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The Army that Never Was: the Unrealistic 1936 Kwantung Army plan for an Inner Mongolian Army

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Abstract

Between 1932 and 1945 the Japanese military raised a number of ‘puppet’ armies. While research has focused on the motives of those who opted to collaborate with the Japanese during the period, little work has been done regarding the composition of these forces. This article examines the Kwantung Army’s January 1936 plans for an Inner Mongolian Army, and the reasons why this ‘army’ never eventuated in the form that had been planned. As such, it sheds light on how officers of the Kwantung Army understood, and misunderstood, the potential of peoples of North China to become useful collaborators in wresting the region from the Nationalist Chinese control.

Keywords

Kwantung Army, Inner Mongolia, ‘puppet’ army.

Introduction

Following the Kwantung Army’s seizure of Manchuria in September 1931 and the creation of the supposedly ‘independent’ state of Manchukuo in March 1932, the need for a pliant military force to assist the Imperial Japanese Army in defending its new territorial gains became imperative. With the Soviet Union to the north, Soviet-backed Mongolian People’s Republic to the northwest and an increasingly fractious Republican China to the south, the Kwantung Army, which in 1931 only comprised two divisions
and numbered around 65,000 men, required additional manpower.\(^1\) The obvious solution to the Japanese military was to raise a Manchukoan ‘army’.

The various ‘puppet’ forces raised by the Japanese Army between 1932 and 1945 have received some scholarly attention. Joyce Lebra’s studies of the Indian National Army and the Japanese-trained armies of Southeast Asia are important works in the field, while John Boyle’s groundbreaking study of Sino-Japanese collaboration touched on the subject of military cooperation among disparate groups.\(^2\) The focus of works of this type, however, is primarily on the reasons why some people in the countries under Japanese military control opted to collaborate and not the structure of the forces that the Japanese military established. Moreover, the logistical aspect of the ‘puppet’ armies raised, that is, the composition of these forces in terms of size and equipment, has usually been ignored. This is unfortunate, as an examination of composition of forces gives us some idea of how the Japanese military perceived the peoples that fell under its control. Moreover, such an examination tells us much about the constraints that impacted on the Japanese military’s plans for these forces.

One reliable way to get some idea of the structure of these ‘puppet’ armies is to go back to the plans prepared by the various Japanese Armies that sponsored them and compare those with the appraisals made by Western military analysts at the time. This material can often be usefully supplemented with a careful reading of contemporary civilian sources, both newspapers and books, which often carried quite detailed, although not always reliable, reports on the Japanese Imperial Army’s sponsorship of ‘puppet’ forces. Finally, the work produced recently by writers who could best be termed ‘amateurs interested in military affairs’ is also an important source. This group,

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\(^1\) See Hayashi, *Kōgun*, 8 for growth of Kwantung Army between 1931 and 1935.

\(^2\) For example, Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies*; Lebra, *Indian National Army*; Boyle, *China and Japan at War*. 
often individuals with a military background, has produced a steady stream of works examining the Japanese military and the various ‘puppet’ armies that were raised.3

This article examines the Japanese-backed Inner Mongolian Army that the Kwantung Army planned in January 1936 as a means of extending its military control deeper into Republican China. The article first outlines the geopolitical context and then examines the Kwantung Army’s plan for this force and considers what equipment the force might have received. Finally, the article reviews the actual composition of the Inner Mongolian Army and considers why the plan and the reality were so different.

Geopolitical context
During the Manchukuo period, the Japanese military pursued policies crafted to woo both the Mongols of Manchukuo and those living in the region adjacent, especially the provinces of Chahar and Suiyuan. Their installation of Puyi, the last Qing emperor, as nominal head of state in 1932, and his elevation in 1934 to the position of ‘emperor’ of Manchukuo, had important ramifications in this regard, because, as noted by both Japanese and Western writers at the time, it increased Puyi’s capacity to serve as a rallying-point for those living outside of Manchukuo, both Mongol and Chinese, who desired independence from Republican China.4 Moreover, in the western part of Manchukuo, the area abutting the region still nominally under Republican Chinese control, the Japanese authorities established the supposedly autonomous Mongol-governed Xing’an province where they trumpeted a ‘policy of rule of the Mongols by the Mongols’ (Mōjin Mō-ji seisaku), even installing a Mongolian prince, Prince Sai, as head of the Xing’an regional administration.5 Furthermore, the Japanese military

