the CTS and received a commission in the Manchukuo Army. Ch'ong, in Pang's words, caught their attention, not only for his appearance in full dress uniform as a "handsome, impressive second lieutenant" but also because he was one of their seniors, having graduated from Kwangmyöng only a few years earlier. In the late 1930s, when Korean conscription was still several years away and the volunteer soldier program on the peninsula was only just being introduced, there were still many Koreans in middle schools who, as Ch'ong Naehyök noted, "had no idea that Koreans could in fact become officers, let alone that their seniors were already serving as officers." In such an environment, the return visit to his old school of an alumnus such as Ch'ong Ilgwôn, now transformed into a symbol of military authority, could have a potent impact on younger students still in the school.

Encouragement from teachers and government officials, empowerment as a Korean man, education without tuition, and emulation of seniors—all were elements that pulled Koreans into the officer corps in the late 1930s and 1940s. Another was simply personality. The military life attracted some men more than others, and for some it was even a cherished ambition. This was not initially the case with Ch'ong Naehyök, who had not really considered a military career before being praised and cheered on by his middle school instructors. But other Korean men who went into the officer corps, including both Park Chung Hee and his MMA 2 classmate Yi Hallim, had been deeply influenced from adolescence, if not before, by heroic stories and images of Napoleon and Yi Sunsin that appeared frequently in Korean-language newspapers and magazines throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Today, thanks in no small part to official government promotion during the Park Chung Hee era, Yi Sunsin is well known to all schoolchildren in South Korea as an icon of Korean military genius and patriotism, and it is difficult to appreciate the astonishment and pride young Koreans in the colonial period experienced when hearing about Yi for the first time, not least of all those who, like Yi Hallim, were living in Manchuria, where Korean-language periodicals were often less accessible. In his autobiography, Yi wrote that he first learned of the admiral by reading the popular Seoul-based Korean-language magazine Sanch'öli and that the knowledge came as "no small shock." His admiration for Yi, as well as his "infatuation" with the "romantic elements" of Napoleon's brilliant military career, played a key role in bringing him to the gates of the MMA. The military, he felt, spoke to something deep in his psyche; he was certain that becoming an officer would "give life to my true self."66

The Question of Nationalism

That a Korean young man in the 1940s could find his "true self" in the IJA or Manchurian officer corps does not rest well today with a Korean nationalist sentiment that often tends to equate being true to one's Korean self at that time with being anti-Japanese, and joining the imperial officer corps equivalent to betraying the Korean nation. There is in fact a substantial body of contemporary Korean-language work on the colonial era that is sharply critical of Koreans who worked for or with the Government-General or other Japanese imperial institutions, including Koreans who had been enrolled in the IJA or Manchukuo Army as officers, and it is important to consider this perspective in trying to unravel the motivations and feelings of those Koreans who entered the JMA and MMA. At its most sweeping, such writing condemns as pro-Japanese or anti-nationalist all Koreans who served in some official occupation at a certain level or higher—company rank and above in the officer corps, for example—regardless of what they may actually have done in that capacity.67

On the one hand it is difficult to fault such writing, especially when it concerns the military, which was, after all, the chief engine of Japanese imperialism on the Asian continent and the ultimate enforcer of imperialist goals. To serve the Japanese army or its subsidiaries was in a very real sense to serve an institution that was literally and physically suppressing Korean nationalist political aspirations. The Jindo Special Force mentioned above, for example, which was officered largely by Korean graduates of the CTS, specifically targeted Korean independence fighters in the area such as Kim Il Sung and others, often closely affiliated with the Chinese communists, as enemies to be tracked down and killed. And even though the vast majority of Korean officers in the IJA or Manchukuo Army were not deployed against other Koreans seeking to overturn Japanese colonial rule, their decision to join the officer corps seems to argue against their possessing a nationalist outlook, or at least one that had as its core the political goal of declaring and setting up a completely independent Korean nation, free of Japanese control.

