. 12-13)–Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King defended its establishment and its active engagement in the region under the aristocratic Herbert Marler and the savvy young diplomatic Hugh Keenleyside. While most books on Canada's view of the Japanese stress racism and denigration, Meehan observes that "with some significant exceptions, Canadian traders, missionaries, and government officials initially viewed Japanese imperialism in a positive light" (p. 3). Missionaries, mostly Protestant by also French Canadian Catholics (embodying a form of early French Canadian "internationalism"), saw Japan as a bulwark against communism and its empire filled with souls to be converted to Christianity (pp. 25, 27). Businessmen valued Japan's "stable investment climate" and its growing appetite for raw materials. Contrasted with China's internal instability and relatively meagre international weight, Meehan explains how and why the federal government focused its energies on Japan during the early Depression years. The phrase "trade trumps diplomacy" seems an appropriate characterization of the era.

The author rightly cautions against portraying the interwar years as an "in-between time." Policy-makers could not preordain a Second World War, and sincerely hoped to avoid one. "The events of the period, when considered in their own right," Meehan observes, "point less to an inevitable conflict and more to a series of responses to the global economic depression and the breakdown in multilateralism" (p. 197). Great power policies, particularly Britain's, were reactionary, inconsistent, and even divergent, leaving Canada with little coherent direction. The Canadian government proceeded with caution, fearful of dividing its Anglo-American allies and increasing its own vulnerability. Indeed, much of the book narrates how Canada's decision-making was colored by British and American influences. In this sense, despite its ostensible focus on the Far East, the book reinforces that the North Atlantic triangle was paramount. At times, the narrative also seemed to gloss over nuances in the British and American positions–the reader learns that Canada faced competing pressures, but the United States and United Kingdom are treated as though they held unified national positions. Delving more into the proverbial "black box" of decision-making in those countries might have painted a less coherent portrait.

Nevertheless, Meehan makes it clear that Japan's aggression in Manchuria, its departure from the League, and its descent into militarist rule made Canadians increasingly uneasy. His detailed analysis reveals not only bureaucratic and political perceptions of Depression-era crises in the Far East, but the myriad Canadian media, intellectual, business, and missionary concerns–not to mention those of the Japanese- and Chinese-Canadian communities. The discussion on the "failure at Geneva," a subject which has been well covered by other historians, offers important insights into impacts on business and missionary interests, as well as domestic responses to C.H. Cahan's infamous 8 December 1932 address. While Cahan's ideas (rooted in "trade and imperialist sentiment") seem "repugnant" today, Meehan reminds the reader that they "had a wider resonance in Canada at the time" (p. 91). Through the decade, discussions about a trade embargo divided American and British officials and encouraged Canada to adopt a "linchpin" role out of fear that it would have to pick sides. Canada's own "trade war" with Japan in 1935 did little to foster mutual goodwill, and did not serve as a winning campaign issue as R.B. Bennett had hoped. William Lyon Mackenzie King quickly resolved the dispute, but "the trade war replaced dreams of Pacific prosperity with a resolute pragmatism" (p. 129). Rising metal exports to Japan led to pacifist accusations that Canada was feeding the Japanese war machine through these "shipments of death" (p. 174), but manufacturers seemed content to reap the profits until 1940 when the federal government finally ended its strategic metal exports to the belligerent. In light of Japanese military and diplomatic activities, positive appraisals of Japanese imperialism became increasingly difficult to maintain, and "the hopes of imperialists and internationalists were effectively dead" by the mid-1930s (p. 98).

Meehan does not confine his perceptive analysis to high diplomacy or national politics. He also examines how Japanese ultranationalism and diplomatic isolation hampered missionary work. Missionaries, buoyed by a spirit of optimism in the 1920s, encountered a "bitter national spirit" that forced them "to re-evaluate and, in some cases, abandon their dreams for evangelization" (p. 129). Catholic and Protestant missions became targets of xenophobic fury, as "many Japanese now viewed Christianity as a 'heretical religion' that subverted the patriotic tenets of 'national defence and national polity' " (p. 132). He also explores how interest groups, particularly the Institute of Pacific Relations, conceptualized regional tensions and chose to focus their attention on economic issues. "By early 1937, however, opinion makers were in virtual agreement that Japan was an aggressive, militaristic, and most likely fascist threat to Canada's security" (p.

