A Real Peace Tradition? Norway and the Manchurian Crisis, 1931–1934

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Abstract
This article questions Norway's role as peace promoter during the Manchurian crisis in the early 1930s. It appears that Norway's attitude towards Japan was more ambiguous and less consonant with the anti-war, anti-Japanese stand hitherto assumed on the basis of Norway's performance in the League of Nations. Norway's foreign ministry was mainly interested in Norway's practical and security needs, and fairly indifferent to events unfolding in the Far East, unless these affected Norwegian economic and political interests. For Norwegian diplomats and senior officials Japan was a civilised state and an important commercial partner. Favourable disposition towards Japan led the foreign ministry in 1934 to appear to acknowledge the ascendance of Emperor Pu Yi in the puppet state Manchukuo. This created considerable embarrassment in diplomatic and political circles.

During the past few years, the Norwegian foreign ministry has moulded an image of Norway as a nation with a long tradition for advocating peaceful settlement of international conflicts. Norway is promoted as a country particularly well suited to take on the role of mediator, on account of its small-state status and its non-colonial history, and because it harbours no great-power aspirations. The legacies of Christian Lous Lange and Fridtjof Nansen are well known[1] and put forward as evidence of the peace-loving attitude and good intentions of this small, northern country. The activist incarnation of this peace tradition is assumed to have blossomed since the end of the Cold War.

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[1] Nobel laureates in 1921 and 1922. Lange was awarded the prize for his work for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Nansen for his humanitarian and peace-promoting work.

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This image of Norway – presented as the so-called 'Norwegian model' – has come under scrutiny in an ongoing research project which assesses the historical roots of Norway's apparent peace tradition.[2] The aim of this article is to contribute to the debate by exploring Norway's role as peace promoter during the Manchurian crisis in the early 1930s. The conflict concerned Japan's military expansion in northern China, China's protest and the reaction of the League of Nations. The crisis was constituted by a series of events that together proved to be a major challenge – and eventually a defeat – for the League. The delegates of the Scandinavian countries in the League protested against Japanese aggression in Manchuria, and the Norwegian foreign ministry advocated the use of sanctions. Several historians have suggested that Scandinavian peace efforts and their demand for sanctions were compromised by the lack of support they received from the great powers. Leading League members, as well as the United States – a non-member – set the tune and were unwilling to commit themselves to anything more vociferous than a moral protest. When the great powers, in particular Britain, decided to limit their reaction to diplomatic channels, there was not much Norway could do.[3]

In spite of Norway's well documented protests regarding Japanese expansion in Manchuria, it appears that its attitude towards the crisis may have been more ambiguous and less consonant with the anti-war, anti-Japanese stand hitherto assumed in the literature. I shall illustrate this by focusing on a curious incident in connection with Japan's occupation of Manchuria in the 1930s and its establishment of the puppet state Manchukuo in 1932. This conflict involved Norway both as an independent member of the League of Nations and as head of the Scandinavian delegations in Geneva, a status it enjoyed by virtue of its position on the League Council.[4] In 1934 Norway's foreign ministry sent a telegram congratulating Pu Yi[5] on his inauguration as emperor of Manchukuo. The telegram would seem to imply a clear recognition of the new regime. This curious and somewhat delicate incident appears to have escaped the attention of Norwegian historians: the telegram was openly congratulatory over the action of one country in occupying the territory of another. As we shall see, the telegram was to prove an embarrassing affair for the Norwegian government. Not only did it implicitly endorse Japan's actions in Manchuria, but it did so at a time when relations between Japan and the West had reached rock bottom. Little less than a year before, Japan had left the League in protest against the League's condemnation of

[2] This research project is led by Professor Helge Pharo at the University of Oslo. For a broader presentation of the project, see Helge Pharo, 'Den norske fredstradisjonen – et forskningsprosjekt', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 84, 2 (2005), 239–55.

[3] Olav Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations – A History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 2005), 134; Oddbjørn Fure, *Mellomkrigstid 1920–1940* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1996), 192–4.

[4] When hostilities broke out in China, Norway represented the Scandinavian countries in the League Council. The League of Nations had three principal organs: the Secretariat, the Council and the Assembly. The great powers (initially Britain, France, Italy and Japan) were permanent members of the Council, while smaller states, at least four, were elected on a rotation basis by the League Assembly. All member states were represented in the Assembly. Authorisation for sanctions required majority votes in the Council and the Assembly, the parties to the dispute being excluded.

[5] The name is sometimes spelt P'u-i or Puyi. He was also called Henry Pu Yi.

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the occupation. Japan's actions, it was felt, were hardly compatible with the expected behaviour of a civilised state.

European peace traditions and the League of Nations

Alongside growing militarism in parts of Europe in the 1930s – most notably in Spain, Germany and Italy – there existed powerful European countercurrents that advocated pacifism and disarmament.[6] Devastating war experiences had brought a longing for peace and a desire to construct a new system for international co-operation between sovereign states. Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century international humanitarian and philanthropic organisations had spoken in favour of a more humane, civilised kind of warfare.[7] When the League of Nations was founded after the First World War, it embodied a new kind of internationalism, based on national self determination, justice and the rule of international law. Disarmament and the promotion of peace were central issues of concern, and League members were to pledge themselves to promoting a lasting peace by respecting other states' political independence and territorial integrity.

Peace societies had been in existence in Scandinavia since the 1880s. These societies encouraged ideas of neutrality and anti-war sentiments, both of which found a resonance in the Scandinavian populations. The overall concern was to keep their countries out of power politics. Scandinavian delegates participated in the two European peace conferences in The Hague, in 1899 and in 1907, when disarmament was addressed as a key issue of concern for the international community. Scandinavians argued that a drastic reduction in military expenditures was necessary to secure lasting peace, and that any international conflict should be solved by the use of compulsory arbitration. Neither conference, however, managed to agree on a disarmament resolution.[8] The Scandinavian peace movement gained strength during the First World War. Out of the activity of hundreds of peace meetings came proposals for an organisation that could maintain permanent peace. Contemporary Scandinavian politicians tended to promote an image of the Scandinavian countries as a 'peace bloc' speaking with one voice in international politics. However, this was a political construction that only to a moderate degree reflected actual Scandinavian policy.[9]

There is no scholarly consensus on whether or not we can talk of a peace tradition entering Norwegian foreign policy over the first decades of the twentieth century.[10] From Norway's independence in 1905 until the outbreak of the Second World War

[6] Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), *passim*.

[7] Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in Warfare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 147–57; David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 29–33.

[8] Shepard Jones, *The Scandinavian States and the League of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 21–3.

