On November 2, 1937, diplomat Ishii Itarō, head of the Bureau of Asiatic Affairs of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, noted in exasperation in his diary, “It seems that Fascism is happening here not by means of people but through institutions.” Ishii summed up trends he witnessed in the Japanese bureaucracy, although the immediate impetus for his remark was Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro’s announcement of the decision to create the Supreme Command (Daihonei), a new agency that considerably strengthened military power over decisions regarding Japan’s actions in China. His comment also reflected his bitterness at the declining power of the Foreign Ministry to manage Japan’s affairs in China proper or to localize and negotiate a settlement to the continuing fighting, as well as his own long and debilitating struggle to influence China policy from a mid-level position and a minority opinion group in the Japanese bureaucracy. In his diary of 1937–1938, Ishii’s caustic and prescient comments about the Japanese leadership and the direction of Japanese foreign and domestic policy offer rare contemporary insights into the coming disaster of war.

This study leads up to Ishii’s predicament and his actions dur-
ing the period 1937–1938, when he was chief of the Bureau of Asiatic Affairs, but of necessity its true focus is wider, entailing a comprehensive look at the institutional history and internal dynamics of the Japanese Foreign Ministry vis-à-vis China across a much longer period, 1895–1945. Some might argue that Ishii’s story, that of a lower ranking civil servant, is minor or even irrelevant to the process of decision-making leading to war or that the historical materials specific to him cannot sustain a book-length study. Both these arguments, however, overlook the importance of Ishii’s actions and his career pattern when placed within a closer examination of Japan’s bureaucratic culture, including factionalism; Japan’s management of its rights and privileges in China, which depended on minor bureaucrats in the Foreign Ministry; and the role of mid-level bureaucrats in both implementing and influencing Japan’s China policies, particularly during the crisis periods of the Manchurian Incident and the early years of the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945. In these contexts, a more dynamic picture emerges of the interaction of metropolitan decision-making (usually by highly placed bureaucrats) with the opinions and ideas of men in the field (usually lower ranking and atypical in other ways of the Japanese bureaucratic mold).

Ishii the individual then can be grouped with other like-minded diplomatic bureaucrats with similar patterns of promotion and office-holding. Their collective diplomatic experience with and general expertise on Republican China distinguished them fundamentally from other Japanese bureaucrats: these attributes marked their educational background, patterns of appointment, and most particularly, their outlook on policy. Ishii was, in fact, only the most notable of many men who, having served or during service as one of Japan’s consuls in China, strongly advocated that Japan adopt or adhere to policies in harmony with China’s rising nationalism and national interests. This study thus aims to profile this distinct strain of “China service diplomat.”

The central role of the bureaucracy in Japanese politics under the Meiji Constitution has received extensive scholarly attention. Bernard Silberman has most definitively discussed the Meiji founders’ shaping of the bureaucracy by 1900 into “the premier in-
stitution of public interest,” subordinating especially the political parties to its greater legitimacy and meritocratic authority. Ishii’s comment points to the further transformation of the bureaucracy during the 1930s and the Pacific War period, as newer “transcendent” agencies, composed typically of civil and military bureaucrats with new loyalties cross-cutting ministry ties, gained broad powers, and the Prime Minister’s office sought hegemony over Japanese institutional arrangements. The Foreign Ministry, despite its peculiarities as a ministry devoted to foreign affairs, offers a particularly good case study of these “revisionist” bureaucratic trends in its rise and decline in influence. And focus on the fate of the China service diplomats within this change allows a sharper view of the consequences of such trends for the internal story of their ministry.

In addition, a closer look at bureaucratic politics centering on the Foreign Ministry in this period to 1938 sheds further light on Japan’s road to the Pacific War. Classically, scholars have analyzed this path with much greater attention to various levels of the international system within which Japan was enmeshed in the early half of the twentieth century. Each new analysis has brought us closer to understanding the complexities of the process leading to war, whether understood from Japan’s top-down political dynamics or from its international role. Until recently, however, studies have tended to emphasize the global level of the process of Japan’s resort to war or stressed the role of the Japanese army. However, it has long been recognized that the army alone cannot take the blame for propelling Japan into war. This book looks elsewhere within the Japanese governmental system to seek understanding of how Japan’s foreign relations deteriorated into war. In focusing on the Gaimushō (the Japanese Foreign Ministry), this analysis primarily looks “within” one ministry at internecine bureaucratic infighting and its contribution to the process by which Japan found itself irrevocably at war with China in the late 1930s.