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3 For example, Jowett, Rays of the Rising Sun; Rottman, Japanese Infantryman; Fujita, Mō hitotsu no rikugun heikishi.
4 Kawakami, Manchoukuo: Child Of Conflict, 205-10; Cutlack, Manchurian Arena, 19-20.
5 Zenrin kyōkai, Mōko nenkan, 258-9; Nakajima, Toku-ō, 149.
established the Xing’an Brigade, whose personnel were largely drawn from the Mongol population. This unit was regarded as one of the most prestigious of the Manchukuoan Army and its existence was publicised both inside and outside of Manchukuo.6

The geopolitical situation in which the Kwantung Army planners drafted the plan for the proposed Inner Mongolian Army was one beset by competition amongst the Nationalist Chinese government and local governors and warlords as well as the Japanese military. In this complex power play, the Japanese military wooed Prince De (Demchugdorjub) of the Sonid Right banner, in Chahar province, adjacent to Manchukuo. De was the leader of a group known as the ‘Young Mongols’, seeking a degree of autonomy from the Chinese Republican government.7 From 1933 onwards, the Japanese military actively pursued De, with a number of Kwantung Army officers travelling to the prince’s residence, often offering arms and ammunition in exchange for his allegiance. De, for his part, was not averse to meeting with the Japanese, using their offers of assistance as a bargaining chip in his dealings with the Republicans. His efforts were destined to failure, however, in the face of Chiang Kai-shek’s assiduous efforts to keep De’s regional rivals (notably Fu Zuoyi, governor of neighbouring Suiyuan province, and his mentor Yan Xishan) on side.8 By early 1936, American officials in Beijing were advising Washington that it was ‘only a matter of time’ before De ‘declared “independence” with Japanese assistance’,9 and that the Mongols had been ‘pushed into the arms of the Japanese’ because of Chiang’s policy of appeasement.10

The Plan for the Kwantung Army-backed Inner Mongolian Army

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6 See Manchoukuo Army and Navy; Jowett, Rays of the Rising Sun, 15.
8 Boyle, China and Japan at War, 124-5; Boorman, Republican China, 7-9.
9 Telegram from Peking, reel 46, frame 77-8.
10 Constant, ‘Comments on Current Events’, reel 2, frame 389.
In January 1936, as part of its ongoing encroachment into the territory of the Republic of China, the Kwantung Army General Staff adopted ‘Tai-Mō (seihoku) shisaku yōryō’ (Outline of policy towards Mongolia [the northwest]). The plan reviewed the current military situation as seen by Kwantung Army planners, and then outlined the military, political, economic and cultural measures to be taken to achieve Japanese control of Inner Mongolia, and especially the provinces of Chahar and Suiyuan, a stated objective of the army. Steps included the coordination of the Japanese agents within Inner Mongolia, in particular the Zenrin Kyōkai (Good Neighbour Association), which had been active in the region from 1934 onwards, providing locals with medical care. The population of Inner Mongolia was beset at the time by an array of diseases, including eye disease and respiratory problems that would have precluded them from military service. The January 1936 plan echoed earlier Kwantung Army reports that called for the provision of medical care to these people, as well as the development of the infrastructure of the region in the form of roads, schools and hospitals. Improvements to the infrastructure would undoubtedly have facilitated Japanese economic penetration there, while the construction of schools and hospitals was a way in which Japanese individuals and organisations could be infiltrated into the region. All of these developments would indirectly benefit the Kwantung Army’s planned encroachment.

After more than seven pages detailing the various non-military agents to be connected with Kwantung Army operations, the plan spelled out the proposed structure