[9] Karen Gram-Skjoldager and Øivind Tønnesson, 'Unity and Divergence: Scandinavian Internationalism, 1914–1921', *Contemporary European History*, 17 (2008), 301–24.

[10] Olav Riste, 'Ideal og eigeninteresser: Utviklinga av den norske utanrikspolitiske tradisjonen', in Sven Holtsmark, Helge Ø. Pharo and Rolf Tamnes, eds., *Motstrøms: Olav Riste og norsk internasjonal*

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in September 1939, the main issue for Norway's leading politicians was to keep the country outside great-power conflicts. Neutralism was a significant undercurrent throughout the period. Olav Riste, a leading historian of Norwegian foreign policy, sees Norwegian foreign policy during these years as a compromise between ideals and self-interests, a policy aiming at non-alliance in times of peace, and neutrality in case of war. The main goal was to secure Norwegian political and economic independence, while simultaneously retaining its westward, Atlantic orientation – in particular its traditionally close relations with Britain – in order to protect its commercial and shipping interests. The implicit assumption was that Britain's own strategic interests would prevent it from allowing other powers to invade Norway. Norway's foreign policy was thus a combination of neutralism leaning towards isolationism, and reliance on Britain for defence assistance if necessary. This has been described by Riste as a policy of 'effortless security'.[11]

In Norway, as in the other Scandinavian countries, support for the League Covenant was limited. Both social democrats and conservatives in the Norwegian parliament were sceptical of an institution that neither assured equality for small and great nations alike, nor fully outlawed war nor endorsed complete disarmament. The absence of the defeated Germany and the Soviet Union was also important, as these two countries were significant reference points at the time for the radicalised Social Democratic Party.[12]

When the Norwegian parliament gave its consent on 4 March 1920 to Norway's entry into the League, a considerable minority voted against.[13] Part of the scepticism was related to the League's possible use of sanctions, which might endanger traditional Norwegian neutrality and drag Norway into conflicts involving the great powers.[14] Norway nevertheless accepted membership in the League, not only because this body offered the prospect of international affairs regulated through the rule of law and not military power, but because the accession of Norway's security guarantor, the United Kingdom, effectively made Norway's non-membership out of the question.[15]

League membership did not, however, effect a major reorientation of Norwegian foreign policy.[16] Neutralism continued to be an important reference point for most

historieskrivning (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2003), 53–88; Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*; Nils Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken 1920–1939*, Vol. 2 (Oslo: Johan Grundt Tanum Forlag, 1961); Bjørn Arne Steine, 'Forskning og formidling for fred 1900–1950', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 84, 2 (2005), 257–74; Helge Ø. Pharo, 'Den norske fredstradisjonen – et forskningsprosjekt', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 84, 2 (2005), 239–56, 245; Even Lange, Helge Ø. Pharo and Øivind Østerud, eds., *Vendepunkter i norsk utenrikspolitikk: Nye internasjonale vilkår etter den kalde krigen* (Oslo: Unipub 2009); Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*; Reidar Omang, *Norge og stormaktene 1906–14* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1957).

11 Riste, 'Ideal og egeninteresser', 53–88.

12 Nils Yngvar Bøe Lindgren, 'Norge og opprettelsen av Folkeforbundet', master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1993, 188–90.

13 Jones, *Scandinavian States*, 71–6; Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 184.

14 Jones, *Scandinavian States*, 29, Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 181; Lindgren, 'Norge', 127–33.

15 Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken*, 39–43; Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 113.

16 Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken*, 22, 45; Karl Erik Haug, 'Stormaktsgarantier og kollektiv sikkerhetsgaranti 1918–1940', in Roald Berg, ed., *Selvstendig og beskyttet: Det stormaktsgaranterte Norge fra Krimkrigen til NATO* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget 2008), 49–60.

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of the country's leading politicians, although over time the League Assembly became the favoured forum where issues of international law and disarmament, and peaceful solutions of conflicts could be articulated. Scandinavian politicians and others coming from minor countries promoted a so-called small state ideology in the League: the assumed significant role they found small states could play in international politics. In their opinion, such states, untarnished by an imperial past and with few material resources to engage in territorial conflicts, occupied the moral high ground in international affairs.[17] Thus, in the Assembly, the prominent Norwegian delegate Christian Lous Lange advocated 'an active and positive peace policy', while Norway's foreign minister Johan Ludwig Mowinckel claimed that his country's foreign policy was guided by 'an objective love of peace': Norway had no hidden agenda, and its desire for peace was genuine.[18]

Whether these and other statements can be taken as evidence of a particular Norwegian peace tradition is, however, doubtful. The 'new internationalism', which in the 1920s advocated international law as the way to resolve international conflicts, supplemented, rather than replaced, Norwegian neutralism. As Riste has pointed out, Norwegian spokesmen could easily engage in self-confident rhetorical activism, as Norway was not a party to any territorial disputes, and it could rely on Britain to protect its interests. Geographically distanced from European power centres, Norway could indulge in what Riste calls its 'missionary impulse', and speak forcefully in favour of peace, disarmament and humanitarian concerns.[19]

Although Norway had accepted League membership, it was not ready to engage in economic and military sanctions lest the country be drawn into major military confrontations.[20] Emphasis on arbitration and defending Norway's position of neutrality were central elements in Norway's policy towards the League throughout the 1920s. The main issue was to avoid Norwegian participation in war, and to secure Norwegian independence. The Locarno agreement in 1925, which normalised relations between Germany and the Western powers, was seen as the beginning of a durable period of peace in world politics. Both Norwegian civil and military authorities viewed the international situation with optimism and agreed to drastic cuts in the domestic military budget.[21] In the unlikely event of war breaking out and the League responding with a call for military sanctions, it was ultimately up to Norway to decide its own course of action.[22] This last point was significant and illustrative of Norway's attitude to internationalism and League policies: considerations of the country's security, and protection of its neutrality, remained the central tenets of Norwegian foreign policy. In common with the other Scandinavian countries, Norway sought to weaken Article 16 of the Covenant of the League of Nations,

[17] For an elaboration of the concept of 'small-state philosophy', see Steine, 'Forskning og formidling', 263; Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 130.

[18] Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitkken*, 144; Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 131.

[19] Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 133.

[20] Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken*, 49–53; Jones, *Scandinavian States*, 13.

[21] Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken*, 152–3.

[22] Ibid., 159–66.