More specifically, the overall story of the book is the failure of the Japanese Foreign Ministry to prevent all-out war between Japan and China, particularly as represented by the Nationalist regime of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek, 1887–1975). As the institu-
Introduction

...tion empowered by the Meiji fathers to oversee Japan’s relations with the strong Western nations and prevent, above all, war with them while Japan built up its state, the Gaimushō can ultimately be analyzed for its failure to meet this responsibility. To understand the ministry’s role in Japan’s relations with China, we must first go back to its beginnings and look at both its activities in China proper and its organizational handling of China affairs in Kasumigaseki, the district of Tokyo where Gaimushō headquarters are located. Then we can examine the historical processes that thwarted its operations in China affairs over the decades leading up to war.

To better analyze what happened to the Gaimushō, or rather to analyze its influence over or control of China affairs, I distinguish between “internal” aspects, which include flaws in the ministry itself and its personnel system, and “external” ones, meaning here the actions of other arms of the Japanese government. My reliance on the voices of diplomats has resulted in a study of the Gaimushō primarily from within, but pressures from outside their ministry took on equal, if not greater, significance as I reconstructed their narratives of change across the decades. Emphasis on the internal dimensions of the Foreign Ministry helps to expand our research about the path to war, because the interior view inevitably leads away from the arena of international conflict and the highest levels of decision-making and toward the political constraints of domestic Japan and the grass-roots upswell of support for imperial expansion.

Several characteristics of the Foreign Ministry distinguished it as institution. First, it was a Japanese variation on a model of diplomatic bureaucracy borrowed from the West but, like other Japanese institutions, it was considerably adapted with far-sighted improvements on the original that strengthened the diplomatic corps’ professionalism, its collegial ties, and the integrated administration of its jurisdictions at home and abroad. These put the Japanese diplomatic bureaucracy, particularly by the 1920s, far ahead of its time. While other works on the Foreign Ministry, or Japan’s foreign policy in the decades before the war, have studied high-ranking officials, this study focuses on middle ranking officials,
who left prolific writings about their jobs and the events of their era. Understanding the Japanese Foreign Ministry from this middle level particularly illuminates aspects of bureaucratic politics in the 1930s that have not received much attention before.

Second, a significant amount of the Gaimushō’s work in the interwar period was less diplomacy than imperialism, carried out in China under the conditions of informal empire.11 In the 1980s, historians revisited the nature of imperialism in China, where foreign powers stopped short of outright colonization. Rather, the Great Powers created the treaty port system, imposing “free trade” on subordinate China. In this way, huge profits accrued to the metropolitan society without the expenditures necessary for subduing and governing colonies.12 Marxist analysts in Communist China termed the political and economic domination of Chinese society through treaty privileges “semicolonial,” while others have described this as informal empire or treaty port imperialism.13 As Japan joined the ranks of the Great Powers, diplomats in its consulates took on semicolonial attributes that included managing Japanese communities, serving as judges in legal disputes, and directing consular police. The role of the Gaimushō in China affairs thus went far beyond its role in the internal affairs of other nations, while at the same time Japan’s leading consuls and consuls-general, who had relatively wide international experience and education, acutely perceived the contradictions between their diplomatic roles in the context of treaty port imperialism and in the context of “normal” diplomacy between equal states.

Third, this book focuses on the China service diplomats who first negotiated Japan’s interests in treaty port China and then played a vital role in decision-making in Kasumigaseki in the wake of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937. Among them, certain key protagonists, like Ishii Itarō, emerge, who together represent part of the institutional response of the Gaimushō to confine Japanese imperialism on the China continent within the limitations of the treaty port system. These men shared key consensus opinions shaped by both their experience in China and their bureaucratic offices and recruitment. They played significant roles in ongoing struggles for Gaimushō control of China affairs occur-
ring both in the field and at the center, although none of them rose to their ministry’s highest office.