11 Kantōgun, ‘Tai-Mō (seihoku) shisaku yōryō’. This report is handwritten and the pages then folded and bound, with the same page number on both sides of the page – ‘a’ refers to the obverse of the page, and ‘b’ to the reverse.  
12 Ibid., 1a.  
13 Ibid., 1b, 4a-4b, 9a. For discussion of the Zenrin Kyōkai, see Boyd, ‘Japanese Cultural Diplomacy in Action’.  
14 Iiyama and Hazama, Mōkyō no tabi, 49.  
15 See, for example, ‘Mōkoku kensetsu ni kansuru iken’; Kantōgun, ‘Nekkashō yori mitaru Mōko minzoku ni tsuite’; Matsumuro report; Kantōgun, ‘Tai-Naimō shisaku yōryō’.
of an Inner Mongolian Army (*Naimōgun*).\(^\text{16}\) This force was to be composed of two ‘armies’ (*gun*), each with a slightly different structure. The first army was to be made up of two cavalry ‘divisions’ (*shī*), each consisting of three ‘corps’ (*dan*) and a mortar company (*hakugekihōtai*). The ‘corps’ were broken down into three ‘regiments’ (*ren*) each of 120 men and equipped with two light machine guns per company, with an additional machine gun company (*kikanjūren*) equipped with four heavy machine guns. The plan followed Japanese Army structure at the time, and there is no reason to suspect that it did not, the heavy machine gun company would have numbered some 40 men,\(^\text{17}\) giving each regiment in total some 400 men. This would have meant that one cavalry ‘division’ would have numbered around 1250 men, together with the mortar company, which with only six mortars numbered no more than 50 men.\(^\text{18}\) The ‘army’ was also to have been equipped with a horse artillery unit with eight guns and a tank unit with 18 vehicles. The composition of the second ‘army’ was essentially the same, although it did not include the tank unit.\(^\text{19}\)

The decision by the Kwantung Army to structure the Inner Mongolian Army around cavalry units was probably based on a number of reasons. Firstly, given the vast size of Inner Mongolia, a cavalry-based force made greater sense militarily given the degree of mobility that was needed to respond to any threat. The reliance on cavalry on the Mongolia steppes was not without recent precedent. Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, the legendary ‘Mad Baron’, whose White Russian forces had harried the Red Army in 1920-21, had noted bluntly during his interrogation by his Bolshevik captors how, on the ‘difficult Inner Asian terrain’, his ‘cavalry could do battle in any direction

\(^{16}\) Kantōgun, ‘Tai-Mō (seihoku) shisaku yōryō’, 6b-7b.
\(^{17}\) Nakanishi, *Nihon no hohei kaki*, 26-7.
\(^{19}\) Kantōgun, ‘Tai-Mō (seihoku) shisaku yōryō’, 7b.
and at any time’ and were thus able to defeat the Red Army infantry divisions sent to catch him.\(^{20}\)

Secondly, there was the practical rationale behind the planned army structure, probably influenced by the Japanese Army’s combat experience in the region during the 1918-22 Siberian Intervention and its service alongside the White Russian forces. An April 1918 assessment by the Japanese Army of the forces commanded by Grigori Semenov noted that while they were not large, only some 1,800 men, a significant proportion comprised cavalry. In addition, Semenov possessed 20 artillery pieces and almost 50 machine guns as support weapons,\(^ {21}\) giving the small force surprising military muscle.

Finally, the Kwantung Army plan may have bought into the romantic image that some Japanese had of the Mongols, one that was often constructed around Genghis Khan, his horde and horses.\(^ {22}\) Mongolia and its horses had been promoted to the Japanese public since the late 1920s, a campaign in which the Japanese military was actively involved.\(^ {23}\) Genghis Khan aside, the type of horse bred in this region was especially sturdy, renowned for its stamina, and able to travel long distances in a day,\(^ {24}\) and thus ideal mounts for the cavalry based force that the Kwantung Army envisioned. The Kwantung Army planners, however, seduced by the romantic image of Genghis Khan and his horsemen, set unrealistic expectations, discussed more fully below, as to what the Mongols were capable of achieving in the short period of time allowed for the Inner Mongolian Army to be raised, trained and readied for action.

With two cavalry divisions in each ‘army’, the Inner Mongolian Army was planned as a force of around 5000 men, a figure that does not include the manpower

\(^{20}\) Patrikeeff, Russian Politics in Exile, 144.
\(^{21}\) ‘Genzai ni okeru Semenofu shitai henseihyō’.
\(^ {22}\) Boyd, Japanese-Mongolian Relations, 11.
\(^ {24}\) Turnbull, Mongol Warrior, 16-17, 27.
needed for the horse artillery units and tank unit that the armies were also to encompass. These units, together with some form of headquarters component, would have accounted for at least a further 500 men, giving the planned army around 5,500 personnel. In addition to manpower, the intended supply of 36 light machine guns, 24 heavy machine guns and 12 mortars, together with the horse artillery and tank unit, would have made it a comparatively well-equipped ‘puppet’ force.