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which implied that League members should implement economic sanctions against aggressor states.[23]

If international disarmament was an important issue for the League, ideologically it was of little significance for Norway's leading politicians. When the parliament voted for defence cuts in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it did so primarily with an eye to reducing public expenditure. The appearance of clouds on the international horizon in the early 1930s did not substantially alter this view. It was Norway's uniquely favourable strategic situation coupled with a desire to limit public expenditure that dominated domestic debates in the early 1930s, rather than an ideological conviction that disarmament was the one and true path to world peace.[24]

Norway's attitude to disarmament can be discerned in connection with its participation in the world disarmament conference in Geneva in 1932–4, and the years preceding the conference.[25] With the exception of Lange, who sat on the League's disarmament commission, and Mowinckel, the Geneva conference met with little enthusiasm in Norway. In the late 1920s, the military authorities argued that disarmament might endanger national security, and neither Lange nor Mowinckel – who briefly led a liberal government in 1928 and 1933 – won over the conservative prime minister Ivar Lykke to their idealism. Even in comparison with the other Scandinavian countries at the conference, the Norwegian delegation was strikingly small.[26] The Norwegian government was the most reluctant among its neighbours to outline a concrete and committed disarmament policy, and made it clear that its delegation should make no international agreements concerning either disarmament or – if the situation so required – the establishment of an international military force, without first obtaining permission from the government.[27]

The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese conflict

The League was predominantly a European club. Many of its members, both large and small, had global interests and it was these that came to shape the League's outlook on the Sino-Japanese conflict as it developed in the 1920s and 1930s. The details of these events are well known, and need not detain us here. The members expressed their interests through the Washington treaties of 1921–2. These treaties outlined the political settlement and diplomatic framework for east Asia. The so called Four-Power

[23] Haug, *Stormaktsgarantier*, 52.

[24] Ørvik, *Sikkerhetspolitikken*, 63, 152–4. The relevant literature does not discuss whether leading actors at the time saw arms race as a major cause of war.

[25] This issue is discussed in Karl-Erik Haug's forthcoming Ph.D. thesis, 'Folkeforbundet og krigens bekjempelse. Norsk utenrikspolitikk mellom realisme og idealisme'.

[26] Norway's delegation was eight in number; three were formal delegates. Sweden sent nineteen (nine delegates), Denmark twenty-one (eight delegates). Haug, 'Folkeforbundet og krigens bekjempelse'.

[27] Ibid. It should be noted that in a recent paper Marta Magdalena Stachurska suggests that it was the deterioration of the international situation that made it difficult for the Norwegian delegation to pursue the issue: see Stachurska, 'Against Failed Hopes – Norway in the League of Nations from the Disarmament Conference to the Appeasement Policy', forthcoming article in anthology by Forum for Contemporary History, University of Oslo.

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Pact[28] signalled the end of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902, and limited the size of Japan's fleet in the Pacific. There was also a Nine-Power Treaty which pledged to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, but which contained no means of enforcement.[29] The Japanese did not think that this treaty applied to their presence in Manchuria, since they already controlled the area on the basis of rights secured after the First World War.[30] However, when Japan embarked on aggressive militarism in the area barely a decade later, it shocked the world.

Since 1905 and the victory over Russia, Japan had stationed military detachments in South Manchuria and exercised full control over the railway network. The semi-governmental South Manchurian Railway Company held a firm grip on a number of Japanese economic activities – in mining, shipping, trade and industry – besides controlling the towns that grew up along the railway. Manchuria soon came to represent a vital economic interest for Japan. The rich, fertile soil yielded a large crop of soya beans, which by 1927 accounted for around half the world's supply.[31] Through the railway company, Japan virtually controlled soya bean production and profited enormously from it.

On 18 September 1931 members of the Japanese Kwantung Army staged an explosion on the railway line near Mukden, and blamed the Chinese for the incident. When a weak Japanese cabinet proved unable to curb Japanese army expansion in Manchuria, the Chinese government, rather than declare war on Japan, appealed to the United States as well as to the League of Nations to take measures to settle the dispute.[32]

The reaction in the West was characterised by confusion, caution and uncertainty. Manchuria was a remote area in the Far East, and when China brought Japanese behaviour to the League Council, doubts were raised over the accuracy of Chinese reporting. Nevertheless, on 30 September the Council adopted a resolution urging the withdrawal of Japanese troops and the resumption of normal relations. News of Japan's bombing of Chinchow, on the Chinese-owned Peking–Mukden line, prompted the Council to reconvene on 13 October, this time with US participation. On 24 October the Council overrode Japanese objections and adopted a resolution stating that Japan had to withdraw its troops before negotiations could commence.

Outside Geneva, opinion in western Europe was, for the time being, inclined to support Japan. Press statements in various European countries showed scepticism over the League resolutions, and argued against the League interfering in the affair. To many, Japan was a bastion of order and civilisation in the East, with an impressive ability to handle affairs decisively. There was considerable sympathy for Japan's

28 France, Japan, United Kingdom and United States.

29 The signatories were Belgium, China, France, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom and United States.

30 Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History 1919–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 377.

31 Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society 1931–1933* (London: Routledge, 2002), 16.

32 Most of the following is based on Christopher Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931–1933* (London: Hamilton, 1972), 132–73.

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demographic and economic position and the need to expand beyond its borders. This attitude was particularly prevalent in the United States, where scepticism over the very existence of a body like the League of Nations ran high: why should this worthless organisation, ran American headlines, risk involvement in a dispute between far-away nations and drag others into the cauldron? Japanese assurances that its aims were strictly limited and mainly defensive, went down well. In all, there seemed no need for a special inquiry to assess the situation. President Hoover summed up his views to the cabinet in October 1931, when he stressed that

> Neither our obligations in China, nor our own interest, nor our dignity require us to go to war over these questions. These acts do not imperil the freedom of the American people . . . We will not go along on war or any of the sanctions, either economic or military, for those are the roads to war.[33]

In Britain, too, there was considerable public sympathy for Japan and a dislike of any hostile action likely to lead to conflict with Japan.

British foreign policy was ambiguous. The British ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Francis Lindley, opined that until the Chinese had 'learned proper manners', it was not unreasonable for Japan to keep its troops in such an unstable region.[34] The British delegation in Geneva was more inclined to see the situation from the Chinese point of view, although the delegation head, Lord Robert Cecil, prevaricated over the question of whether Japan ought to withdraw troops. A policy of caution prevailed, and the desire to intervene was modest. After all, Japan did have certain rights in Manchuria, which meant that some of its moves were justified. The affair, it was generally felt, ought to be handled with tact and caution, in order to avoid alienating Japan or precipitating its exit from the League. Above all, it was for the Chinese and Japanese to negotiate a resolution to the crisis on their own terms.

