

The Development of the North Manchuria Frontier, 1900-1931

By Fuliang Patrick Shan, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Fuliang Patrick Shan, B.A., M.A.

SUPERVISOR: Dr. David P. Barrett

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Abstract

This thesis examines the history of the North Manchuria frontier from 1900 to 1931, which was a crucial period in regional development. Within thirty-one years, about four million Chinese peasants immigrated into the region. The frontier society that took shape exhibited features different from China Proper. It lacked traditional Chinese social characteristics such as the clan system. The frontier exhibited a volatile social order. However, the new society was still Chinese and the coming of millions of immigrants impressed this character further on the region.

Land ownership changed dramatically. Once the state began to sell off land, private ownership quickly developed. By the end of the 1920s, over ninety-five percent of the land was privately owned. Large-scale ownership was balanced off by a small-scale farming economy. Seventy-five percent of land was occupied by small farmers. The region developed special ties with the international market, and the great demand after World War One for soybean spurred rapid economic growth.

Indigenous peoples embraced agricultural life, though the varying ethnic groups responded to it differently. The Solon abandoned hunting for sedentary life, the Manchus turned them from soldiers to farmers, while the Mongols moved from pastoral life to settlement. The tide of Chinese immigration was the primary factor in bringing about this change, but other factors such as the change of ecological system, government policies and the adoption of a new land system played important roles.

Banditry was a persistent phenomenon of the frontier, because of historical, social and geographical factors. Banditry was an inescapable part of frontier life through the 1900-31 period. Settlers organized themselves for defense and the government launched punitive campaigns. However, banditry remained a central problem. Banditry created its own subculture in frontier life.

Russian influence was important in the early history of the frontier. The Russians occupied the region from 1900 to 1906. They built a railway, controlled navigation on major rivers, dominated international trade and held timber and mining concessions. The Russians turned the railway zone into a sub-colony where they held mastery for more than two decades. However, the dissertation points out that the Russian role should not be exaggerated. Chinese authorities never surrendered sovereignty and endeavored to reassert their authority. Within the railway zone the Chinese had to acquiesce to the status quo, but they sought to limit Russian actions in the region beyond the zone. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Russian influence in North Manchuria quickly waned.

This thesis is intended to probe and analyze the development of the North Manchuria frontier. Since few scholars have studied the region from the perspective of frontier history, the thesis represents a pioneering effort. It postulates that the quick evolution of the region from a wilderness to a granary was a special case in the history of modern China. However, the distinctiveness of the region does not separate it from the rest of China. Rather, to understand the development of the frontier is to understand more fully the history of modern China.

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The map of Northeast China is taken from the National Geographic Atlas of the World, Seventh Edition, 1999, p. 103.

Finally to my own family go my thanks for their patience in these demanding years, because as a husband and father of two I evaded many obligations in order to focus on this challenging but arduous task.

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Abbreviations

BMN	<u>Bei Man Nongye</u> (North Manchuria Agriculture), by DTJD (Ha'erbin: Zhongguo Yinshuaju, 1928)
CASS	Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo Shehui Kexueyuan)
CER	Chinese Eastern Railway (Zhongdong Tielu)
DNJY	<u>Dongbei Nongye Jindaihua Yanjiu</u> (A Study of Agricultural Modernization in the Northeast), by Yi Baozhong (Jilin: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990)
DTJD	Dongsheng Tielu Jingji Diaochaju (Chinese Eastern Railway Economic Investigation Bureau)
HKS	<u>Heilongjiang Kaifa Shi</u> (A History of the Development of Heilongjiang), edited by Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengming and Gao Xiaoyan (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1999)
HPA	Heilongjiang Provincial Archives (Heilongjiang Sheng Dang'anguan)
HPA, HS	<u>Heilongjiang Shezhi</u> (The Establishment of Local Government in Heilongjiang), published by HPA (Ha'erbin, 1985)
HPA, HTCZ	<u>Heilongjiang Tongzhi Caiji Ziliao</u> (Selected Sources in Heilongjiang Local History), published by HPA (Ha'erbin, 1985)
HPA, ZT	<u>Zhongdong Tielu</u> (The Chinese Eastern Railway), published by HPA (Ha'erbin, 1986, continuing)
HRZ	<u>Heilongjiang Renwu Zhuanlue</u> (Biographies of Heilongjiang Figures), edited by Ma Fang, (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1988, continuing)
HSD	<u>Heilongjiang Shengzhi Dashiji</u> (The History of Heilongjiang: A Chronological Record), edited by Zhang Xiangling (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1992)

- HSMZ Heilongjiang Shaoshu Minzu: 1903-1931 (Heilongjiang Ethnic Minorities: 1903-1931), published by HPA (Ha'erbin, 1985)
- HST Heilongjiang Shengshi Tansuo (Explorations of the History of Heilongjiang Province), by Sun Zhanwen (Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin Renmin Chubanshe, 1983)
- HZ Heilongjiang Zhigao (A History of Heilongjiang), by Zhang Boying (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1992)
- QDDJ Qingdai Dongbei Diqu Jingjishi (The Regional Economic History of the Northeast during the Qing Dynasty), by Kong Jingwei (Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1990)
- SEQHS Sha E Qin Hua Shi (A History of Russian Aggression in China), edited by Yu Jingrong, CASS (Jindaishi Yanjiusuo: Modern History Institute) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1990)

Introduction

The word “frontier” conjures up three distinctive images. It is often portrayed as a wilderness; it is the home of aboriginal people; and it is a land which draws new settlers to it. Within this wilderness, nature was dominant and the inhabitants depended on it for survival; as newcomers moved in, they changed the land, overwhelmed the native population, exploited the resources for production and created a new society. Such frontiers are easily found in the New World. Both the United States and Canada were historically the development of constantly changing frontiers. Many might think that the frontier was alien to modern China, since the history of that country is based in a civilization of more than four thousand years. However, there was a frontier left in modern times in North Manchuria. A wilderness remained there until the early twentieth century when immigrants began to arrive and shape a new society in just thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931.

That such a frontier remained so long was caused by a number of factors. These included the state policy of prohibiting Han settlement during the Qing dynasty, the quasi-religious practice of ancestor worship which kept the land intact, the move to benefit Manchu bannermen and the imperial monopoly on natural resources, especially much prized ginseng and valuable game animals. North Manchuria had been deliberately left as a royal wilderness.

This does not mean the land always had been wild. As a matter of fact, the North Manchuria region underwent significant advances in earlier times. The Bohai kingdom (698-926), a tributary state of the Tang Empire, reached a high level of civilization in its agricultural technology, manufacture, arts and urban life. However, the Liao conquest in 926 devastated its economy, forcing its population to relocate to the south. The Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), originally established in North Manchuria, spurred regional development. Prosperity returned. The Jin conquest of North China, the rulers' decision to relocate their people to North China and the destruction of the ready built urban infrastructure again destroyed the regional economy. Over the next several hundred years, North Manchuria never regained its former glory, though during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) temporary recovery occurred. Hence there was a hiatus between the early history of the region and the new era that opened in the twentieth century.