While it is not possible to state with certainty what weaponry the force received, as the plan was not that detailed, from examining period photos it is possible to suggest what the fully-equipped army might have looked like. In September 1937, for example, following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the Japanese press highlighted the role of the cavalry of the Inner Mongolian Army in the campaign.\textsuperscript{25} The photo that accompanied the report showed two Inner Mongolian Army cavalrymen mounted on their sturdy horses and dressed in uniforms almost identical to those worn by the Japanese Army (see Figure 1). The only pieces of equipment that marked the men as not being Japanese soldiers are the brassard that can be seen on the upper left arm, presumably to indicate that the men were Mongols, and the bandolier and waist pouches for ammunitions, which were equipment common to Chinese troops of the period.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} ‘Mongol Cavalrymen’, \textit{Japan Chronicle}, 361.

A second photo, said to show Inner Mongolian Army soldiers in 1936, presents a far more motley assortment of individuals dressed in traditional Mongol garb and carrying an array of weapons (see Figure 2). Of interest, however, is that while the group is mostly armed with antiquated rifles, at least two of the soldiers are carrying the Czech ZB-26 light machine gun. The ZB-26 was a highly successful design, which influenced the design of the British Army’s Bren gun, and was widely exported during the 1920s and 1930s. How these Inner Mongolians came by them is unknown. There was, however, a thriving arms trade in China about this time, as arms dealers and gun runners flocked to the country to ply their trade, resulting in just about every type of pistol, rifle and machine gun available being found in China during the period.

FIGURE 2. Inner Mongolian Army c.1936, reproduced in Jowett, Rays of the Rising Sun, 51. The men second from the left and third from the right are equipped with the ZB-26.

In terms of the artillery that the Inner Mongolian Army might have had been given, a segment of a 1942 Japanese propaganda film documenting Japanese Army operations in Inner Mongolia and, specifically, the part played by the Inner Mongolian Army in assisting the operations against Chinese ‘bandits’, shows a group of Inner Mongolian soldiers using a light artillery piece,\(^\text{29}\) in all likelihood a Model 11 (1922) 37-mm gun. Although not a large bore piece, the gun would have given the small Inner Mongolian Army a weapon that fired both high explosive and armour-piercing ammunition, making it an efficient infantry close support weapon.\(^\text{30}\)

While such light weaponry could have been supplied, the provision of any armoured vehicles would seem unlikely, given that the Kwantung Army never had sufficient armoured vehicles to equip its own units, let alone ‘puppet’ forces. The larger

\(^{29}\) Sensen niman kiro.

Manchukuoan Army, for example, had to make do with an odd assortment of vehicles salvaged from the equipment that had been used by Zhang Xueliang’s pre-1931 army, mostly World War I vintage tanks, and it was not until 1943 that it received a small number of obsolete Japanese tanks.31

That the Inner Mongolian Army did receive tanks is supported by several sources. Firstly, in a November 1936 Chinese press report some credence was given to the belief that the Inner Mongolian Army possessed tanks. The article was based in part on an interview given by Major-General Kita Seichi, then the Japanese Military Attaché in Shanghai. In this interview Kita declared ‘reports that these Mongols are too poor to buy tanks, armored cars and munitions are untrue’.32 While press reports at the time, particularly those from the Chinese press, must be viewed with caution, Matsui Tadao, one of the Japanese Army officers assigned to the Inner Mongolian Army, also noted the provision of armour to the Inner Mongolians at this time in his postwar memoirs.33

Of the light armoured vehicles used by the Kwantung Army at the time, the most likely contender for service with the Inner Mongolian Army was the Type 92 cavalry tank. Manufactured in relatively small quantities between 1933 and 1935, this lightly armoured vehicle, equipped only with machine guns, saw service in Manchuria and North China, but was already being phased out at the time that the Inner Mongolian Army was being planned. With a top speed of 40 kilometres an hour and an operating range of around 100 kilometres, the small vehicle would have been able to work alongside the Inner Mongolian cavalry.34 It is also tempting to suggest that the fact that the Type 92 was a ‘cavalry’ tank might have influenced the Kwantung Army planners.