There was, it appears, a tendency in the West to think that, given time, the crisis would pass and that, therefore, any decisive move against Japan would be counterproductive. A number of foreign policy officials viewed Japan as essentially friendly, non-threatening and reasonable, in fact almost Western in its general outlook and values. China, in contrast, was chaotic and politically unstable. This, as historian Christopher Thorne notes, accounts for the Western failure to perceive Japan as a threat or to grasp the significance of the political events unfolding. In line with this thinking, Japan's actions were unfortunate, but more in the nature of a temporary aberration which would, in the course of time, rectify itself. According to Thorne, Western observers failed to understand who really pulled the strings in Japan; that the civilian cabinet had been overruled by the military, and that the latter, supported by an increasingly bellicose public, was bent on further expansion. The fact that the real policymakers in Japan were not guided by a liberal mindset proved hard to fathom, as was the fact that Japan would not withdraw its troops on being told to: 'the error was

[33] Quoted in ibid., 162.
[34] Quoted in ibid., 143.

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not dissimilar to that of believing in 1939 that Hitler could be placated with loans and large tracts of Africa'.[35]

Thus Western reaction, whether expressed at foreign ministry level or in Geneva, was one of restraint and patience. In December 1931 the council reaffirmed its resolution of 24 October, but set no time limit for the withdrawal of troops and granted Japan the right to take military action against Chinese 'bandits', in view of the exceptional situation that existed. Western newspapers continued to voice their more or less outright sympathy for Japan, and to promote the belief that Japan's grievances against China were genuine.[36]

We cannot know whether a more forceful reaction would have changed the course of events. Most probably, the Kwantung Army would have continued undeterred anyway. What we can establish is that the wait-and-see attitude did nothing to force Japan out of Manchuria. The year 1932 saw an intensification of Japan's activities in the area, and a consolidation of its presence. On 9 March the puppet state of Manchukuo was set up, an act instigated by the Japanese military in Manchuria. The Japanese government accepted the new state as a fait accompli, and gave it its formal recognition in August the same year.[37] The League Assembly passed a resolution stating that Japan's actions were contrary to the League Covenant,[38] but no sanctions followed and the consolidation of Japan's position in Manchuria continued unabated. Instead, the League dispatched a fact-finding mission under V. A. G. R. Bulwer-Lytton to the region. The resulting 'report' was critical of both Japan and China; it pointed out that the existence of Manchukuo was the result of external machinations and had little to do with Manchurians' desire for independence.[39]

The League Assembly accepted the conclusions of the Lytton report and, although it stood back from sanctions, its open condemnation in February 1933 of Japanese action led to Japan withdrawing from the League the following month.[40]

The Manchurian crisis showed the impotence of the League of Nations, and demonstrated the fallacy that conflicts between states could be resolved through a process based on the power of law alone. The League had proved unable or unwilling to voice more than a feeble protest against Japan's occupation of Manchuria. Western observers were disturbed and shocked at Japan's actions, but were confused and indecisive in their reaction. There was reluctance in Europe to interfere in squabbles over territories in distant lands. Besides, Western powers saw Japan as more civilised than China and were reluctant to condemn its actions unreservedly. Historian Zara Steiner has pointed out that whereas the great powers advocated a cautious line, smaller member states were more vocal in their protests. They were,

[35] Ibid., 164.
[36] Eldrid Mageli, *Towards Friendship: The Relationship between Norway and Japan, 1905–2005* (Oslo: Unipub 2006), 37–40.
[37] Ian Nish, *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism: Japan, China and the League of Nations, 1931–1933* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993), 88–9.
[38] Steiner, *Lights*, 736.
[39] Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period* (London: Praeger, 2002), 87.
[40] Ibid., 89.

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however, dependent on the larger states to push the League into action, otherwise merely able to show their indignation.[41]

Norway and Manchuria

Norway was a member of the League Council from 1930 to 1933, and represented the Scandinavian states during the escalation of the Sino-Japanese conflict. When the conflict erupted in September 1931, the Scandinavian states were hardly supportive of Japan's moves. The Norwegian foreign minister Birger Braadland, of the Agrarian Party, did not at first take a confrontational stand against Japan, instead adopting a cautious approach. As European criticism of Japan's military grip on Manchuria grew over the following year, Scandinavian delegates increasingly voiced their disapproval of Japanese actions. By early 1932, with hostilities spreading towards Shanghai, it was obvious that Japan's actions could no longer be justified on the grounds of self-defence. At the same time, Japan's status as a prominent world power could hardly be ignored, and in Norway reactions to the expansion were therefore ambiguous. Norway did hold the door open for tougher protests, but it had reservations about committing itself to economic or military sanctions.[42] As Shepard Jones notes, although Braadland supported the Council's efforts 'as a friendly and impartial mediator', he studiously avoided taking any active lead against Japan in the League's discussions.[43]

Norway's low profile in the Council provoked criticism in Norwegian newspapers. Several commentators emphasised that, as a small state, Norway ought to show a firm commitment to the League principles. The left liberal *Dagbladet* criticised Norwegian policy and stated that, as a Council member, Norway had an obligation to react against Japanese aggression. The centre-right *Tidens Tegn* expressed similar sentiments. The labour daily *Arbeiderbladet* referred to an article printed in the Swedish social-democratic newspaper *Arbetet*, which criticised Norwegian policy and in particular Braadland's apparent sympathy for 'the yellow power' in the Far East.[44] Perhaps mindful of these views, Braadland shifted towards a more activist stance during spring 1932. In a speech to the League Assembly on 3 March 1932, he advocated the use of sanctions if Japan continued to defy the League's wishes and flout its principles of peaceful co-operation and negotiation.[45]

In autumn 1932, however, Norwegian diplomacy reverted once more to its earlier cautiousness. The paper and pulp company Borregaard, one of Norway's largest industrial firms, had large exports to Japan, particularly of pulp for the production of synthetic silk. Such exports had risen sharply in the early 1930s, from 10,000 tons in 1929 to 21,000 in 1931, and by 1934 Borregaard's pulp exports for synthetic silk accounted for more than 50 per cent of the company's total output. These sales,

[41] Steiner, *Lights,* 741–2.
[42] Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 191–195.
[43] Jones, *Scandinavian States*, 256.
[44] *Dagbladet*, 1 February 1932; *Tidens Tegn*, 29 February 1932; *Arbeiderbladet*, 23 February 1932. These and other articles are referred to in Hans Per Hem, 'Norge, Folkeforbundet og Manchuria-konflikten', master's thesis, University of Oslo, 1987, 66–9.
[45] Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 193; Hem, *Norge*, 75.