North Manchuria, as a geographical term, was coined around 1900, and became widely used in the first half of the twentieth century. The territory basically covers today's Heilongjiang province, a tiny portion of northern Jilin province and a small part of present northeastern Inner Mongolia. The administrative map of the region has undergone a number of changes in its provincial boundaries. In 1907, two provinces existed: Heilongjiang and Jilin. During the years of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo (1932-1945), Heilongjiang was partitioned into seven provinces. In 1946, Heilongjiang was divided into four provinces but following the establishment of the People's Republic of China it was reconfigured in 1950 as two provinces. In 1954, the two were merged, creating the province that exists to this day. Two points about the

changing boundaries should be made. The eastern part of today's Heilongjiang was the major part of Jilin from 1907 to the 1930s. And Heilongjiang once embraced a large part of today's eastern section of Inner Mongolia. Despite of the changes of domestic political maps, today's Heilongjiang, which covers historical North Manchuria, is the central part of the region that this dissertation mainly deals with.

The province's topography is varied. The land is roughly divided between the mountains and the fertile plains. The Greater Xing'an and the Lesser Xing'an mountains essentially shaped the landscape. Between the mountains lies the fertile Song-Nen plain that became the focus for frontier settlement which began in the late nineteenth century, and reached its peak in the 1920s. Two rivers, the Heilong [Amur] and the Ussuri, define the northern and eastern borders of the province. With their numerous tributaries running through the land, much of the region was accessible by navigable rivers. The rivers and their alluvial soil made the land productive during the years of settlement.

The high latitude bestowed a frigid climate over the long winter, with low low temperatures from fifteen to thirty degrees below zero in January. Summer was very hot, with sufficient sun and rain to ensure a good growing season. The four month frost free summer was crucial to agrarian settlers. The contrast between the summer and the winter was described by travelers. There were two distinctive natural landscape, one pure white in the winter with snow covering the land and the other pure green in the summer with grass blanketing the ground.

In the late nineteenth century, North Manchuria remained largely a wilderness. The famous frontier official and writer Song Xiaolian observed in 1888 that “wild grass widely grows in this bleak desolation while no trace of human habitation can be found... In the winter, snow pervades the sky with only dots of trees to be seen on the mountain slopes ... frigidness grips the land ... in the summer boundless oceans of grass grow unchecked. Many places have never seen a human being residing there. Alas! What an unfortunate land!”¹ This condition was the consequence of man-made policy. Had the Qing allowed settlers early in its rule, the land already would have been developed. The Qing, however, strictly forbade Han settlement. In 1668, two decades after their conquest of China, the Qing built a palisade of willow trees, walls and forts to check illegal immigrants. This policy reflected the Manchus’ determination to maintain their ancestral lands and their traditional banner military life, as well as preserve the region as a private royal park. During the next two centuries, North Manchuria was sparsely populated by Manchu bannermen, native ethnic groups and illegal Han squatters. The chief economic function of the region was to supply local produce to the imperial court in Beijing. The Manchu scholar Xi Qing recorded in the early nineteenth century that the region “each year contributes various local products, including white flour in June, eagles in July and fish in October. Spring festival tribute like fish and wild boar . . . arrows and fungi . . . are carried in big carts to the capital in November. Spring fish, young eagles, native flowers,

¹ Song Xiaolian, *Bei jiao ji you* [A Tour of the Northern Land], Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, p. 1, p. 29. The book was originally written in the 1890s. Song later became governor of Heilongjiang.

and plants are dispatched in December.” Other items favored by the court included ginseng, pelts, pearls and deer antlers.² This list of products testifies to the hunting, fishing and limited farming nature of the pre-twentieth century North Manchuria economy.

This pastoral retreat was to be repeatedly disturbed by Russia from the mid-seventeenth century, when Russian explorers arrived. Clashes between Russians and Manchus occurred, culminating in the battles of Yaksa in 1685 and 1686. The Qing victory and the ensuing treaty of 1689 assured peace for one hundred and seventy years, but proved unfortunate for regional development. Qing policy was reasserted and the land remained largely a wilderness. By the mid-nineteenth century, the population of the region, which is larger than either France or Germany (or Japan), was no more than one million.³

The Russian incursion again threatened the region in the nineteenth century. This happened at a time of national crisis, when China was suffering from foreign imperialist aggression and internal peasant rebellion. The weak Qing dynasty was forced to sign two treaties, Aihui (Argun) in 1858 and Beijing in 1860, which together surrendered more than one hundred million square kilometers to Russia. As a result, the Heilong [Amur]

² Xi Qing, *Heilongjiang waiji* [An Informal Record of Heilongjiang], Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1936, p. 53. Xi Qing was a member of the Manchu nobility of the Qing Dynasty. The book was published during the late Qing.

³ Zhang Xiangling, *Shishuo Heilongjiang* [A Brief History of Heilongjiang], Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin Chubanshe, 1999, p. 52.

and the Ussuri, the two former inland rivers, became the international boundary and North Manchuria henceforth directly confronted an expanding Russian empire.

Facing this new threat to the north, the Manchu rulers were forced to modify their long held policy of prohibiting settlement. Yet, to lift the ban would take more than half a century. The first experimental move was made in 1860 when a limited region around Hulan was opened in Heilongjiang. This decision initiated a bitter controversy at the Qing court. Advocates termed the new policy *Shibian* [border fortification], seeing it as a vital measure for the defense of the country and an essential part of a comprehensive program of reform. *The Shibian policy of population settlement and land cultivation would be realized under government supervision. Fortification of the border to safeguard the land from falling into Russian hands was the goal; encouragement of immigration to the frontier to build a human shield was means to realize this; preservation of territorial sovereignty over the region was the ultimate aim.*

The partial opening of the land, then, was not a voluntary action made by the Manchu rulers; rather they were compelled to adopt the policy out of expediency. Even if the coming of the settlers generated governmental revenue, the dynasty was reluctant to lift the ban. It was the Russian invasion of 1900 and the ensuing Russian occupation that forced the Qing to open the whole region to Han settlers. The implementation of this decision in 1904 was significant, for it set off a large-scale immigration, which led to the creation of a new frontier society, a disruption of the lives of the indigenous people, and the development of a thriving economy connected to world market.

A new stage now opened in the history the region and lasted until the Japanese conquest in 1931. The Chinese character of the frontier region was now definitely established. Although sinification of the Manchu bannermen began much earlier, the rapidly changing frontier milieu completed this process. The other ethnic minorities in the region were also subjected to the pressures of sinification, though they managed to preserve some of their identity. The major threat to growing Han Chinese hegemony over the region came from the Russian empire across the northern border. The Russian presence, especially in the railway zone running through Heilongjiang, made this European empire an important actor in the region prior to the 1917 Revolution.

The opening of the frontier for settlement offered a stage to many different players to assume their roles. The Chinese peasant immigrants took up the land. They were the farmers on whom the economy would rest. Bandits were the villains; the indigenous ethnic groups were bystanders and the Russians were the unwelcome guests. Their interrelationships, whether complementary or antagonistic, created a frontier society of exceptional volatility and complexity.

The aim of this dissertation is to trace the process of integration of the North Manchuria frontier region into the dominant Chinese political, cultural, social and economic framework. The dissertation concentrates on the thirty-one year span from 1900 to 1931. Events within each chapter are on the whole chronologically organized, but the chapters themselves are defined topically in order to address the major factors influencing the development of the frontier.