Ultimately, the force that the January 1936 Kwantung Army plan detailed was well balanced, with a mix of cavalry, horse artillery and tanks that could have numbered

31 Jowett, Rays of the Rising Sun, 17.
33 Matsui, Naimō sangokushi, 158.
34 Tomczyk, Japońska Broń Pancerna, 60-4.
around 5,500 men. It was not a large force by any measure but, with the mix of light and heavy equipment, it would have been a force to be reckoned with on the North China battlefield when placed against some of the ragtag units fielded at the time by the Chinese Republican Army. However, when the Japanese-backed Inner Mongolian Army’s attempt to wrest control of part of Suiyuan province from the Republic of China got underway in November 1936, in what came to be known as the Suiyuan Incident, the Inner Mongolian force that went into battle was not the well-balanced unit that had been proposed.

**The Outcome – What Went Wrong in the Suiyuan invasion?**

The Inner Mongolian Army assembled by the Kwantung Army was far less effective than the force which had been initially planned, numbering instead 4 units of around 16,000 personnel in total. Instead of the initially planned force, it was an unwieldy mix of Mongol, Manchukuoan and Han Chinese, largely comprising mounted irregulars the reliability of whom was seriously doubted by some of the Japanese Army officers associated with the operation. In fact, the Manchukuoans were Han Chinese, but the Japanese military applied the term ‘Manchukuoan’ to the Han Chinese of Manchuria to imply that they were in some way different to the Han Chinese living outside of Manchukuo. Three of the four units were a composed of this personnel. It was the fourth unit that comprised of the fledgling first and second Inner Mongolian Armies, which had been enlarged and now numbered some 11,000 personnel. Exactly how the Japanese were able to raise an army double the size of what had originally been planned is unclear, but it seems likely that it was done by drafting recruits who were less well-trained and of dubious loyalty. The commander of the second army was Li Shouxin, a Sinicized Mongol and former colonel in the Rehe provincial army, whose troops had performed well during operations in Chahar in December 1935 and were considered
reliable by the Kwantung Army.35 The Chahar operations had seen Li’s force occupy the eastern part of the province, just north of Zhangjiakou, and, as the US military attaché noted, place the ‘Japanese astride the Kalgan [Zhangjiakou]-Urga road …, in a better position to exercise influence over Shansi [Shanxi] and Suiyuan’.36 Finally, as had been done during the Chahar operation, the Kwantung Army raised an independent air unit by drafting about 60 men from the Manchukuo Airline Corporation to provide air support for the operation.37

The Republican Chinese force opposing this mixed Mongol, Manchukuoan and Han Chinese force was significantly larger, numbering around 45,000 men.38 Indeed, when the Inner Mongolian Army was committed to battle in November 1936 it was soundly beaten. The Suiyuan Incident has been examined in a number of existing works,39 so I will confine my remarks here to the impact that the defeat had on the broader Sino-Japanese conflict. The spirited response of the forces of Fu Zuoyi, the Chinese warlord who controlled Suiyuan province, struck a chord with the Chinese population, and the Chinese press reported widely on Fu’s success.40 This led to calls from across Chinese society for Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek to resist Japan’s encroachments on Chinese territory. Moreover, the unexpected success that the Chinese forces had against the Inner Mongolian army, which the Chinese press implied was actually the Kwantung Army, may have indirectly triggered the December 1936 kidnapping of Chiang by Zhang Xueliang, the former ruler of Manchuria, in the well-known Xi’an Incident. Writing later of his decision to seize Chiang, Zhang specifically

38 Funaki, Mōjin, 165.
39 Coble, Facing Japan, 325-33; Coox, Nomonhan, 69-73.
40 See, for example, the articles ‘Mongol Cavalry Driven Back’, ‘Mongol Forces Mutiny’, and ‘Kwantung Army Ready’.
mentioned the Suiyuan invasion as one of the reasons for his action.\textsuperscript{41} Kwantung Army Vice Chief of Staff Kawabe Torashirō concluded independently that the Suiyuan invasion had prompted the kidnapping.\textsuperscript{42} By seeking to gain control of Inner Mongolia, the Kwantung Army inadvertently prompted a rapprochement between the Guomindang (Nationalists) and the Chinese Communists for the purposes of facing their common enemy.\textsuperscript{43}

This begs the question of what went wrong between the tabling of the Kwantung Army’s plan for an Inner Mongolian Army in January 1936 and the launch of the Suiyuan operation later that year. In the space of some 11 months, the plan for a small but well-balanced military force had morphed into a larger but far more unwieldy entity composed of a mix of racial groups, some of whom were unreliable, which was soundly defeated when it went into action. Much of the reason why the force that was established was defeated lies with the Kwantung Army planners who, carried away with their mythology of the Mongol horsemen, underestimated what was needed to raise, train and equip such an army. It seems to me that there are four major reasons why the planned army never eventuated.