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which took place in co-operation with the Japanese trading house Mitsui, had been vital in helping the company to emerge from the recession.[46] Borregaard's director, Hjalmar Wessel, wrote to Braadland, warning him that the Japanese might cancel orders if Norway criticised their actions in Manchuria.[47]

Norwegian pro-Japanese sentiments

Although the Norwegian government formally condemned the Japanese actions, pro-Japanese sentiments were not uncommon in official circles. As we shall see below, Norwegian diplomats and consular representatives in Tokyo and Shanghai went to great lengths to convince their foreign ministry that Japan's actions in China were understandable. To a great extent these diplomats condoned Japan's ruthless expansion in Manchuria.

In April 1932, Braadland received a telegram from the recently appointed foreign minister of Manchukuo, Hsieh Chiehshih, expressing his wish for formal diplomatic relations between Norway and his country. Unsure of how to respond, Braadland asked the legation in Shanghai to ascertain which other countries had replied to the invitation. Nicolai Aall, chargé d'affaires *ad interim*, reported that neither Sweden, Denmark or the Netherlands had replied to Manchuria's initiative, and did not intend to do so in the immediate future.[48] Over the following two years the question of recognition became a recurrent theme in Norwegian diplomatic dispatches between Shanghai, Tokyo and Oslo.

The Chinese government attempted to persuade Norway to condemn Japan's actions. The Chinese foreign minister, Lo Wen-Kan, wrote to Aall, explaining that Japanese recognition of Manchukuo was contrary to the Nine-Power Treaty, signed in Washington in 1922, which committed Japan and the other eight signatories to respecting Chinese sovereignty, independence and administrative integrity. The Chinese government urged Oslo to give its 'most serious attention' to the actions of the Japanese government, and refrain from recognising the 'unlawful organisation born of Japanese military action'.[49] Aall responded that his government was prepared to uphold the treaty and would take 'immediate steps' to prevent unlawful action.[50]

The outward sign of sympathy did not mask the fact that Aall's primary concern lay in avoiding any damage to Norwegian interests in the East that might arise if Norway adopted an overtly anti-Japanese stand in Geneva. For him, the conflict should be solved through bilateral negotiations, and not third-party intervention. Although experts might defend Chinese historic rights in this area, in Aall's opinion the Chinese had forfeited the right of sovereignty over Manchuria:

[46] Trond Bergh and Even Lange, *Foredlet Virke: Historien om Borregaard 1889–1989* (Oslo: Ad Notam, 1989), 155.

[47] Hem, *Norge*, 78.

[48] Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), 30 April and 3 June 1932, The National Archives, Oslo (TNA), NMFA, Box 7423S-2259, H 60.

[49] Lo Wen-Kan to Aall, 25 June 1932, ibid.

[50] Aall to Lo Wen-Kan, 1 July 1932, ibid.

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In Geneva, there will most probably be no dearth of historical accounts, both from the two directly interested powers, and from others who want a say in the matter. Interpretations regarding China's sovereignty and its right to Manchuria will in all probability be conveyed with all kinds of diplomatic skills. But will any of the Western powers which have great political ambitions or interests in the East have the courage, or find it pertinent, to ask: Can any civilised power in the 20th century willingly contribute to bringing Manchuria back to the kind of chaos which characterises China today?[51]

Japan was a civilised power, China was not; China's legal right to sovereignty had therefore to give way to Japan's right to extend the beacon of civilisation. Minister Ludwig Aubert in Tokyo shared Aall's views. In numerous, lengthy reports to Oslo he addressed the issue of Norway's role in the League of Nations regarding the events in China. Aubert criticised the Lytton report as a theoretical work of limited practical value:

It is not based on real first-hand experience, it is mainly a result of office work, it does not fully take into account the numerous incidents which together have produced the present atmosphere between China and Japan . . . Only those who have lived near . . . the several provocations contributed by the Chinese during recent years, will fully understand why the Japanese finally lost their patience and launched a full-scale military occupation to end the harassments.[52]

Ludwig Aubert doubted that Japan would agree to any of the League's suggestions for a solution. He found that the League ought to 'swallow the bitter pill' and accept Japan's presence in Manchuria.[53] To give added weight to his view Aubert supplied the Norwegian foreign ministry with articles written by American, British and Russian authors printed in English-language newspapers in Japan. The tone of the articles was more or less the same.[54] They endorsed Japan's actions in Manchuria and argued in favour of non-intervention. The articles pointed out that there was an 'alarming growth' of communism in China, the government was in decay and Japan was 'profoundly disturbed' by the increasing chaos. China was a 'serious menace' to the peace and welfare of the world, which had failed to make any advance in civilisation since the sixteenth century. The Japanese presence in Manchuria had given hope of a better life to 'millions of Chinese'. Aubert suggested that all the articles should be sent to Norway's delegate in Geneva.[55]

It is clear that Aubert's views echoed those held by other foreign observers in the region. As F. P. Walters, the historian of the League of Nations, noted,

[L]arge sections among the European communities in the Far East, which, having long resented the rising nationalism of China, were glad at first to see a return to a policy of force, and ridiculed the idea that the League of Nations could usefully intervene.[56]

Aubert's US counterpart in Tokyo, Ambassador Joseph C. Grew, was a convinced supporter of the Japanese and consistently urged his government to adopt a policy of

[51] Aall to NMFA, 04 Oct 1931, TNA, NMFA, Box 7426S-2259, H60.
[52] Aubert to the NMFA, 13 Oct. 1932, ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] See for instance an article by O. M. Green, *Japan Times & Mail*, 27 Sept. 1932.
[55] Aubert to the NMFA, 13 Oct. 1932, TNA, NMFA, Box 7426S-2259, H 60.
[56] F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 469–70.

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restraint towards the Sino-Japanese conflict.[57] Grew admitted that Japan's actions in Manchuria were contrary to the spirit of the 1922 Washington agreement, but felt that a number of practical considerations had to be taken into account: the chaotic conditions in China and the need to create a 'buffer zone' against the communist threat, as well as Japan's need for raw materials for its industry and extra territory for its growing population. Aubert, like Grew, feared that the conflict would escalate if the League intervened.[58] Not even the Japanese campaign in Jehol in March 1933 could make Aubert change his mind. Indeed, the Japanese conquest of Kupeikow might, he felt, lead to fewer military confrontations between Japan and China: 'there exists here a concern that the Chinese will attempt to pull the Japanese troops along with them inside the Great Wall and thereafter invite the League to intervene'. This might mean trouble for the Japanese settled in China, as Chinese troops might take revenge on Japanese civilians.[59]