The first chapter investigates the immigration flow into North Manchuria, the patterns of settlement and the formation of a new frontier society. In regard to the reason why immigrants moved into the region, the chapter examines both the sending provinces, particularly Shandong, Hebei and Henan and the receiving provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin. The availability of land in North Manchuria and the state policy of Shiban certainly served as attractions to newcomers. But conditions in sending provinces were likely of greater consequence in stimulating resettlement. Lack of land, overpopulation, the ravages of banditry and civil wars, natural disasters and extreme poverty all forced the poor “coolie” to migrate. Although lack of accurate statistics does not allow us to determine the exact number of emigrants, a careful investigation shows that about four million people migrated to North Manchuria during the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931. This great migration took place by land and sea, by road, railway and ship. Established communication lines, particularly railways, played an important role in the migration; moreover, they helped shape settlement patterns in the region: the closer the communication line, the denser the settlement. However, as more people moved in, settlement spread out and eventually blanketed the plains, river valleys and mountain foothills. In analyzing settlement patterns, such factors as the design of new towns, the role of land reclamation companies, the establishment of military farms, and relief arrangements for refugees will be examined.

The settlement of four million Han Chinese in a hitherto thinly inhabited region was a dynamic, complex process. The opportunities offered by the communally oriented farming culture and the development of a flourishing commercial activity enabled new

immigrants to alter their social status in a way seldom to be seen in China Proper. This society was not a replica of the traditional Chinese society the settlers had left behind. The traditional clan system was absent in the new society. The new communities were made up of settlers with different surnames, multiple dialects and widely varying backgrounds. The absence of the clan system meant the non-existence of strong patriarchy and the ensuing complicated familial and social ties. This contributed to the emergence of a more vibrant, dynamic society, based more on the individual or the nuclear family. The new frontier society was largely illiterate, yet the uneducated young men and women on the move provided a strong base for economic growth. The new society was militant in nature, and weapons played a central part in daily life. This did not make North Manchuria a hotbed of rebellions; rather people used weapons to protect their communities from the frequent threat of banditry. Despite the above reservations, the new society was a Chinese society; given time, it would eventually take on the characteristics of Chinese society in China Proper.

The second chapter studies how the land tenure system evolved in the frontier, interprets landlord-tenant relations and seeks to explain the rise of North Manchuria from a wilderness to a granary and in particular its incorporation into the world economy. Land tenure on the frontier developed as private ownership once the state declared the territory open for settlement. The opportunity to own land attracted not only new immigrants but also speculators who bought up large tracts of land. Over the first three decades of the twentieth century the state continued to auction off wilderness land for private ownership. By 1931, more than ninety-five percent of the total arable land was in private hands.

However, despite landlordism, large estates did not dominate. There was a concentration but also small farms operated by tenant farmers. Seventy-five percent of the cultivated land was farmed by small farmers. Land changed hands frequently, and tenants might rise into the ranks of the independent farmers. The most noteworthy feature of the agrarian frontier economy was that it was not a traditional insulated economy in which farmers produced only for themselves and their locality. It was a combination of natural economy and commodity economy. Farmers produced not only that which they needed, but they also devoted much of the land to produce for the market. The Russian wanted wheat, the Japanese wanted bean cakes and the Europeans wanted soybean. Thus the North Manchuria economy soon began to develop international linkages. The Great War particularly stimulated the European demand for soybeans, and this led to rapid economic growth.

Chapter three deals with the transition to agricultural life experienced by the non-Han indigenous ethnic groups. Each group experienced signification and agricultural settlement differently due to its distinctive cultural background. The Solons were forced to abandon their traditional hunting life as they adapted to a sedentary existence. The Manchus more easily transformed themselves from warriors to full fledged farmers, as many of them already had settled on the land. The Mongols, facing reduced pastoral grasslands, had to retreat from their traditional nomadic life. The coming of millions of immigrants was obviously the leading cause of transformation. Changes in the ecological system that depleted game and wildlife, the privatization of land and official pressures to adopt settled life, all played roles. Some members of ethnic groups managed to retain

their traditional patterns of life; some turned to banditry. Rebellion was rare, but there were sporadic occurrences, such as the Mongol uprising led by Wutai in 1912 and the Tonggang rebellion of the Solon in 1922. Chinese rulers were cautious in handling ethnic affairs, as they did not want to create enemies who might defect to the Russian side. An official policy of paternalism was installed to help the ethnic groups adapt to farming and to persuade them to adopt a pan-Chinese cultural mentality. In the course of the 1900-1931 period the ethnic groups were exposed to intense sinification.

Chapter four probes the phenomenon of regional banditry. The roots and social milieu of banditry, and measures taken to counter it are examined here. Banditry in the frontier region differed from banditry in the older, settled areas of China, where the causes lay in rural overpopulation, social tension, economic distress and administrative decay. In North Manchuria the ecological ambience provided ideal spaces for bandits to maneuver, because the regional military tradition created a social cachet for outlaws and the near vacuum of political authority allowed bandits to operate. Rapid changes in social status generated disparities that tempted those lower down to resort to banditry. Furthermore, the shortage of females resulted in a bridal famine that drove young and sexually active men who had no family obligations to take the path of outlawry. Frontier bandit gangs also drew into their numbers ethnic outlaws and even Russian brigands who easily crossed the border to the Chinese side.

Bandits originally ranged over the plains and mountains. However, as more settlers poured in, they began to retreat into the mountain areas. Here they maintained their

distinctive organization. They adopted distorted forms of Confucianism and Buddhism to create a communal spiritual life. In order to gain benefit, bandits often developed special ties with the settlers and tried to influence the local community, even recruiting collaborators from the local police. Nevertheless, bandits were widely hated, and the battle against them, though it waxed and waned under different Chinese governments, never ceased. For their defense, settlers spontaneously organized village associations. However, most settlers wanted the government to provide protection. Local governments implemented a number of measures, such as mass pacification campaigns in which army and police units were used. Government officials also sought peaceful solutions, such as absorbing bandits into the police force. Constabulary districts were defined to control bandit movement and some attempt was made to redirect bandits into lawful endeavours. Regardless of what the government did, banditry resurfaced repeatedly as a central problem of frontier society. The bandits may be said to have created their own subculture.

The last chapter examines the Russian influence on the frontier region. This foreign force was so strong that many have seen North Manchuria as a Russian sphere of influence. Such an image leads to the misleading notion that the Russians were masters and the Chinese subordinates. While there is no doubt that North Manchuria was a Russian sphere of influence, it was still a Chinese frontier territory under Chinese sovereignty. Despite Russian control of the railway zone crossing Heilongjiang, and even during the Russian military occupation of the region from 1900 to 1906, the Chinese government functioned as the local administration. The traditional perception of host and guest was employed by the Chinese to classify their relationship with the Russians.

Accordingly, the latter were no more than guests and guests without an invitation. As hosts, the Chinese should accommodate them, but also keep watch on them. The sizable Russian military presence in the railway zone stimulated Chinese awareness that national sovereignty was under threat. The Chinese authorities acted to limit the Russians to the railway zone. Should they venture beyond the zone, their activities were monitored and Chinese officials often lodged protests.