But, as Yun Haedong and other scholars have suggested, colonial life was full of "gray areas," and nationalism also came in different forms and degrees.68 Like most Koreans at the time, it is probable that the young officer candidates simply accepted Japanese rule as a fait accompli, at least for the foreseeable future, and that they followed their personal ambitions as best they could given the conditions under which they lived. As Kim Tonghun (MMA 6) put it to me when I posed the question of nationalism: "Unless
you were committed to the independence movement, you just lived your life like an ordinary person." At the same time, one should not forget that for the MMA cadets, as for other Koreans, the conditions of ordinary life, whatever else they were, were of course also the conditions of a colonized people. Even though the GGK at the time was actively promoting an official wartime policy of assimilation and equality between Koreans and Japanese, ethnic prejudice and discrimination against Koreans remained a fact of everyday life in the colony, as evinced by Japanese treatment of Koreans at the Pusan ferry landing even as 1944–1945, when Chóng Naehyŏk was a cadet at the JMA. And even if Koreans joining the officer corps might not have been particularly nationalistic in a political sense, they were acutely aware of Koreans' second-place status in colonial society and certainly felt a keen sense of what might be called ethnic consciousness, or even ethnic (as opposed to political) nationalism. Indeed, as noted above, one of the attractions of the officer corps for Korean men in the late colonial period was the opportunity it offered to assert themselves as Koreans in a profession of great esteem that hitherto had been closed to them precisely because of their ethnicity.

As Chóng's story shows, an officer's uniform did indeed empower the Koreans who wore it, but it is also important to note that racial bigotry was not entirely absent even in the army, or at the academies. The MMA in fact offered a prime example of the disparity between rhetoric and reality in that regard. Like the new state it served, the Manchukuo Army and its premier training facility were officially committed to a policy of "ethnic harmony," but as in the Manchurian government administration and bureaucracy, the ideal of "harmony" did not necessarily translate into "equality," at least in the minds of many Japanese officers and cadets. Although in the army at least rank always took precedence over ethnicity in the chain of command, a Japanese attitude of condescension, sometimes blatant but more often subtle, nevertheless tended to color interethnic relations, exacerbating latent tensions and leading occasionally even to open clashes.

To be fair, the Japanese themselves, or at least the officers and cadets at the MMA, were conflicted if not actually confused on this issue. Here the extant diary of one of Park Chung Hee's MMA 2 Nikkei classmates, Hosokawa Minoru, is especially revealing. On the one hand, it catalogs countless lectures to the Nikkei from MMA officials in the corps of cadets to remember and observe the "harmony of the five races" in all their everyday relations with their Mankei counterparts. From Superintendent Nagamo on down there was in fact at the MMA a steady clarion call of "Nikkei and Mankei as One," and section commanders emphasized over and over again that although the Nikkei were Japanese citizens (kokumin), they were also citizens (kokumin) of Manchukuo and should not let pride in being Japanese turn into a "sense of superiority" (yūetsukan) toward their Mankei classmates. They should, rather, in Nagumo's words, strive for "heart-to-heart, soul-to-soul" relations in all their Mankei contacts. Following the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, such language took on an even greater urgency, with MMA corps commanders only hours after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor stressing that it was now more important than ever for Nikkei and Mankei to be "of one mind" and for the Nikkei to "abandon any feelings of superiority." Many of the Nikkei cadets, for their part, seem to have made a genuine effort to live up to the ideal of ethnic harmony. Hosokawa, for example, a dutiful cadet with a troubled conscience on this issue, frequently reminded himself that "I love my fatherland [kokoku], but I am also a citizen [kokumin] of Manchukuo" and that "I am in the Manchukuo Army." He often berated himself for succumbing to the Japanese "sense of superiority," and whenever he encountered Mankei cadets or native Chinese, as he once did on a Sunday excursion to Xining to buy souvenirs for his family, he consciously tried to keep in mind the ideal of ethnic harmony.

The problem, however, was that such exhortation and effort toward ethnic harmony existed side by side with contradictory impulses and encouragements. Even though the Nikkei cadets were formally under the rule of the Manchukuo emperor, many, such as Nishikawa Nobuyoshi (MMA 7), thought of themselves as serving primarily the Japanese emperor. And although they served together with Mankei officers in the Manchukuo Army, because they were Japanese their role was considered special. Hosokawa had written that "I am in the Manchukuo Army," but in another entry he also declared, echoing the views of his instructors, that "the Manchukuo Army is the armored train; the track is the Imperial Way; and the engine is the Nikkei." What this meant in terms of the Nikkei-Mankei relationship was that the former had a "duty to lead the Mankei like an elder brother [chókeri] and to serve as a model to other peoples."" We must remember," Hosokawa noted, that "we have come to Manchuria as messengers of the Japanese emperor to imperialize [kôka] a foreign people." The Nikkei cadets' sense of their special mission, incited by their teachers, only strengthened the very feeling of superiority they were being asked to renounce, subverting efforts at ethnic harmony and instead provoking feelings of rivalry or antagonism on both sides. MMA athletic competitions or field exercises thus often simultaneously became ethnic
competitions, with the Nikkei feeling especially disgraced if their prowess and performance did not match their self-image as models and leaders. On a joint Nikkei-Mankei summer march with heavy backpacks in the Dalian area in 1941, for example, Mitsui Katsuo (MMA 2) barely managed to avoid passing out from the intense heat. That was embarrassing enough for a cadet whose instructors were constantly telling him that he should be able to surmount all such physical challenges, but as Mitsui wrote later in a memoir, the greater mortification for him would have been for him, a Nikkei, to collapse in the presence of the Mankei.