Why were Ludwig Aubert and other diplomats in Tokyo convinced of Japan's right to expand its empire by means of a military conquest? One reason could be that he and others were influenced by the effective media machine run by the Japanese. According to the historian Louise Young, Japan's vision of 'total empire' in Manchuria can be traced back to 1905, when Japan first established a sphere of influence through its control of the Manchurian railway. Later the vision was fuelled by government plans to send millions of Japanese migrants to the country, spurred on by utopian visions of economic opportunities. Manchuria was portrayed as Japan's lifeline, an area where Japan had special rights to extract raw materials, to promote development, to civilise people and to settle its surplus population. Japan produced not one imperial system, but two. One lay in Manchuria itself, fully equipped with state agencies and bodies to secure economic and social control befitting a colony. However, in Japan, as well, empire building took place, in Young's words 'a parallel set of political and social structures' which were needed to support the imperial project.[60] This second system became a national project which included people from all sectors of society. Schools, political parties and mass media, as well as other social, cultural and political institutions, engaged in shaping the popular mind so that its focus became empire, rightful colonisation and war fever: 'From the top down and from the bottom up, agents of empire sought to involve all segments of Japanese society in the Manchukuo project.'[61] Manchukuo was, Young argues, Japan's jewel in the crown.[62]

Japan withdrew from the League of Nations on 20 March 1933, and in most historical accounts, this moment is taken as marking the end of the Manchurian crisis. And yet, if Japan no longer participated in the League's deliberations, it was still very much the driving force behind events in Manchuria. Aubert informed the

[57] Joseph C. Grew, *Ten Years in Japan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1944), 70.
[58] Aubert to the NMFA, 13 Feb 1932. TNA, NMFA, Box 7424S-2259.
[59] Aubert to the NMFA, 9 March 1932, ibid.
[60] Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5.
[61] Ibid., 16.
[62] Ibid., 22–52.

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Norwegian foreign ministry that, from now on, Japan would concentrate on Asian politics, with the goal of making Japan the leading power on the Asian continent. Japan was proud of its new position as a great power, and felt 'insulted and upset' that small and insignificant states had dared to criticise it, and, furthermore, these states had contributed to the League's 'verdict' on Japanese actions in Manchuria. Although the Lytton report was a product of great-power delegations, Japan obviously blamed the smaller countries for the outcome of the Geneva negotiations.[63] Aubert did not explicitly state which small countries Japan had in mind, but Norway must have been among them. Norway's Christian Lous Lange, the only Scandinavian representative in the League Council, had pressed for the condemnation of Japan during the negotiations in autumn 1931.[64]

Norway's recognition of Manchukuo

According to Aubert, the international community ought to accept Japan's position and allow the country to cultivate its status as a great power and complete its mission in Manchuria.[65] League members, however, were not prepared to recognise the new state of Manchukuo. Lange reported from Geneva that the UK delegation believed that 'nothing should be done by His Majesty's consular officers' in Manchukuo that could be interpreted, 'expressly or by implication', as a recognition of the new government.[66]

The Norwegian government proved more forthcoming. On 1 March 1934 a large number of countries received a telegram from Hsieh Chiehshih. The telegram stated that the former Chinese emperor Pu Yi, who had held the position as regent in Manchukuo since 1932, had acceded to the throne as emperor in this new state, and that his government wanted to develop cordial relations with other countries.[67] In contrast to most recipients, who declined to answer the telegram, Norway's foreign ministry responded to Hsieh Chiehshih's request within twenty-four hours. In a telegram dated 2 March 1934, the Norwegians 'acknowledge receipt [of] your telegram announcing accession to throne of Manchoutikuo of new emperor and join your Excellency's wishes for development of good relations between two countries'.[68]

The telegram would seem a clear if implicit recognition of Manchukuo. Norway normally followed Britain closely in its international relations, but the foreign ministry's telegram appeared to deviate from this policy. This is peculiar, given Mowinckel's political orientation and experience. He had taken over as prime minister and foreign minister in 1934, headed a minority liberal government and was temperamentally disinclined to antagonise Britain in any way. Among Norwegian

[63] Aubert to the NMFA, 13 March 1933, TNA, NMFA, Box 7424S-2259.

[64] Norway was a member of the Council from 1930 to 1933. See Jones, *Scandinavian States*, 256.

[65] Aubert to the NMFA, 29 March 1933, TNA, NMFA, Box 7424S-2259.

[66] The Leg. in Geneva to the NMFA, 3 June 1933, ibid.

[67] Foreign Minister Hsieh Chiehshih to the NMFA, 1 March 1934, ibid.

[68] NMFA to Hsieh Chiehshih, 2 March 1934, ibid. 'Manchoutikuo' is a non-standard spelling of Manchukuo.

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politicians, he was an ardent believer in the need to court British support.[69] For Mowinckel, who was also a wealthy shipowner, it was vital to protect Norway's long coastline and to secure Britain's assistance in case of attack.[70]

The telegram created considerable disturbance in the diplomatic relationship between Japan and Norway, and – as well – in Norway's relationship with the League of Nations. Hersleb Birkeland, who was part of the Norwegian delegation in Geneva, warned the Norwegian foreign ministry that Norway's choice of words had created quite a stir. Only eight of the seventy-one member states had reacted positively to the puppet state's invitation and few of these were countries with which Norway would normally wished to be associated.[71] Birkeland even questioned his superiors whether a mistake had been made: 'I would remind you', he wrote home on 8 March, 'that Dr Lange was chairman of the League Assembly's appointed advisory committee which . . . has discussed the question of non-recognition of the new state.'[72]

Chinese reactions were understandably strong. The Chinese chargé d'affaires in Oslo, Niétsou Wang, expressed his surprise at Norway's action. Japan had illegally occupied Manchuria and the recent coronation of Emperor Pu Yi was a farce:

> Pu Yi and other members of his theatrical troupe are mere puppets controlled by their masters and have no independent personality . . . By this latest act in Changchun the gravity of the far eastern problem will undoubtedly be further heightened, while international rivalries and complications in the Far East will be further increased.[73]

The Norwegian government tried to clarify matters. August Esmarch, the most senior official at the foreign ministry, immediately authorised Birkeland to state, whenever necessary, that the telegram did not amount to a formal recognition of the Manchukuo regime.[74] Birkeland duly obliged, and informed the League's political department that the telegram had merely been an act of courtesy, and most probably sent by a young and inexperienced officer. It was, in short, 'a clerical error'.[75]

Christian P. Reusch reported from Tokyo that the Japanese press had pointed out that only one other country – Liberia – had been as forthcoming as Norway in its response to Pu Yi's coronation. According to a press telegram from Geneva, discussed in a Japanese newspaper, Christian Lous Lange had tried to tender his resignation from the Norwegian delegation in the League, on account of the change of policy implied in the telegram. Reusch further related that he had been approached by the Belgian ambassador, Baron Bassompierre, who was keen to have his government recognise Manchukuo, provided that Norway did the same: 'I could only answer that I was without any information in this case, but that I personally found it hard to

[69] Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 251.
[70] Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 133.
[71] Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Holy See, Liberia, Lithuania, Nepal and Turkey.
[72] Birkeland to the NMFA, 8 March 1934, TNA, NMFA, Box 7424S-2259.
[73] The Chinese Leg. in Oslo to the NMFA, 6 March 1934, ibid.
[74] Esmarch to Birkeland, 13 March 1934, ibid.
[75] Birkeland to Esmarch, 19 March 1934, ibid.