Fourth, the China service diplomat must be understood in relation to his fellow Japanese diplomats, both the Anglo-American-oriented, liberal seniors he served in the 1920s and the Axis-oriented, “reform” diplomats he would come to battle in the 1930s. The internal factionalism of the Gaimushō and the limitations of its personnel system combined to limit Gaimushō cohesiveness in exercising its existing policy roles and jurisdictions under the best of circumstances in the 1920s. In the 1930s, however, the ministry’s influence and capability worsened when reform bureaucrats combined forces with external institutional forces working to diminish Gaimushō authority.

Until now, scholarship on the prewar Gaimushō has focused on the tradition of “Kasumigaseki” diplomacy and the prominent diplomat-statesmen who embodied it. Ian Nish most recently termed this tradition that of the “internationalists,” mostly in the Foreign Ministry, who were identified by their support for the League of Nations in the interwar period. As Uchiyama Masakuma has pointed out, often this internationalist or “orthodox Kasumigaseki” diplomacy has been used synonymously with “Japanese” diplomacy, but the former term has a specific historical context and denotes a distinct policy orientation. Uchiyama points to the origins of Kasumigaseki diplomacy in Japan’s attempt to win approval from Western powers in the early Meiji period. Thus, the term refers to a foreign policy of cooperation with the Anglo-American powers. In the quest for Western approval, this foreign policy also strove to distinguish or distance Japan from other Asian countries (datsu-A nyū-Ō shugi). More recently, historian Shimazu Naoko has also elaborated the Japanese Foreign Ministry’s pro-Western orientation in the years leading up to 1919 and concluded that, as pan-Asianist and eventual Axis proponent Nakano Seigo voiced it, “the ministry was out of touch with the reality of national opinion.” Put more strongly, Gaimushō policy emphasis on cooperation with the emerging Anglo-American world order was necessarily predicated on de-emphasizing Japan’s growing territorial stake in China. This blind eye toward China in part explains
the gap between mainstream Kasumigaseki diplomats such as Shidehara Kijûrô and diplomats with lengthy China service, such as Ishii Itarô. Despite Shidehara’s favorable stance toward renegotiation of Chinese tariffs and support for the Nationalist Nanjing government before 1928, Ishii and others bitterly blamed Shidehara for his failure to take a stand against the Japanese army’s illegal occupation of Manchuria from 1931 to 1932.

By 1931, Shidehara’s actions were also constrained by the nascent “Imperial Way,” or revisionist faction, in the Gaimushô that was quick to attack perceived weaknesses of the internationalists. The term revisionist bureaucrat is a blanket term for a variety of Japanese phrases, such as kakushin kanryô (reform bureaucrat), shin kanryô (new bureaucrat), or chô kanryô (super bureaucrat), that were current in the 1930s and described officials who self-consciously sought, often in concert with the military, change in the social order to strengthen Japan’s political and military strength. While scholarship has elaborated the phenomenon of 1930s reform bureaucrats and their impact on policy-making in other ministries, emphasis on the internationalist tradition in the Foreign Ministry has undermined understanding of the important role of reform diplomats. From before World War I, anti-Western traditions in the Foreign Ministry began to nurture men such as Matsuoka Yôsuke, well-known for “Imperial Way,” or Axis diplomacy, in the 1930s. Matsuoka’s high-ranking career in and out of the Foreign Ministry is far better known than the careers of the younger diplomats who supported his initiatives in the late 1930s. The weakness of Kasumigaseki diplomacy in the 1930s stemmed in no small part from this opposition in the Foreign Ministry’s own ranks.

Turning from the Gaimushô’s internal divisions and flaws to the external forces, this book draws on three themes. First, rather than simply labeling opposition to the Gaimushô or to Kasumigaseki diplomacy as coming from “the army,” this study sees the continued deprivation of Gaimushô jurisdiction in China affairs as stemming, by definition, from institutional adjustments made at the very top of the Japanese government, often, to be sure, in councils dominated by the army or by military sympathizers. The study looks across three decades to show a series of institutional
amendments or interventions in Gaimushô authority that were consistently protested by the latter. The following is a chronology of only the successful attempts to weaken Gaimushô authority: from 1905, the early struggles over Gaimushô jurisdiction in Manchuria; in 1915, the establishment of the Advisory Council on Foreign Relations; in 1929, the creation of the Takumushô (the Colonial Ministry); after 1932, the effective expulsion of the Gaimushô from its treaty port role in Manchuria; and, finally, in 1938, the Gaimushô’s failure to stop the creation of the Kô-Ain, or Asia Development Board.23 Even after the Kô-Ain had deprived the Gaimushô of any role in China beyond “pure diplomacy,” in 1942 the establishment of the Dai Tô-Ashô or Greater East Asia Ministry closed down the remaining skeleton Gaimushô offices and personnel in China.