Demonstrable evidence of Mankei abilities could often evoke a grudging Nikkei admiration and a resolve to work harder to develop their own strength and stamina to a "superior" level, even in such activities as skating, where, as Hosokawa wrote, the Mankei were very skilled, "as one might expect." But the Nikkei's sense of latent, if not always apparent, superiority also led some to act in an arrogant manner toward their non-Japanese peers, especially the Chinese, referring to them even in public not as "Mankei" but as "Man-chan," an infantilizing ethnic slur comparable in English to something like "little Chinks."

Such behavior naturally conspired to make the Mankei feel that there was a certain hollowness at the core of the vaunted ideal of ethnic harmony. And even when they were not being subjected to offensive language, Mankei sensitivities about Japanese discrimination were fueled by other factors as well. One was the MMA's mess hall policy of regularly serving white rice to the Nikkei cadets and the less desirable staple sorghum to the Mankei on the assumption that the unfamiliar sorghum would make the Nikkei sick.

Although the policy was applied only to entering Nikkei in their first six months and eventually abolished altogether during the MMA 6 class residency in 1944, it was a constant source of bitterness among the Mankei cadets, who regarded it as simply another sign of Japanese prejudice. And for many of the Chinese Mankei cadets, the memory of Japan's ruthless and humiliating invasion and occupation of Manchuria only a few years earlier also worked to bolster perceptions of Japanese arrogance and bias and ard to intensify feelings of resentment.

The Mankei gave expression to these perceptions and feelings in a variety of ways. Some simply shrugged them off and moved on with their training. Others vowed to excel in their endeavors, surpasing their Japanese counterparts and thus proving them wrong. But some took a more confrontational stance as well, using their authority of rank to challenge and discipline Nikkei underclassmen who failed to observe proper military etiquette or who for one reason or another had not performed well in a school activity. And among the Chinese cadets, there were also not a few whose more radical social consciousness and sense of nationalism led them to form links with the Chinese Communist Party. (See Chapter 6.)

The small number of Korean cadets in the MMA classes found themselves in an ambiguous and sometimes difficult position, hovering somewhere between the Mankei and Nikkei. Koreans in the first four MMA classes, including those in Park Chung Hee's MMA 2 class, were assigned to the Mankei group, placed in Mankei companies and sections, and lodged in the Mankei barracks. On the other hand, most, including Park, had taken Japanese names, spoke and wrote far better Japanese than most of their Chinese Mankei classmates, and were already relatively well acclimated to Japanese cultural life from their school years. In fact, according to Park's MMA 2 Chinese classmate Gao Qingyin, the Koreans seemed so much like the Japanese that many of the Chinese cadets, especially those who harbored strong resentments against the Japanese occupation, disliked and even feared them.

But the Koreans, who suffered from something less than full acceptance from the Mankei group, also had to face the same assumption of superiority from the Nikkei that so angered their Chinese classmates. To be sure, their relatively high level of comfort with Japanese language and culture and often outstanding performance in academy tasks insulated them to a certain extent from the worst of Japanese condescension, and the derogatory "Man-chan" was of course directed not at them but at the Chinese. And once the Koreans were formally incorporated into the Nikkei group—whether, like Park Chung Hee, through special selection after the yokka course in the earlier MMA classes, or routinely from the time of matriculation, as was the case in the later classes—the insulation was even greater. Kim Tonghun, who, along with other Koreans in the MMA 6 class, had been fully incorporated into the Nikkei group, felt little sense of difference or alienation as a Korean: "We weren't Japanese, we weren't Chinese, but something in-between. We weren't rulers, but we also weren't as oppressed as the Chinese at that time, when Japan was still in the early stages of colonizing Manchuria."