First, while the armies commanded by Genghis Khan were comparable to a modern force in terms of ‘maneuverability, firepower, discipline and excellent officer corps’,\textsuperscript{44} and although contemporary Mongolians such as Li Shouxin had demonstrated talent in combat, there was an unbridgeable gap between the unrealistic expectations of the Kwantung Army planners and what the Inner Mongolians of the early twentieth century were capable of achieving.

A modern army requires trained officers and non-commissioned officers to direct it in battle, and those personnel were lacking. The need to develop such a cadre had

\textsuperscript{41} Upshur, ‘Chang Hsueh-liang’, 44-55.
\textsuperscript{42} Kawabe, ‘Ichigaya yori Ichigaya e 3/7’, 183-4.
\textsuperscript{43} Boyd, \textit{Japanese-Mongolian Relations}, 154-5.
\textsuperscript{44} Holland, ‘Death that saved Europe’, 99.
been recognised at the beginning of the twentieth century, with at least one Inner Mongolian prince establishing a military school staffed by Japanese military personnel at his banner administration.\textsuperscript{45} The school was largely unsuccessful, however, and one of the first things the Japanese military had to do in the early 1930s was to dispatch a small group of Mongolian students to Japan to undergo military schooling.\textsuperscript{46} These students then served as trainers at the military school at Zhangbei in Chahar that the Japanese military established and which by June 1936 had about 500 Mongolian youths undergoing training.\textsuperscript{47} To effectively staff the planned army, however, this school needed to turn out 12 captains, 36 lieutenants and 108 noncommissioned officers of various grades,\textsuperscript{48} something that would have been impossible to do in the amount of time available. Japanese Army infantry officer candidates undertook six to 11 months training at officers’ school followed by service with a field unit on probation for four months, but this was usually after graduating from a military preparatory school, while NCOs received 12 months of training at NCO school, but only after completing their basic training.\textsuperscript{49}

The Kwantung Army planners would have been fully aware of the time needed to train a reliable officer and NCO corps, and for them to proceed regardless is clear evidence of unrealistic expectations on their part. One possible source of trained personnel would have been from the Manchukuoan Army’s Xing’an Brigade mentioned earlier, who, being predominantly Mongol and already trained, might have provided an ideal boost to the officer and NCO cadre of the fledgling Inner Mongolian Army. There was, however, no suggestion in the January 1936 plan that seconding personnel from

\textsuperscript{45} Jagchid, \textit{Last Mongol Prince}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{46} ‘Zenrin kyōkai nenpyo’, 412.
\textsuperscript{47} Stilwell, ‘Situation Report’, 404.
\textsuperscript{48} United States War Department, \textit{Handbook on Japanese Military Forces}, 38.
\textsuperscript{49} Rottman, \textit{Japanese Infantryman}, 9-10.
the Xing’an Brigade was considered, an indication of how little exchange there was between the Manchukuoan and Inner Mongolian armies at the time.

The second reason why the planned army never eventuated relates to the size of the Inner Mongolian population. It is often forgotten that there is a direct relationship between the size of the armed force that a country is capable of supporting and the size of its population. In January 1936 the population of the area under direct control of the Kwantung Army was probably no more than half a million people, which was most likely why the Japanese military were forced to pad the Inner Mongolian force with Manchukuoan irregulars. Indeed, at the time of the July 1937 Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the beginning of the undeclared Sino-Japanese war, the Soviet-backed army of the Mongolian People’s Republic numbered less than 12,000 personnel recruited from a population of slightly more than 800,000.

A third reason why the planned army never eventuated had to do with the availability of equipment. As noted earlier, the Japanese Army never had enough heavy weapons to adequately equip its own units, making the prospect of supplying modern weaponry to a ‘puppet’ force highly improbable. Looking at what the larger Manchukuoan Army had to make do with, it seems likely that Kwantung Army planners baulked at supplying the Inner Mongolian Army with modern weapons that would have had to have come from their own limited supply.