In 1939, Gaimushô solidarity did overcome an attempt to further deprive it of powers that were unrelated to China when it successfully resisted the proposed creation of a Trade Ministry, the Bôekishô. In this effort, however, unlike the struggles over China-related jurisdiction, the reform bureaucrats joined other diplomats to act in concert to successfully protect Gaimushô turf. Their threatened group resignation stopped the Bôekishô initiative. As the head of the Gaimushô’s commercial bureau, Yamamoto Kumaichi, protested, “This was definitely not a factional movement, nor something like a power struggle.”24 United, the Gaimushô bureaucrats exhibited great force, causing a contemporary observer in the late 1930s, E. H. Norman, to observe:

[The bureaucracy] has scarcely brooked any interference from such lowly quarters as the Diet or even from ministers who try to reform or ignore its corporate will. For instance in very few countries would it be possible to witness a strike of the Foreign Office staff such as took place in the autumn of 1939, which compelled the Premier and the Foreign Minister to adopt a very conciliatory, almost apologetic attitude. This is a passing but significant incident illustrating the inner cohesiveness and . . . the quasi-independent position enjoyed by the bureaucracy.25
Norman, however, failed to appreciate that he was seeing a rare moment of united protest in the Gaimushō. Diplomatic bureaucrats were divided against themselves in 1930s disputes over China affairs. Reform bureaucrats then aligned with outside agencies, in particular the army, to prevail over the moderates and the China service diplomats in the Bureau of Asiatic Affairs (Tō-Akyoku). Norman’s observation concerning the solidarity of Gaimushō bureaucrats in the Trade Ministry dispute suggests that had the ministry stood together against the incursions into its China authority from external forces rather than fracturing along differing policy lines, a different story than the one told here might have evolved.

Second, this study divides the outside agencies into two categories: those impinging on Gaimushō authority in the field in day-to-day frictions and those in Tokyo, where formal orders from the cabinet would finally deprive the ministry of previously assured powers. Sometimes, as after the Manchuria Incident of 1931, the formal realignment of power in Tokyo only reaffirmed or consolidated what had already been accomplished in the field. Therefore, in this book the discussion of the role of the Japanese consul, while not ignoring the Chinese milieu in which he operated, stresses the conflicts of his office with competing Japanese agencies and players in China or in the overall management of China affairs. In pre-1931 Manchuria, these included the Kantō (Kwantung) army, the South Manchurian Railway, the Kantō Government-General, the Korean Government-General, and often the Japanese resident community. Some of these competing groups have been illuminated in other studies, particularly of the Manchurian Incident. The contours of other groups are best imagined from the scholarship illuminating analogous Western pressure groups in China. Competition in China was often directly linked to external forces brought to bear on the Gaimushō at the center, resulting in the gradual institutional dismantling of China affairs, one of the processes described in this book.

Third, this analysis of the Gaimushō’s failure to retain jurisdiction over China affairs takes into account the politicization of the China issue and, most unfortunately, the reputation of the Gai-
mushō itself. This process began as early as the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War but became irreversible in the 1920s in the heyday of party politics and during the rivalry of the Seiyūkai and Shidehara’s party, the Minseitō. At the same time that China’s lawlessness became fodder for Japanese politicians, the Japanese government was forced to respond to the increased international stature of central authority in China, embodied in Jiang Jieshi and the Nanjing government, and began to move toward full diplomatic relations. Despite or because of this, in the late 1920s there was a great increase in anti-Jiang propaganda and editorials calling for the protection of Japanese residents in China. The Seiyūkai, in particular, so ferociously attacked Jiang Jieshi that the Japanese press and public retained a permanent revulsion toward China’s only truly national interwar leader. As time progressed, the Gaimushō, identified with Shidehara and his policy of respect for Jiang Jieshi, also became discredited for perceived weaknesses in China affairs. From its position as Japan’s most highly respected ministry in the opening two decades of the twentieth century, in the 1930s its public image sank as critics called it elitist, corrupted by Western affectations, and collaborationist toward the Anglo-American “existing order.” Revisionist diplomats sought to correct just these perceived defects, while others were reduced to apologizing for their ministry’s inadequacies and promising to cooperate in planned improvements. In 1938, in response to a Diet member’s question about the loss of public confidence in the Gaimushō, Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki solemnly promised to pay greater attention to recruitment and to bring in “appropriate new men from outside the ministry.” The Gaimushō lost respect from all quarters, and its handling of China affairs received the most scathing criticism.