The Chinese seemed to acquiesce in the status quo of Russian dominance in the railway zone. However, there never was any intent to surrender sovereignty to Russia and the Chinese government strove to retain the minimum symbols of sovereignty when Russia established municipal governments in Harbin and in a number of other cities. The creation of the railway zone was disastrous for Chinese frontiersmen, not only because land was taken away from them, but also because Russians obtained privileges, imposed their laws, established their schools, encouraged immigration of fellow nationals, and set up a Russian style administrative structure. Yet even when national sovereignty was only symbolic, China's claim to it was unremitting. Chinese governments never ceased thinking of the frontier region as part of China.

Beyond the railway zone, Russian interests were primarily economic. Russian financial influence with the ruble as its medium, penetrated the whole frontier, dominating international trade. The Russians also held special mining and timber concessions, as well as navigation rights. Yet the constant Chinese effort to reassert national authority gradually narrowed the range of Russian activities. The Chinese

authorities prevented Russians from purchasing land in the frontier region and they blocked the Russians from building new railway lines. It was due to their commitment to national sovereignty that the Chinese gradually squeezed Russian imperial power out of the region, especially after 1917. A close examination of the frontier region shows that while Russian influence was strong, China still held onto its sovereignty. The notion that Russians were dominant in the region for much of the period under consideration must be modified.

The five major issues mentioned above offer a panorama of the development of the North Manchuria frontier. It has been pieced together from a wide array of Chinese sources. Since few secondary works on the topic exist, primary sources, either published or unpublished, constitute the basis on which this dissertation has been written. These sources are mainly archival. The interpretations regarding the history of the North Manchuria frontier are primarily based on these archival documents. Many arguments advanced here are done so without any predecessors, so to speak, to fall back on. Even when secondary sources are drawn on, the material quoted invariably belong to primary sources. To retrieve these sources, the author explored the essential archives in Harbin and Beijing. Many of the documents, often a century old, left the researcher's hands stained with dust. This was a minor inconvenience. Since these documents were written in classical Chinese, without punctuation, reading at first went agonizingly slowly. Fortunately, thanks to the author's education in classical Chinese some twenty years earlier, most of the difficulties with the texts faded. The most frustrating part of the

research program was inability to gain accesses to certain archival materials, such as the Chinese Eastern Railways records, which are still not open to the public.

The tradition of compiling local history had produced many county level annals from the 1920s. This assisted the gathering of information on society at the grassroots. Taiwanese scholars have filled some gaps on Sino-Russian relations by their publication of primary sources. However, it is to be regretted that the lack of primary sources on the part of settlers, ethnic minorities and bandits forestalls any deeper exploration of their innermost psychological world. It is true that official documents contain useful information about settlers' lives, and about ethnic minorities and bandit gangs. However, the virtual absence of the first-hand accounts such as diaries and private letters presents a barrier. One reason for this is that the overwhelming majority of settlers and ethnic peoples were illiterate. To some extent this lack of first person sources can be remedied by careful reading between the lines of the official archival sources, which are indeed plentiful.

With copious but particular archival sources at hand, the dissertation represents a pioneering effort to present North Manchuria from 1900 to 1931 as a distinctive period in the history of a developing frontier, to deal with the changing faces of the land, to assess the transition of the people on the frontier, and to shed light on virgin land. The dissertation was written with the ambition to open a door for a topic that has attracted little attention, to usher a fresh look at a neglected topic and hope it would promote debate.

The dissertation uses the pinyin system in transliterating the names of Chinese persons, places and special Chinese terms. However, certain well known versions of Chinese names, such as Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kaishek, are retained in the text. Pinyin equivalents, in this case, Sun Yixian and Jiang Jieshi are used in the footnotes and bibliography. Certain pinyin renderings of place names are modified as in common practice for ease of reading; thus Harbin instead of Ha'erbin, and Qiqihar instead of Qiqiha'er.

Chapter One: Immigrants, Settlers and New Communities: The Shaping of a Frontier Society

For many millennia North Manchuria was sparsely inhabited by a variety of small ethnic groups. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that Han immigrants, in large numbers, began to pour in by land and sea. Most of them came from Shandong, Hebei and Henan. The flow of immigration was so large that it transformed North Manchuria. In the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931, approximately four million settlers arrived. New villages sprouted up across the land, dotting this northeasternmost region. The rapid making of this new frontier altered the patterns of previous settlement, sped up ethnic assimilation, fueled the local economy and, above all, fortified Chinese sovereignty as the government sought to form a human shield against foreign incursion.

The spectacular level of human migration to North Manchuria was a special phenomenon in modern China. As a penal colony for political exiles and civil criminals for centuries, the region had been known as the great northern wilderness. Since Han settlement had been prohibited by the Qing dynasty for two hundred years, the region was virtually virgin land. Politics had been a factor in keeping the land underdeveloped and under-occupied; politics at the turn of the century was also a factor in encouraging the tide of immigrants. The new stratagem was termed the border fortification policy [*shibian*]. Indeed, without the *shibian* policy of both the Qing and the Republic, the above mentioned massive population movement would not have occurred, at least not

when it did. The policy included a number of measures designed to facilitate immigration and settlement. The opening up of land which possessed abundant resources and exceptional fertility made the region a magnet strongly pulling settlers from China Proper.

North Manchuria has attracted scholarly attention. Yet with only a few exceptions scholars have not focused their attention on the topic of migration and settlement. Scholars know much about Manchuria as a battlefield of the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, but they have not considered the nature of frontier society itself. In recent years, only one book has been published on immigration into Manchuria¹. While it discusses the causes and demographics of the migration from Shandong, its range does not extend to the North Manchuria frontier that absorbed most immigrants in the 1920s. Hence, North Manchuria frontier society remains virgin land in academic study.

This chapter will be devoted to the making of the frontier in terms of the influx of population, patterns of settlement, and the distinctive features of the new society. The great northern wilderness, in short time, was settled by immigrants and organized into small communities. Since the new people were predominantly Han Chinese, frontier

¹ See Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria, Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000. This book is an excellent investigation of the migration from the perspective of the place of emigration. It includes interviews conducted in 1984 in Shandong by Professor Lary. It is, however, basically a study of Shandong rather than of Manchuria, the emigrants' destination.

society would become an extension of Chinese society, but with its own distinctive features.

I. The Migration to North Manchuria

The massive migration to Manchuria, especially to its northern region, represented a unique episode in modern China's history. The migration was not a sporadic movement but a continuous flow of humans from one region to another. It was not short term, rather it lasted for decades. It was, in some sense, a regional process, but at the same time it was a national phenomenon, with international ramifications. To study the migration, emphasis should be placed on two particular regions: North China, especially Shandong, Hebei and Henan, the provinces that sent their people out, and North Manchuria, which absorbed most of the immigrants.

The sending provinces in North China had long been the engines of Chinese history. However, around the turn of the century, they were experiencing serious social and economic transformation. Occupational dislocation, concentration of land ownership, natural disasters, population overflow and foreign penetration each left a mark. During the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931, political turmoil and civil war added new miseries.