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imagine that the Norwegian government had altered its point of view in the question of recognition of Manchukuo.'[76]

Reusch and Aall and the Norwegian delegates in Geneva repeatedly denied, to other diplomats as well as to the Chinese and Japanese press, that Norway had officially recognised the new state. On 23 March 1934, the Chinese Chekiai Agency radio service in Europe claimed to have received an official denial from Norway.[77] However, this did not stop rumours to the contrary. In April, Birkeland warned Esmarch that the 'sorry affair with Norway's response to Mandsjukuo [*sic*] is, apparently, still haunting us in Geneva'.[78] At the end of May, the *Japan Advertiser* quoted Birkeland as saying that the Norwegian telegram to 'Mr Pu Yi on the occasion of his enthronement was written by error and without consultation with the political department. It was only meant as a polite acknowledgement.'[79]

The timing of the telegram is certainly peculiar. While Norway, along with the other League states, had declined to recognise the new regime two years earlier, Norway acknowledged – even if implicitly – the inauguration of the new emperor in 1934, after Japan's departure from the League and its withdrawal from the international scene, actions that effectively made it an outcast in international politics. Norway's move was hardly politically correct, even less so in 1934 than it would have been in 1932, given the work in Geneva and the conclusions of the Lytton report. Frantic attempts were made to tone down the 'mistake'.

The case finally lost its momentum. Over the next two years Norway followed other Western countries and loyally stuck to the League decision in condemning the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. Western diplomats were carefully instructed to avoid any statement likely to be interpreted as recognising the new state of Manchukuo. Nevertheless, pro-Japanese attitudes continued to prevail among politicians, diplomats and businesspeople. Erik Colban, Norway's minister in London, reported that the British foreign office was favourably inclined to Japan's expansion and that the country probably

> had done the world a favour by bringing about order in the enormous stretches of land which now is called Manchukuo. A government official told me . . . that one would do well in remembering that this land until recently was more or less desolate, inhabited by a couple of million Chinese only, and that thanks to Japan's intervention Chinese from the South had come in great numbers, so that now there were around thirty million there.[80]

In Colban's opinion, Norway should not, merely on the grounds of international law, abstain from taking part in exploiting economic possibilities in this area. Although it was self-evident that Norway could not flout the League resolution, Norwegian business interests should, nevertheless, be ready to engage in activities in Manchuria as soon as a change in League policies made this possible: 'If we were to wait until

[76] Reusch to the NMFA, ibid.
[77] Statement from Chekiai Agency Radio Service, 23 March 1934, ibid.
[78] Birkeland to Esmarch, 18 April 1934, ibid.
[79] Reusch to the NMFA, 24 May 1934, ibid.
[80] Colban to the NMFA, 13 Nov 1934, ibid.

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the Norwegian government officially can give Manchukuo its recognition, we would probably arrive on the scene after the others have taken their share.'[81]

Atrocities in Manchuria

Why did Norwegian diplomats advocate a policy that was at odds with Norway's obligations under the League? Why did 'legal principles' not carry more weight? The answer probably lies in the fact that Norwegian diplomats shared the widespread conviction that Manchuria was a near-empty land mass, ripe for exploitation by a 'civilised' state. Japan's actions were, in short, little different from the expansion of its frontiers by the United States on the North American continent in the nineteenth century. Land was available for a surplus population, and indigenous inhabitants could be tamed or subdued. Manchuria, although part of the Chinese empire, was subject to the despotic and tyrannical rule of warlords who hardly enjoyed a popular mandate from the Chinese people. Japan had already provided a functioning communications network in the form of an extensive railway system, and this had attracted Chinese settlers.[82] The reports from Aubert indicate an utterly naive belief in the munificence of the Japanese military and civilian authorities. In one report he expressed mild concern at rumours that suggested that civil–military relations between the Japanese and Manchurians were 'not good', and that the rule of General Minami, Japan's ambassador in Manchuria and supreme commander of the military forces there, had led to 'unpleasant incidents' for the civilian population. Aubert admitted, however, to not knowing whether such rumours were true, but tellingly remarked that he had recently 'read telegrams from Manchukuo's capital Hsinking, which say that General Minami has . . . [instructed] Japanese officials and soldiers in Manchukuo to show consideration and affability towards officials and civilians . . . A reminder [of this kind] is most probably to the point.[83]

True, Aubert's access to information was limited. But it remains the case that harsh rule did not begin with the infamous 'rape of Nanking' in late 1936. After 1931 stringent Japanese enforcement measures were introduced into Manchuria to maintain public order. Japan justified the presence of troops in China on the grounds that they were needed to deal with the endemic banditry, but is clear that excessive force was routinely deployed against any sign of internal opposition to Japanese rule. Moreover, information about Japanese activity was readily available to Norwegian diplomats, had they wished to read it. Edward Hunter, a reporter for the Internews Agency, reported extensively on the massacre at Fushun in November 1932, when almost 3,000 men, women and children were killed by Japanese troops, and frequently

[81] Ibid. Colban's comments come across as particularly odd, since he is otherwise known for his efforts, by way of personal diplomacy, to protect ethnic and other minorities within the League system. See Susan Pedersen, 'Review Essay: Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112 (2007). 1091–117, available at www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/112.4/pedersen.html (last visited 16 June 2009).

[82] Walters, *History of the League*, 468.

[83] Aubert to the NMFA, 23 May 1935, TNA, NMFA, Box 7424S-2259.

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exposed the brutality of Japanese occupation policies.[84] Following the Tanggu truce of 31 May 1933, the Kwantung Army embarked on the mass resettlements of ethnic minorities, in which villagers were forced at point of death to sell their land and move on.[85]

The Manchurian crisis brought Far Eastern events onto the agenda of the League of Nations. League assessments established Japan's responsibility for the conflict, and Assembly resolutions condemned Japan's occupation of Manchuria. However, the League's great-power members were not willing to use sanctions against Japan, and for some time expressed an attitude of expectation that the conflict would somehow stabilise and normalise itself in the course of time. Outside Geneva, reactions to Japan's military expansion were even milder. There was considerable fear of a chaotic and unstable China, ridden as it was by factional fighting between various nationalist groups and warlords, as well as nurturing an alarming growth of communism. Several diplomats and other foreign policy actors warned of the danger posed by the continued existence of an uncivilised China and clearly expressed their preference for an orderly power like Japan extending its influence in the region.