145). Meehan also demonstrates that repeated calls for a ban on Japanese immigration, commonly described by historians of British Columbia and race relations,[1] also had an international context and were driven by external events.

In his final analysis, Meehan suggests that Japan went from an imperial ally and most-favored trading nation in 1929 to enemy by 1941, after "Japanese expansion [had] result[ed] in the most horrific atrocities committed in Asia in modern times" (p. 2). Japan's repudiation of the Washington Treaty raised persistent concerns about Canadian coastal defenses, particularly in British Columbia where the threat was most acute. By 1936, the Canadian press shared a consensus that Japan was a fascist state, and that its military was directing foreign policy. Although Canada lacked a Far Eastern policy and was "physically and mentally unprepared" for Pacific hostilities (p. 137), King began a limited rearmament program, and steered a careful course between American and British positions that became increasingly shared. During the 1937 diplomatic crisis, which King claimed was the most serious test of dominion autonomy since 1922, the prime minister staunchly defended Canadian autonomy and appeasement, demonstrating that his view of Canada's independence in decision-making did not only apply to Europe. On the other hand, he refused to take an independent role on the difficult issues of sanctions or collective security, both of which raised the "risk of bringing Canada into a war they did not want" (p. 169). In typical fashion, King's concern was less with Japanese atrocities committed against the Chinese than with potential diplomatic and military repercussions for Canada. If London and Washington split over Pacific security, Meehan explained, it would have been "nearly impossible [for Canada] to side with Britain against the United States" (pp. 116-7). Canada's leading allies actually came closer together, and Japan's signature on the tripartite pact of September 1940 reinforced that it was now in the opposite camp. Through a technicality, Canada became the first Western country to declare war on Japan after its attack on Pearl Harbor, sealing the fate of Japanese Canadians and Canadian soldiers in Hong Kong. More generally, with this declaration, "the era of Pacific promise, once heralded by missionaries, diplomats, and trades, had come to a dismal end" (p. 197).

There is much subtlety to Meehan's analysis of Canadian thinking throughout this book. He confirms that Bennett's "wait and see approach" to the League of Nations was fraught with inconsistency (p. 56), but acknowledges that the prime minister was not helped by the tentative stance taken by American and British officials over the Manchurian crisis in 1931. The conflicting positions adopted by Marler and Keenleyside, domestic interest groups, and a national press divided along partisan lines, over how Canada should respond to Far Eastern issues made decision-making even more complicated. In the end, Bennett maintained a "cautious policy of neutrality in the Far East," recognizing divisions in public opinion and scant support for sanctions amongst Parliamentarians (p. 75). King displayed his usual proclivity for procrastination and ambiguity, but rather than simplistically chastising him for inaction, Meehan empathizes with the difficulties that politicians faced during the 1930s.

In relying on the great powers to lead the response to Japan's aggression in the Far East, Canada showed that autonomy amounted to freedom, perhaps even isolation, from imperial ties but not yet full status as a minor power conscious of its international responsibilities. While its influence on the Far East was minimal, Canada could have made some impact on decision-makers in London and Washington. Yet, action along these lines would have been inconsistent with Anglo-American policies, domestic divisions on the issue, and Canadian interests as they were seen at the time. In steering a middle course, King, the liberal and pacifist, had woken to a new world.

The author's comprehensive and nuanced treatment is possible because of the rich source base upon which he draws. He makes excellent use of the Department of External Affairs files, memoirs, newspapers, popular periodicals, and Parliamentary debates. Primary and secondary materials are seamlessly integrated into a flowing narrative. Readers will also benefit from his thoughtful bibliographical essay at the end of the book, which he included in lieu of a simple list of sources. This five-page overview, which provides a useful road map to the published literature on Canada's relations with East Asia, should serve as a model for scholars (particularly those who are publishing a first book based on a dissertation) who do not want to burden the reader with a heavy historiographical discussion in the introduction or produce a simple list of sources (which is often redundant to detailed endnotes). It is such mindfulness about the reader–in terms of the general accessibility and eloquence of this work–that makes Meehan's narrative survey such a valuable contribution to Canadian diplomatic history. I have little doubt that his balanced interpretive study will remain the essential book on Canada's changing perceptions of Japan in the interwar period for years to come.

Note

[1]. For a recent example, see Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man's Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003).

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