In 1900, North China was so heavily populated that the land barely produced enough to sustain its inhabitants. The population density was around 500 per square mile, a level

which remained constant through the 1920s.² Settlement was so dense that several villages were packed into each square mile, with several hundred people per village. The pressure of population in North China traditionally had been lessened by allowing extra mouths to migrate to peripheral regions such as Manchuria or Mongolia. However, with the Qing ban on such movement, a huge population reservoir was created that threatened to burst forth at any moment in every direction.

Overpopulation reduced landholding per capita and drove up the price of land. The concentration of land in the hands of landlords made farmers little more than hired workers. Land prices steadily increased, and it was out of the question for poor farmers to buy. According to reports from the 1910s and 1920s, land prices in Shandong varied from \$490 to \$546 per mu [0.15 acres] in Chinese dollars. Meanwhile, wages paid to hired hands were but \$25 to \$37 per year.³ Ownership of land sufficient to maintain a family was inconceivable for most peasants. They were tenants or at best minuscule landholders, hence they were ready to move from their home districts if they could acquire cheap land.

The downfall of the Qing in 1911, followed by civil war, aggravated the already troubled condition of life in North China. The emergence of warlords caused damage to rural society through the imposition of surtaxes and forcible conscription of young peasants. War spread in North China along the major rail and road communication lines;

² Franklin L. Ho, Population Movement to the Three North Eastern Frontier in China, Shanghai: China Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1931; printed by Thomas Chu and Sons, Shanghai. This pamphlet was bound with other articles in one book by Cornell University Library, entitled Institute of Pacific Relations: Publications on China, 1931, Cornell University Library, 1931, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

marauding armies extracted tolls from the peasants, seized or ruined crops, ravaged the regional economy, and left the population in destitution. Warlords often forced local peasants to contribute labour and food. Military expenditures drained local revenues. For example, between 1925 and 1928, Zhang Zongchang, a notorious warlord in Shandong, diverted 88% of provincial revenues to military expenses while completely ignoring irrigation, road construction and other public works.⁴ Fragile and insecure communities were further harassed by bandits who themselves were products of political turmoil. Even though some bandits targeted the rich, their indiscriminate raids more often than not made the poor suffer. The insecurity of life pushed many to join the bandits merely to survive. The civil wars fought continually after 1911 produced more bandits in Shandong, Henan and Hebei than at any time in the previous two centuries.⁵

North China at the turn of the century was frequently afflicted by natural disasters, such as the overflowing of the Yellow River, local floods, drought and locusts. There was no predictable cycle to the disasters, but they occurred so often that the regional economy teetered on bankruptcy. In the eighty years prior to 1911, natural disasters befell almost every county in North China, with some 670,000 occurrences at the village level recorded.⁶ Shandong provides telling testimony of natural disasters. In 1927, famine struck 56 counties in the province. Sixty percent of the population or 20,860,000 people

⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵ He Nian, *Jiu Zhongguo tufei jiemì* [Bandit Secrets of Old China], Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1998, pp. 2-3.

were affected. Once again, in 1928, another famine threw 60% to 70% of population into destitution, the harvest being less than 10% of the normal amount.⁷ Some indigent peasants sold family members in order to purchase tickets to reach North Manchuria. According to a report from 1928, “The only thing they are able to sell is women and children. Boys are selling for something like \$10; girls for \$10 to \$30, while young women bring as much as \$100 or more.”⁸

Historically, Chinese peasants in North China, desperate to escape local conditions, migrated north. This movement of people had even taken place during the centuries when entry into Manchuria had been prohibited, though the number of immigrants never reached a large figure. Furthermore, those illegal immigrants settled mainly in the southern part of Manchuria. It was not until the 1860s, under the pressure of Russian penetration, that the Qing partially lifted the ban. Immigrants were allowed into specific areas, such as Hulan. However, it was not until the complete lifting of the ban at the turn of the twentieth century that the great flow of settlers into the region began.

The traditional journey to North Manchuria comprised two main routes: one was by land through Hebei and South Manchuria, the other was by the sea from Shandong to South Manchuria and then by land to North Manchuria. Upon the completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1903, immigrants increased greatly in number. To boost

⁶ Li Debin and Shi Fang, *Heilongjiang yimin gaiyao*, [An Outline History of Immigration into Heilongjiang], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1987, p. 72.

⁷ “Annual Report of the China International Famine Relief Commission in 1928”, in Franklin L. Ho, *Population Movement to the Three North Eastern Frontier in China*, pp. 25-26.

income, the Russians sought immigrant passengers. After 1903, the Beijing-Fengtian railway, joining the CER at Shenyang, carried this human flow. Commercial ships, owned either by Chinese or Japanese, transported the Shandong migrants across the Bohai Gulf. Although the Russo-Japanese War temporarily interrupted the flow for several months in 1904-05, migration continued until 1931, when the Japanese occupation of Manchuria brought it to an end.

Abundant Chinese records exist for migration between 1900 and 1931, but they are inconsistent. Although the Qing and the Republic regularly conducted a census, they did not include all immigrants, because of difficulties in counting the immigration flow. Still, trends can be perceived. The population of Heilongjiang province in 1900 was approximately 1.5 million. By 1912 it had reached 3.5 million, and in 1931 it stood at 6.2 million. Annual increases, according to one source, show the population rising 400,000 between 1911 and 1910, and 200,000 between 1912 and 1911,⁹ while another source indicates a net population increase between 1904 and 1911 of 470,000.¹⁰ From 1912 to 1917, the net increase was 561,000, an average of 100,000 per year.¹¹

Statistics for the immigration flow were first compiled in 1924. They further emphasize the extent of the unprecedented migration. From 1918 the flow accelerated, as shown by the following figures: in 1918, the number of immigrants was 129,000; 1919–

⁸ Famine Commission Bulletin, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 23, April 1928; Franklin L. Ho, *ibid.*, p. 16.

⁹ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, gen. eds., HKS, pp. 481-483.

¹⁰ Li Debin and Shi Fang, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

134,000; 1920–141,000; 1921–148,000, and 1922–154,000. During these five years 706,000 immigrants arrived, on average 141,000 per year. The tide reached its height between 1923 and 1930, when the annual average almost doubled to 270,000. Two million newcomers arrived during this seven year period.¹² As of 1930, then, almost half the population of North Manchuria was made up of immigrants who had settled there since 1918.

The first accurate survey of migration into Manchuria as a whole was conducted in 1923 by the Research Department of the South Manchuria Railway (SMR). Annual statistics published by this agency show that from 1923 to 1930 more than five million immigrants arrived. Of those, about two million came between 1923 and 1926, and approximately three million between 1927 and 1930.¹³ A detailed breakdown is given in the table below.

Table 1:1
Immigration to Manchuria

¹¹ Ibid., p. 67.

¹² Ibid., pp. 69-71.

¹³ Statistics vary. See Chen Han-seng, Notes on Migration of Nan Min [Refugees] to the Northeast, Shanghai: China Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1931, printed by Thomas Chu and Sons, Shanghai. This pamphlet was bound with other articles in one book by Cornell University Library and was entitled Institute of Pacific Relations: Publications on China, 1931, Cornell University Library, 1931. See also Shi Fang, Zhongguo renkou qianyi shi [A History of China's Population Migration], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1990, p. 412; and Franklin L. Ho, Population Movement to the Three North Eastern Frontier in China, p. 1.