Norway as small-state peace promoter?

In her study of inter-war international relations, Zara Steiner notes that with very few exceptions (such as El Salvador), member states were unanimous in their non-recognition of the new regime in Manchuria.[86] On the basis of Norway's telegram to the new emperor of Manchuria, she could clearly have added Norway to the list of exceptions. It is hard to believe that a telegram sent on behalf of the foreign minister was little more than a 'clerical error'. Whoever drafted the telegram – and their identity remains a mystery – it is clear that the sentiments expressed echoed those held by Norwegian diplomats and the country's senior officials. These men, while happy to acknowledge that Japan's actions were incompatible with the Nine-Power Treaty, nevertheless saw Japan as a civilised state, and as an important commercial partner for Norway. Norway's pulp and paper interests in the region were not insignificant, and officials were clearly reluctant to harm the country's business relationships.

Thus, with respect to Manchuria, there is little empirical evidence to characterise Norway as a small-state peace activist genuinely trying to promote peace. The limited steps made in this direction were negated by the actions of the great powers. Like other European countries at the time, Norway's approach to the Sino-Japanese conflict was ambiguous, confused and hesitant. In short, Norway was, to borrow Gram-Skjoldager and Tønnesson's phrase, neither exceptionally peace-promoting nor particularly peace-loving.[87] Neither Fridtjof Nansen nor Christian Lous Lange was representative

[84] The quote from Hunter is taken from Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 113.
[85] Ibid., 114.
[86] Steiner, *Lights*, 744.
[87] Gram-Skjoldager and Tønnesson, 'Unity and Divergence', 302.

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of Norway's official policies. Lange's protest against Japanese aggression towards China received only partial support at home.

How does Norway's Manchuria performance compare with the country's behaviour in the League more generally? In the Abyssinian crisis, which became the League's next challenge, the Norwegian parliament and government firmly supported economic sanctions in response to Italy's conquest of Abyssinia, even though it might harm Norwegian interests. Part of the reason for this apparent volte-face lay in the fact that Abyssinia was closer to Europe than Manchuria, and that the crisis directly involved the interests of the European powers. The cynical Hoare–Laval agreement, which effectively condoned Italian aggression, compromised the League's sanctions system and fanned Norwegian mistrust of great-power politics. The increasingly unstable international situation prepared the ground for a renewed domestic debate over the merits of neutrality over collective security. The key issue was how best to keep Norway out of a future great-power war. Halvdan Koht, foreign minister after the Social Democratic Party came to power in 1935, saw League membership as vital for Norway's ability to promote peace, but was critical of any commitment that might draw Norway into military conflicts. As he saw it, Norway could take a non-neutral stand in conflicts between states, but adopt a position of neutrality in case war broke out.[88] This brought the debate back to the 1920s over whether Norway's definition of neutrality was compatible with League membership.[89] In 1936 the four Nordic states declared that they no longer considered themselves bound by League's collective security mechanisms.[90]

The historian Susan Pedersen has pointed out that European powers used Geneva as a place to articulate their adherence to collective security and the international legal framework, while at home their interests were expressed within a much narrower and nationally oriented frame of reference. There was thus a 'gulf between public speech and private calculation'.[91] Norway, as a small state, appears to have followed this pattern.[92] The Norwegian internationalists in Geneva, above all Lange, argued in favour of international legal obligations and commitments, while politicians back home were mainly preoccupied with considerations of national security and economic interests. While peace and disarmament were important issues in Geneva, at home they became subordinate to other concerns that were considered to be more important: reduction of military expenditure, maintenance of overseas business contacts, and securing Norway's abstention from great-power confrontations. On these issues, there was little substantial disagreement across the political spectrum. Most leading politicians saw the League as an important instrument for developing contacts and pursuing international negotiations, but found that Norway's economic

[88] Koht made a point of distinguishing between 'conflict' and 'war'.
[89] Fure, *Mellomkrigstid*, 205–14.
[90] Riste, *Norway's Foreign Relations*, 136.
[91] Pedersen, 'Back to the League', 1097.
[92] Others did too. As an interesting parallel see Michael Kennedy, '"Principle Well Seasoned with the Sauce of Realism": Seán Lester, Joseph Walshe and the Definition of the Irish Free State's Policy towards Manchuria', *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 6 (1995), 79–94.

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and security interests were best served by a policy of non-alignment. In fact, judging from the limited enthusiasm for the disarmament conference in 1932–4, Norway was possibly even less committed to the cause of international disarmament than were Sweden and Denmark.

In the 1930s, as clouds darkened the international scene, Norway's desire to protect its own independence and its reluctance to entertain commitments abroad became more pronounced. Non-alignment as an important undercurrent became stronger. Neither Manchuria nor Abyssinia drew Norway closer to the League, but rather fuelled domestic debate over whether Norway's commitments under the League could be reconciled with its own security needs, and the preservation of Norwegian independence and autonomy on the international stage. Judging from its behaviour during the Manchurian crisis, there appears to be nothing particularly 'peace promoting' about Norway's approach to international affairs, whatever the reputation of those it sent to speak on its behalf in Geneva. Legal principles proved less important than practical political and security interests. Scholars have pointed out that the real shift in Norway's foreign policy orientation came after the Second World War, with Norway's commitments in NATO and the United Nations. It was only then that the country's leadership came to recognise that Norway's fate was indivisibly linked to the broader political developments beyond its borders. In such circumstances, international commitments were both necessary and unavoidable. This shift represented a fundamental reorientation from Norwegian policy in previous decades.[93]

Throughout the twentieth century, Norway's relationship with Japan was ambiguous and took a number of twists and turns ranging from curiosity to indifference, hostility to friendliness, and fear and suspicion to admiration.[94] However, in the case of the Manchurian crisis, Norway's attitude appeared to be consistent with the general Norwegian attitude towards its security interests during the inter-war period: a desire to play safe, opt out of international peace activism, and distance itself from aggressive foreign powers. Internationalist-minded individuals did not alter this general policy. Norway was hardly a peace promoter in Manchuria.

[93] Knut Einar Eriksen and Helge Ø. Pharo, *Kald krig og internasjonalisering 1949–1996* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1997), 31.

[94] Mageli, *Towards Friendship*.

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