Finally, the reason why the planned army was neither well equipped nor trained might have been a combination of impatience and overconfidence on the part of the Kwantung Army. In September 1931, the Kwantung Army, numbering some 25,000 personnel, was able to defeat Zhang Xuéliang’s forces, possibly ten times its size, and seize control of the three provinces of Manchuria. That was not an isolated success. In

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January 1933, for example, when the Kwantung Army looked to seize Rehe province and incorporate it into the new ‘nation’ of Manchukuo, a force of some 20,000 Japanese supported by 42,000 personnel of the Manchukuoan Army, had subjugated the province in less than two months.\(^{53}\) At this time there had been (theoretically) 100,000 Chinese soldiers to defend Rehe.\(^{54}\)

The apparent weakness of the various Chinese armies that the Kwantung Army faced, combined with the initial performance of the Manchukuoan Army, may have lulled Kwantung Army planners into believing that they could encroach more deeply on Chinese territory using largely ‘puppet’ forces with small amounts only of additional support. Indeed, this is what was done in December 1935 when forces commanded by Li Shouxin launched an attack from Dolonor on districts in the south of Chahar province. Li’s force, which only numbered some 5000 personnel, supported by a small number of Japanese aircraft and possibly a few tanks, was able to capture the region north of Zhangjiakou, placing it in a position to exercise influence over Shanxi and Suiyuan provinces.\(^{55}\) The apparent success of such a small force, albeit one supported by aircraft and tanks, may have convinced Kwantung Army planners that to seize Suiyuan they would not require a significantly larger force.

This apparent overconfidence on the part of the Kwantung Army planners was consistent with a widespread underestimation of Chinese military strength. Throughout the period the widely held perception of the average Chinese soldier, both within China and abroad, was that he was either a village yokel, unable to avoid being swept up by whichever warlord was recruiting, or the scum of the civilian world, unsuited for any other kind of employment.\(^{56}\) That such was the contempt with which the average

\(^{54}\) Coble, *Facing Japan*, 94; Skya, ‘German and Japanese Ultranationalists’, 139.
Chinese soldier was held in Japan can be gauged from the manner in which the magazine *Ie no hikari* (Light of the Home), a magazine for women, portrayed the Chinese soldier. In its stories the average Chinese soldier was lazy, cowardly, ignorant and inept at fighting, as well as effete, because when it rained he fought from under his umbrella so as not to get his uniform wet.\(^{57}\) Denigrating the enemy is a standard trope; witness the American contempt for the Japanese soldier as ‘scrawny, near-sighted, and poorly trained and equipped’ prior to the start of the Second World War.\(^ {58}\) Nevertheless, if a Japanese women’s magazine viewed Chinese soldiery in this negative light, one can imagine how the Japanese military perceived them.

**Conclusion**

While the Inner Mongolian Army that the Kwantung Army envisioned in its January 1936 plan never came into existence, the plan illustrates the extent to which Japanese military officers connected with its development were willing to go in the pursuit of control of the region. In particular, the plan illustrates that the Kwantung Army was thinking, to some extent, about the changes that were needed in Inner Mongolia to facilitate the formation of the proposed army. While some might argue that the planned force was merely a ‘pipe dream’ and that there was never any likelihood of it actually eventuating, I believe this was not the case. The evidence that is available from photographs and film taken after July 1937 suggests that the Kwantung Army did continue to equip the Inner Mongolians, seeking to implement its January 1936 plan, even if the army that eventuated was not what had been initially envisaged.

The Kwantung Army had in mind a compact, well balanced force in terms of ratio of fire power to manpower. In the end, however, they were unsuccessful because of the

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\(^{57}\) Wilson, *Manchurian Crisis*, 143.

reasons of unrealistic expectations, which led to insufficient time to develop a cadre of trained officers and personnel, as well as insufficient population numbers to support the planned force, a lack of available equipment, given the demands of the Imperial Japanese Army at that time, and impatience and overconfidence on the part of the Kwantung Army itself. If the Kwantung Army had been able to assemble, train and equip the force it had planned in January 1936 then the outcome of the November 1936 Suiyuan Incident might have been different. The smaller Inner Mongolian ‘army’ would not have been so soundly thrashed and Sino-Japanese relations not so adversely affected.

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