The organization of this book encompasses a chronological history of the Gaimushō from about 1895 to 1940. Here, however, the chapters do not create an exhaustive history. The first three are focused on delineating what might be termed the institutional, cultural, and political setting for men in the Foreign Ministry, particularly China diplomats, to give a careful analytic framework for understanding the emergence of their opinions about China. The
final two chapters look at their actions during the two crisis periods for Japan’s movement toward war in China: the Manchurian Incident and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and its aftermath. The geographical focus of the first of these two chapters is in Manchuria, while the second is in Tokyo, but neither tells us much that is new about top-level decision-making. Instead, the focus here is on these middle-level men, who resisted expansionism but, not to their own surprise, failed. Not so coincidentally, Ishii Itarō and Hayashi Kyūjirō were two men acting from these two geographical sites during the respective crisis periods. Their stories help us to better understand how bureaucratic management of Japan’s affairs in the field related to metropolitan decisions regarding such management.

To summarize this book at greater length, Chapter 1 discusses the Gaimushō’s early institutional development to reveal the autonomy it achieved during the Meiji period and its early resistance to incursions on its jurisdictions. This chapter introduces the organizational context of Kasumigaseki diplomacy and examines two developments that influenced the ministry’s future institutional climate. The first is the formation and eventual disbandment of the Provisional Advisory Council on Foreign Relations, a transcendent government board attached to the Prime Minister’s office that ran Japan’s foreign affairs from 1917 to 1922. The Gaimushō opposed this new council throughout this period, protesting it usurped Foreign Ministry powers; afterward, the institutional memory of the Advisory Council remained as a factor motivating protests by diplomatic bureaucrats against similar incursions into Gaimushō jurisdictions. In another development, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, younger members of the Gaimushō delegation, outraged at their ministry’s inadequate performance at the conference, staged a first reform movement in Paris, when they drew up long petitions of desired Gaimushō reforms in heavily attended meetings. Although this movement prefigured the fervor of revisionist diplomats of the 1930s, it never sought to ally with forces outside the ministry, nor did it challenge Japan’s participation in the Versailles system. In fact, as a related but more extremist trend, at Versailles, future revisionist bureaucrats of the 1930s, such as
Matsuoka Yōsuke and Konoe Fumimaro, together first generated the ideology of Japan’s need to break with the existing world order (genjō dahan shugi). Matsuoka refused to sign the Gaimushō petitions, probably because they did not advocate such a break. Indeed, Matsuoka submitted his resignation from the Gaimushō while in Paris. Only in 1940 would he return to the Gaimushō as foreign minister to completely “renovate” it by purging it of surviving “establishment” diplomats.

Chapter 2 explains the Gaimushō recruitment and personnel system by examining the case of the China service diplomats. The Gaimushō did not deploy its China experts in the most effective ways because of the dominance of Tokyo Imperial University (Teidai) graduates within the ministry and because of negative or mixed perceptions of diplomats with long experience in China. The chapter’s second half profiles differing China service diplomats across three decades, from 1910 to 1940, to allow further insights into the men who carried out Japan’s role in the treaty port system at the level of direct involvement in China affairs. Contemporary writings of these men as well as their numerous memoirs shed light on the developing consensus among China service diplomats that Japan must extend recognition and support to Jiang Jieshi’s government.