Bigotry, like beauty, however, lies to some extent in the eyes of the beholder, and even if they had never encountered the police at the Pusan ferry, as Ch'ong Naehyok had, or any overt discrimination from officers or other cadets at the MMA, many Korean cadets had reason from their own earlier life experiences to feel that Japanese did not necessarily regard them as
equals in any real sense. Hosokawa, struggling himself to overcome his Nikkei prejudices, was brought face-to-face with this reality of Korean everyday life in January 1942, when he took a train up the peninsula on return to the MMA from a winter break in Japan. Indignant at the differential treatment the police on the train were meting out to Koreans and Japanese, he lamented that "such was still the case after more than thirty years since the annexation." "I felt sad for the Korean people," he wrote, adding: "And they too of course were feeling the pressures keenly." But even for the best-intentioned Nikkei cadets, such as Hosokawa, attitudes and emotions in the racially diverse academy context were complicated. In interviews years later other Nikkei cadets from Park Chung Hee's MMA 2 class told me their feelings were very mixed, "half sympathetic toward the Koreans and Chinese, half not." And of course suspicious or less sympathetic feelings on the part of Japanese classmates and instructors could create problems, or even lead to tragedy, as occurred at Zama at the end of the war (see the Conclusion). It was not surprising, therefore, that many of the Nikkei sensed a strong ethnic nationalism from Park and other Korean classmates that was of course strengthened by such Nikkei ambivalence. "Thinking back," Kaneko Tomio (MMA 2) said, "the Koreans must have had a difficult time, must have had very complex ideas in their hearts." On occasion such difficult times and complex ideas led to bursts of Korean anger, not least of all when a Korean cadet felt a Japanese classmate was underestimating his ability or putting him down, as happened once during a live-ammunition artillery exercise at the JMA when Park Chung Hee's fellow 1961 coup conspirator Yi Chuil (MMA 1) exploded at a Japanese classmate for unfairly blaming him for a weapon misfiring. But for the most part Korean ethnic nationalism at both the MMA and JMA took the form of a competitive striving for excellence that aimed at matching or exceeding the best efforts of the Japanese cadets. Korean upperclassmen even made a point of visiting their Korean juniors soon after they entered the academy to enjoin them never to "lose out" to their Japanese classmates. Those in the MMA 1 class, who took their role as the first MMA Korean "seniors" very seriously, were especially severe with their MMA 2 juniors, including Park Chung Hee, not only encouraging them with words but also, according to Kim Muk (MMA 2), checking up on them on a regular basis and administering physical discipline if any of them failed to live up to expectations. So deeply rooted was the Korean drive to outperform the Japanese in this quintessentially Japanese world that it might well be said that far from erasing or diminishing a sense of Korean identity, the experience of academy life may actually have strengthened it for most Korean cadets.

Embracing Academy Life

But ethnic pride and competition notwithstanding, not all cadets performed at the same level or adjusted to academy life with equal ease. For some it was just a question of ability or experience. Before entering the MMA many of the non-Japanese cadets, for example, especially the Chinese, had acquired little or no familiarity with Japanese customs and practices, including kendo, which was at the core of the academy's martial arts curriculum. Some, such as Korean cadet Kim Muk (MMA 2), just could not stay on a horse and kept falling off. Personalities and attitudes were important as well. Even though all who came through the gates of the academy entered voluntarily and with their eyes fixed on an eventual commission, not all, whether Japanese or non-Japanese, were necessarily as earnest and conscientious in following the regimen as others. Although he desired the education and prestige the MMA could give him, for example, Park Chung Hee's Chinese classmate Gao Qingyin was often as indifferent as he dared to be to the rules and regulations of the school, and he was also not infrequently annoyed, like many of the less diligent cadets, at those classmates who made a point of taking everything with the utmost seriousness. There was, in fact, a well-established jargon at both the MMA and the JMA to describe such unremittingly earnest cadets and officers, but the adjective most frequently heard was majime. A common Japanese word, widely used then and now in civilian life, especially in schools, majime carries the meaning of "serious" or "serious-minded." At the academies and in the officer corps more generally in the 1940s it conjured up the image of a sharp, critical, strong, and silent man of few words and resolute behavior, a difficult-to-approach and at times even frightening "true believer" who embraced the academy and military life with a conviction and commitment that were clearly demonstrated in his speech and behavior. For cadets such as Gao, the majime cadet or officer was someone to be avoided if at all possible, as the task or activity he would supervise was certain to be carried out with the utmost strictness and attention to detail. As a classmate or senior, moreover, the majime cadet, always a favorite of the instructors, could be the bane of existence for less able or less dedicated cadets, a vexing standard against which their own attitudes and actions would be judged.
and graded. Given what has already been said, it should come as no surprise that Koreans were generally regarded as among the most major of cadets at the MMA in the 1940s, not least of all by their Chinese Mankei classmates. And if there was one Korean who for many seemed to stand out above all as an archetype of the major cadet, especially within the MMA 2 class, it was Park Chung Hee. Given his central role in both the 1961 coup and the subsequent shaping of the Korean modernization state, it is crucial to understand the full extent of Park’s devotion to the IIAS major ideal.