Year	Volume of Immigration	Index (1923=100)
1923	342,038	100
1924	376,613	110
1925	491,949	144
1926	572,648	167
1927	1,016,723	297
1928	938,472	274
1929	1,046,291	298
1930	653,000 (first six months)	191

(Source: Franklin L. Ho, Population Movement to the Three North Eastern Frontier in China, 1931. The 1929 figure is from Shi Fang, Zhongguo renkou qianyi shi, p. 412.)

Further statistics are to be noted. According to a survey done in the 1920s, about 73% of all immigrants arrived in Manchuria by sea, sailing from Qingdao, Yantai, Longkou, Tianjin and other ports. Some 23% directly took the train to Shenyang. Over 50% of the total immigrants who traveled by boat landed in Dalian. In 1927, when more than one million arrived, this figure reached nearly 60%. During the 1920s, most immigrants came from Shandong. Tradition and convenience induced these migrants to choose the sea route, rather than the land route. Some took the train to Tianjin and then traveled to Manchuria. According to one estimate, of the migrants who passed through

Changchun to North Manchuria from 1927 to 1929, 95% were from Shandong, 4% from Hebei and only 1% from Henan and other provinces.¹⁴ It is not strange that today in North Manchuria most aged residents still claim Shandong as their home province.¹⁵

The greater proportion of immigrants chose to settle in North Manchuria. By the late 1910s, South Manchuria was quite saturated in terms of demographic capacity. In contrast, North Manchuria had vast areas available for cultivation. One statistic shows that among the 630,000 immigrants arriving in Manchuria from January to July 1927, 64% went to North Manchuria, while 36% remained in the southern region.¹⁶ Another estimate in 1927 indicates that “no less than 800,000 would enter North Manchuria during the immigration year,” a figure which represented over 75% of the total.¹⁷ The population movement was so intense that precise statistics are hard to attain. It is clear, though, that in the 1910s and especially during the high tide of immigration in the 1920s the majority of immigrants made North Manchuria their new home.

To facilitate migration, the Chinese government built several railways to compete with the Japanese and the Russians. These new trunk lines included the Siping-Baicheng line, the Baicheng-Angangxi line, the Angangxi-Keshan line and the Hulan-Hailun line.

¹⁴ Chen Han-seng, Notes on Migration of Nan Min [Refugees] to the Northeast, p. 6

¹⁵ Cao Baomin, Shenmi de Guandong qisu [The Mysterious Customs of the Northeast], Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 1994, p. 1.

¹⁶ Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁷ C. Walter Young, “Chinese Labor Migration to Manchuria”, Chinese Economic Journal, Vol. 1, No. 7, July 1927, p. 619; Zhu Xie, “Manzhou yimin de lishi he xianzhuang” [Past and Present History of Immigration into Manchuria], in Dongfang Zazhi: Oriental Miscellany, vol. 25, 1928, p. 17; Shi Fang, Zhongguo renkou qianyi shi, p. 412.

Chinese immigrants to North Manchuria need not travel the SMR or CER. Some of them took the train from Tianjin to Shenyang and then walked on foot or took carts to Siping before reaching North Manchuria via Baicheng and Angangxi. Hence, Japanese statistics certainly understate Chinese immigration, since many migrants did not travel by the SMR.

Who were these immigrants? What were their occupations and social status in their home provinces? A social anatomy reveals that most were landless peasants who fitted the Western term “coolie.” Driven by hunger, natural disasters and landlessness, they yearned for a stable life with land to cultivate in order to feed their families. Hence, it was food rather than gold that compelled them to migrate. Indeed, “North Manchuria is the Cannon [Guanyin] of hope which allows the bulk of migrant farmers to its spacious and vacant areas.”¹⁸ They would settle wherever land was available. From a macro-analysis, the migration was but a relocation of peasantry. After reaching the new land, most peasants continued their traditional profession “to mend the surface of the earth.”

Among the earliest immigrants were some seasonal labourers who went to North Manchuria for the spring and summer and returned home in the winter. Yet once they accumulated a certain amount of capital, many seasonal labourers became settlers through purchase or rental of land. Some returned home only to bring back their family. It is true that many seasonal laborers went home and never returned to Manchuria, but the

¹⁸ Tsao Lien-En, Chinese Migration to the Three Eastern Provinces, Shanghai: The Bureau of Industrial and Commercial Information, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor, National Government of the Republic of China, Series No.15, 1929, p. 62. Guanyin is the Buddhist goddess of mercy.

lucrative gains from their experience often encouraged neighbors and relatives to emigrate.

There was also a small number of landlords among the migrants. These landowners had been harassed by bandits or had suffered other misfortunes in their home provinces. They sold their land and brought their cash to North Manchuria, where they set themselves up again as landholders.¹⁹ Landlords of this type were a magnet attracting former tenants in a chain reaction of migration. It was not uncommon for immigrant landlords to increase their wealth in the new land. Many members of the local elite in North Manchuria claimed landlord origins in North China, especially the province of Shandong.

The overwhelming majority of the immigrants were illiterate. One witness recorded in 1901 that immigrants from Shandong and Zhili [Hebei] were “exceedingly poor and illiterate” and that “because they were scattered over a very large area, educational facilities were not yet well organized.”²⁰ After the establishment of the Republic in 1912, new schools were set up in North Manchuria and these attracted a new kind of immigrant—educators—though in small numbers. For example, Xue Zenfu, a Hebei native who earned a college diploma in his home province, emigrated to North Manchuria in 1918 and settled in Yilan County. A teacher as well as an administrator,

¹⁹ Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁰ Alexander Hosie, Manchuria: Its People, Resources and Recent History, London: Methune & Co., 1901, p. 159.

Xue devoted his life to local education.²¹ A number of literati came as well. They composed poems and wrote books. Poetess Cao Fengzhao, who was to make a name for herself in North Manchuria, came to Heilongjiang around 1900, and settled in Baiquan county, where she died in 1916.²²

Within the migration, traffic in women occurred, a consequence of endemic peasant poverty. Since the sale of females was lucrative, there were smugglers who specialized in it. Many cases testify to this. For example, Zhang Guangying, who was born in 1907 in Shandong, was sold by her parents in 1922 and then was resold in Bei'an in North Heilongjiang for marriage to her purchaser. Zhang, known as "Sister Shang," after her husband's surname, later became a well-known anti-Japanese agitator during the Japanese occupation. It was through her activities that her mysterious past eventually was revealed.²³ Sale and resale of women to North Manchuria was not sporadic; rather, it was a common practice through which many women were brought to the area.

Some immigrants arrived in North Manchuria because they shared the same provincial origins as government administrators. Zhou Shumo, a native of Hubei and a holder of the jinshi degree, was governor of Heilongjiang from 1907 to 1911. During his tenure, he implemented a series of policies to bring in immigrants. Zhou assisted his provincial countrymen in settling especially in the Nehe region. A large number of Hubei

²¹ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 164-165.

²² Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 5, 1994, p. 51.