Chapter 3 explores the consul’s job in China under treaty port imperialism to reveal its many facets in the informal empire and to delineate the ways Japanese imperialism further extended the system previously established by Western powers. Consular duties included service as investigative lawyer, judge, and jail warden for Japanese criminal and civil cases; management of the association that ordered the Japanese community; planning and financial control of community building projects; supervision of the consular police force; negotiations with Chinese authorities; and the compilation of exhaustive trade reports. The consul’s job occasionally extended to rehabilitation of lawless Koreans and Japanese. Further extension of consular duties in Manchuria included the supervision of much greater numbers of police and the adjudication of numerous land disputes regarding the rights of Japanese to lease and farm land in the interior. By 1931, Chinese
nationalism and international consensus seemed on the verge of achieving the abolition of extraterritoriality in China, which resulted in giving Gaimushô critics even more cause to advocate the outright occupation of various areas of China. Japan’s empire was soon to be extended with the creation of Manchukuo.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Gaimushô’s losing struggle to maintain an unrestricted consular role in Manchuria against competing Japanese agencies such as the Kantô army, the Kantô and Korean Governments-General, and the South Manchurian Railway. The focus is on the experiences of Hayashi Kyûjirô, consul-general in Fengtian from 1928 to 1932. From 1928, Hayashi advocated a new unified system of Japanese administration in Manchuria to be placed under the direction of the Fengtian consul-general or a new “High Commissioner” impartial to any particular Japanese organization. From his point of view, the Manchurian Incident was the logical outcome of decades of competing Japanese jurisdictions; by 1932, the army succeeded in complete control from the new capital of Xinjing (Changchun). In succeeding years, the Gaimushô saw further inroads into its nominal role in the new administrative systems devised for Manchukuo, first in 1934 with the creation of the Manchurian Affairs Bureau and finally in 1937 when all consulates were closed after Japan’s abolition of extraterritoriality in Manchukuo.

Chapter 5 returns the focus to the center. In the 1930s, the Foreign Ministry suffered a further rapid demise in the public eye, contributing to its failure from 1937 to 1938 to maintain peaceful relations with Nationalist China and to the eventual establishment of the new China organ, the Kô-Ain. The chapter weaves together the story of the revisionist bureaucrats and their contributions to the sabotage of Gaimushô responsibilities, the struggles of China service diplomats in the Bureau of Asiatic Affairs, and the shift in the political dynamics surrounding Gaimushô internal organization and China jurisdictions. These last changes included a new environment surrounding the appointments of foreign ministers that was hostile to high-ranking Kasumigaseki diplomats, and Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro’s eventual renovations of the Gaimushô bureaucratic system. This chapter features the China
service diplomat Ishii Itarō, who served as head of the Bureau of Asiatic Affairs from 1937 to late 1938. From his perspective in the middle ranks of the ministry, the Gaimushō’s fallen prestige and inadequate leadership as well as the army’s independent initiatives resulted in the failure of the only possible route to peace, the Gaimushō’s negotiations with Jiang Jieshi. In tandem with the creation of the puppet Wang Jingwei regime in Nanjing, the Konoe cabinet authorized the Kō-Ain, the new Asia Development Board that would handle China affairs “based on the ideology of occupation.” The Kō-Ain was the precursor of the Greater East Asia Ministry of 1942 that was intended to design a new Japan-centered form of diplomatic relations within the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

*Japan’s Imperial Diplomacy* highlights the antiexpansionist efforts of key China diplomats but does not attempt to apologize for their contradictory roles as agents for Japanese imperialism. Some of them understood this contradiction and bravely called for the end of treaty port exploitation in China. My intention is not to stress their sympathies with Chinese nationalism but to clarify the institutional framework that fostered their antiexpansionist protest, if I can label it as such. The meaning of their efforts is thereby broadened and linked to the responsibility of their ministry to seek peaceful or diplomatic solutions to Japan’s conflicts with other nations. The complexities of Japan’s trend to war can be found in their day-to-day alliances across ministerial boundaries and the internal dynamics of their workplace. The reasons for the diplomats’ failure lie in the institutional weakness of their assigned functions in the bureaucracy, the peculiar fluidity of Japanese organizational changes and loyalties during this period, and the forces shaping public opinion. While there is no simple causal explanation, their experience reveals a systemic failure.