Park Chung Hee as Aspiring Officer

In a speech at his official retirement ceremony from the army in late August 1963, as he was preparing to run for the South Korean presidency later that year, Park Chung Hee told the assembled soldiers of the ROK Fifth Corps that “I have sought to pursue my philosophy of life solely within the military.” Indeed, his embrace of the institution was deep and genuine. Perhaps the first thing to note is Park’s long-standing desire and determination to become an officer. When Park was a child, admission to the JMA was practically still all but impossible for most Koreans, let alone for someone like Park, born in 1917 as the youngest son of a dirt-poor peasant family in Kumi, a small village about fifty miles northwest of Taegu. But he had been drawn, like Yi Hallim and other young Korean boys at the time, to images and stories of famous military figures. He had also been drawn to the sights of actual soldiers from the Choson Army on maneuvers in his hometown area, and he once told Yu Yangsu (Yu Yangsoo), another ROKA officer who would join the coup in 1961 and serve the Park government in many important capacities, that he had been captivated at the time by the Choson Army officers in their uniforms and large, high-crowned hats. “As a boy, I had a profound yearning to be a soldier,” he later wrote of those years:

On occasion the Japanese 80th Infantry Regiment based in Taegu would come into the Kumi area for field exercises, and watching them, I thought how much I would like to be a soldier. As an elementary school student, I loved the great figures in Japanese history that we learned about in our Japanese-style education. And then as a fifth-grader, I read Yi Kwangsu’s biography of Yi Sunsin and came to revere the admiral. As a sixth-grader, I read a biography of Napoleon, and he became an idol.

Park’s subsequent five years as a student at Taegu Normal School only cemented his fascination with soldiering and with Japanese military practice in particular. As noted earlier, the school, like the society, was becoming increasingly militarized from 1932, the year Park entered. And Park himself, who despite the privations of poverty had won a coveted tuition-free admission to the prestigious teacher’s college after compiling an exceptional record at his elementary school and passing the TNS entrance exam, was gradually losing interest in his academic course of study while simultaneously discovering and reveling in all the school’s military-related activities. According to his TNS classmates, his zest for martial bugling was matched by his enthusiasm for the required military drills and exercises that were associated with it, exhausting activities that many of the other students disliked. Even outside of the scheduled drill periods, he could often be found lingering on the drilling grounds, or near the armory, where the school’s rifles and machine guns and other military equipment used in training were stored. Japanese sword fighting or kendō, another required activity unpopular with many TNS students, not least of all because of the physical pain it involved, was for Park a particular passion. So Pyongguk, one of his dorm mates at the school in 1935–1936, remembered how Park, alone among all the students, would go each morning in kendō gear to practice his striking techniques with the bamboo sword (shinai) on a fence that separated TNS from the adjacent Taegu Commercial College, and how in the spring he would wield the shinai to slice off the blossoms on a cherry tree that stood on the commercial college’s side of the fence. In his final year, when each student was asked to choose a pose for the school graduation album that best reflected his personality and interests, Park elected to have a formal photograph of himself taken in full kendō regalia, posed in the sport’s classic “middle stance” (chidán no kamae): right foot slightly forward, eyes fixed straight ahead, and shinai at the ready for attack or defense.

Park’s growing enchantment with the Japanese military at TNS was greatly deepened by his personal interaction for the first time with actual Japanese officers and soldiers. Some of this contact took place during the week or so of on-site military training at the Choson Army’s 80th Infantry Regiment in Taegu that all TNS students were required to take, but the most sustained and important interface occurred during the drill sessions at