²³ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 2, 1990, pp. 114-115.

natives were still to be distinguished in Nehe in the early 1930s, the result of Zhou's earlier endeavours.²⁴ Since Chinese administrative practice required that officials serve in provinces other than the one in which came from, governors and county magistrates in North Manchuria were mostly southerners. Their presence furthered the migration of people from their home provinces to the frontier.

Provincial governments in the settlers' places of origin sometimes assisted migration. In the 1920s emigration from Henan was particularly well organized by the provincial administration. Migrants were also helped by a variety of organizations en route. The eminent scholar Chen Han-sheng (previously spelled Chen Han-sen) studied the emigration from Henan in the winter 1929-30 and personally visited North Manchuria. During the winter, according to Chen, 22,136 people from Henan settled in Heilongjiang and northern Jilin. It took fifteen days to travel by train from Henan to North Manchuria through Hebei and Liaoning. Since famine was affecting Henan that year, the Henan provincial government gathered refugees at railway stations and transported them to North Manchuria. The Famine Relief Commission of Henan set up offices in Henan and Beijing and played a leading role in the emigration. Other societies, such as the World Red Swastika Society, Putsi Buddhist Society, International Red Cross, Heilongjiang City Charity Society and several missionary groups, all rendered help. The fortune which befell Henan migrants seemed a luxury to immigrants from other provinces. Chen observed that Shandong migrants had to fully pay their own way. In

²⁴ Wu Shiyuan, "Ji Hei yimin wenti zhi yanjiu" [A Study on Immigration to Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces], in Manchuria Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan, March 1930, pp. 31-32.

contrast, Henan migrants were assembled from all parts of the province and were furnished with provisions, free transportation and necessary protection on the way. Through prior arrangement, they were subsequently distributed to different counties in Heilongjiang and northern Jilin.²⁵

In contrast, the Shandong government offered insignificant assistance to migrants. However, fraternal societies were spontaneously organized by Shandong people to lend a hand. The fact that most Shandong immigrants could not get government help was due to the huge volume of emigration. It was the earlier Shandong immigrants who were successful in business who now set up philanthropic associations. For example, the Charity Society of Shandong assisted 2,000 people (360 families) to Dongxing, Heilongjiang province, in May 1929.²⁶ The Shandong Provincial Guild of Dalian, also known as the Shandong Club, directly raised funds from Shandong settlers already in the Northeast to assist new immigrants from the province. In April 1926, a sum of \$70,000 was raised for this purpose, “though it was said that half already had gone for relief.”²⁷ Furthermore, the Guild encouraged Dalian residents, most of whom came from Shandong, to offer food, clothes, money or other items to help the penurious emigrants to North Manchuria. Most importantly, as C. Walter Young noted during his visit to the

²⁵ Chen Han-seng, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17, pp. 21-22. See also Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 598, for the table of Henan refugees. According to Zhang, some 24,968 Henan people arrived in Heilongjiang in August 1929. The actual figure was probably much larger than the official one.

²⁶ Chen Han-seng, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁷ C. Walter Young, “Chinese Labor Migration to Manchuria,” *Chinese Economic Journal*, Vol.1, No.7, July 1927, p. 628.

city, the Shandong Club successfully lobbied the South Manchuria Railway Company to “reduce railway fares for women from Dalian to points north.”²⁸

Despite help provided, most immigrants endured great hardship en route to North Manchuria. Upon arrival in Dalian, some emigrants chose to walk on foot to the north, which could take months. “Along the way, they often eat raw sorghum and corn, begging and suffering while trekking to North Manchuria.” Some had to sell family members in order to obtain food and money before reaching their destination.²⁹ Those who took the train would reach North Manchuria in a few days if the trip went smoothly. Yet often they encountered problems in transferring from one station to another; some were stuck in railway stations for days, especially between Beijing and Shenyang, since warlord conflict frequently interrupted transportation. Emigrants stranded in railway stations were short of food and often suffering from disease; their vulnerability led to many deaths.³⁰ Sometimes a family was accidentally separated, never to be reunited.³¹ Indeed, the way to North Manchuria was a “vale of tears.”

The owners of railways and shipping companies prospered greatly from the human tide to North Manchuria. Both the Japanese SMR and the Russian CER gained great

²⁸ Ibid., p. 628.

²⁹ Shi Fang, *Zhongguo renkou qianyi shi*, p. 416. See also Wang Muning, *Dongsansheng zhi shikuang* (The True Situation in the Three Northeastern Provinces), Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1929.

³⁰ Chen Han-seng, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

³¹ Ji Fenghui’s family story was a typical example. His forefathers -- three brothers -- moved to North Manchuria from Shandong, one brother being lost on the way. See Ji Fenghui, *Ha’erbin xungen*, [Seeking Roots in Harbin], Ha’erbin: Harbin Chubanshe, 1996, p. 337.

profit from carrying Chinese immigrants. Chinese-owned railways, which paralleled the Japanese and Russian lines, reduced fares in order to tap the immense population flow. In 1925, fares on Beijing-Shenyang and the Beijing-Suiyang lines were lowered by 30% and free transportation provided for children under twelve. Other Chinese rail lines later followed suit.³² According to Franklin Ho, major Chinese lines agreed in 1928 to transport Chinese immigrants through to Heilongjiang at a reduced rate equivalent to 30% of the third class fare for men and 15% of the third class fare for women. Both the SMR and the CER also offered reduced fares, varying from a 30% to 50% reduction of ordinary rates.³³ Since the majority of Shandong emigrants mainly took the sea route, the four major steamer companies, three Japanese and one Chinese, competed to carry this vast human cargo across the Bohai Gulf. There were also a number of small steamer companies, both Japanese and Chinese, but they played a much lesser role.³⁴ Without the existence of railways and steamships, it would have been impossible for so many millions to make the long arduous journey to North Manchuria.

While the overwhelming majority of immigrants were natives of North China, a small number came from South Manchuria. North Manchuria held appeal not only those living in China Proper but also for some residents of Liaoning and southern Jilin, who envisioned ready wealth in the black soil of the virgin land to the north. Though

³² Nongshang Gongbao [Public Bulletin of Agriculture and Commerce], April 1925, vol. 129; See also Dongfang Zazhi (Oriental Miscellany), vol. 25, no. 12, p. 20; and Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 54.

³³ Franklin L. Ho, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

insufficient information makes it hard to compare these separate streams of migrants, recently published data indicate that quite a few immigrants from Liaoning and southern Jilin achieved prosperity in the new land. Some went to the frontier as independent farmers, some became landlords and some acquired wealth through land speculation. Since the Chinese who lived in South Manchuria were much better off than those who were migrating from Shandong and Henan, opportunities to move into the landlord-business elite were not beyond them.³⁵

The common perception that immigrants entered North Manchuria only from the south must be modified by the fact that many Chinese long settled in territories recently annexed by Russia were forced after 1900 to relocate to the Chinese side of the border. In the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion, these people moved to Chinese territory under threat of force. According to one archival source, Chinese in the trans-Amur and trans-Ussuri regions “suffered from Russian oppression . . . and were eager to return.”³⁶ The flow of Chinese to North Manchuria continued up to the Russian Civil War. Subsequently the new Soviet state accorded those Chinese remaining within its eastern

³⁴ The big four were Dairen Kisen Kaisha, Tanaka Trading Company, Awakyodo Shipping Company and the Cheng Chi Company, only the last of which was Chinese. See Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 6; and C. Walter Young, “Chinese Labor Migration to Manchuria,” p. 622.

³⁵ Ma Fang, *HRZ*, vol. 1, 1988, p. 126, p. 152, and p. 168; vol. 2, 1990, p. 34 and p. 47; vol. 3, 1990, p. 109; vol. 5, 1994, p. 92 and p. 139; vol. 6, 1996, p. 242.

³⁶ “Jilin jiangjun Ming’an wei weiban Sanchakou, Fengmishan dengchu fanghuang weiyuan Chunling suobing zhaoken qingxing ji shudikaizheng geshi chahe chizunzi” [Order of Jilin General Ming’an to Cultivation Councilor Chunling concerning Cultivating the Border Land near Sanchakou and Fengmishan], July 1881, in *HPA, HS*, 1985, p. 716.

territory more favorable treatment than had the czarist authorities, thus bringing the reverse migration to an end.

There were also some Shandong migrants who entered North Manchuria through the Russian port of Vladivostok [Haishenwei]. From here they crossed into Chinese territory by land. Chinese immigrants thus entered North Manchuria from multiple points of entry, not solely from the south. Those immigrating via Russia, though not numerous and soon dispersed into local communities in North Manchuria, left their mark in history. Unlike the refugees from North China, these people often had made some money working in Vladivostok, and this enabled them to purchase land and even set up their own businesses.³⁷

During the first twenty years of the Republican period, from 1912 to 1931, the great majority of immigrants to Manchuria proceeded to the northern frontier region: “64% of the settlers went to North Manchuria and only 36% settled in the south.”³⁸ In the late 1920s, the figure rose to more than two-thirds.³⁹ Whatever incongruities there may be in the detailed statistics of the migration, it is clear that the bulk of the immigrants made North Manchuria their home.

³⁷ The famous Chinese entrepreneur and landowner Zhang Tingge immigrated to North Manchuria this way. Zhang was born in a poor family in Shandong and went to Vladivostok after the first Sino-Japanese war, eventually moving to Harbin in 1915. See Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 4, 1992, pp. 47-49.

³⁸ Shi Fang, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

II. The Patterns of Settlement

A macro-analysis of the settlement pattern first draws attention to the major transportation lines. The closer the railway, the more dense the settlement pattern. In North Manchuria the major railway lines were the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), co-owned by Russia and China but managed by the Russians, and several Chinese-built lines. The CER consisted of two lines: the longer one went through North Manchuria from Manzhouli in the west to Vladivostok in the east, the shorter ran south from Harbin to Changchun. The T-shape made Harbin the pivot. The Chinese-built lines included the Siping-Taonan, Taonan-Angangxi, Angangxi-Keshan and Hulan-Hailun lines. Though the Russo-Japanese war resulted in Russian surrender of the line south of Changchun to Japan, the northern T-shaped network remained under Russian control.

Because of convenience of transportation and easy access to markets, immigrants concentrated themselves along the CER. As time passed, cities emerged. Harbin, a fishing village in the nineteenth century, rapidly developed into a large city.⁴⁰ Although urban industries and businesses absorbed some immigrants as laborers, the majority went to the rural areas to work as farmers. Immigrants tended to congregate in the southern part of North Manchuria since the climate was milder than in the northernmost region. A

³⁹ C. Walter Young, "Settlement Zones in Manchuria," in Tsao Lien-En, Chinese Migration to the Three Eastern Provinces, p. 72.

⁴⁰ The population of Harbin increased rapidly. A recent publication gives the following figures: 1903—44,756; 1911—46,258; 1912—68,549; 1916—89,751; 1918—157,379; 1927—342,772. One third of Harbin residents were Russians. Chinese immigrants made up the bulk the population. See Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Ha'erbin shilue, [An Outline of Harbin History], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, p. 118.

Chinese Eastern Railway study of 1930 shows the following settlement pattern. In the southern CER region (Changchun to Harbin) the population density was 210.6 per square mile, in the Harbin-centred area it was 132.8, and in the eastern CER region it stood at 31.5. In the outlying areas the figures were: Boduna [Fuyu], 54.4; Anda, to the west of Harbin on the CER, 57.0; Qiqiha'er 5.9; Lower Sungari 31.7; and Barga only 0.67.⁴¹ The figures indicate the important role the railways played in settlement. The northern regions far from the railway were sparsely inhabited.

The CER statistics neglect Chinese railways. To compete with the Russians, the Chinese built several lines to parallel the CER. Along these lines, immigrants established new communities. Some lines, especially the Hulan-Hailun railway, were specially designed to boost the local economy by bringing in new settlers. The population density along the line in 1929 reached a level of 101 persons per square mile, denser than some of the CER-centred regions.⁴² Major waterways, such as the Nen River, the Heilong [Amur] River and the Ussuri River, also acted as conduits and areas of settlement. Note should also be made of two sections of the navigable Sungari [Songhua]: one from Boduna [Fuyu] to Harbin along the Upper Sungari and the other from Harbin to the Heilong [Amur] River along the Lower Sungari. During the summer, the navigable rivers were as important as the rail in delivering immigrants to their destinations. Both

⁴¹ Chinese Eastern Railroad Printing House, North Manchuria and the Chinese Eastern Railway, Harbin, China, 1924; reprinted as a book in A Garland Series: China during the Interregnum, 1911-1949 The Economy and Society, edited by Ramon H. Myers, Hoover Institution, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London, 1982, p. 22.

⁴² Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

waterways and railway lines thus served to define the location and shape of the new communities. The type of habitation pattern which ensued was one of linear settlement. This pattern was also to be found in territory contiguous to the land frontier in northeastern Manchuria, where the Chinese government encouraged settlement parallel to the border for defense purposes.⁴³

As the areas along the transportation lines became crowded, new immigrants moved farther away to seek arable land. Nevertheless, the prevailing pattern of linear settlement remained valid for the period up to the Japanese conquest in 1931. It should not be assumed, however, that habitation was sparse away from the lines. Settlement in fact spread throughout North Manchuria, even into the eastern wilderness of the Three River Plains, though the number of migrants to such regions was not large.

The official plan for opening up the frontier largely determined the placement of settlers, by prearranging the location of villages and the shape of local communities. The Qing dynasty at the turn of the century adopted the ancient method of the nine square system to allocate land. This system was devised in ancient times as an idealized political and economic form of land division whereby one large square was divided equally into nine small ones. The shape of the nine squares is identical to the Chinese character “jing,” meaning a well, hence the system is also known as the well-field system [jingtianzhi]. In ancient society, the system gave power to the landowner, as he lived in

⁴³ There is a stretch of land-based boundary between China and Russia in Dongning, Muling and Mishan counties in east Manchuria. To fortify the border, the Chinese government encouraged immigration and settlement in the area. See HPA, HS, pp. 719-735.

the central square while controlling the serfs who worked the fields of the eight smaller squares. The system is supposed to have lasted several hundred years before it was abolished because it impeded agricultural production and crippled laborers' initiative. Ironically, two thousand years later, the system was realized, at least in outline, not in China Proper, but in a frontier region. But the difference between the reincarnation and the model is readily apparent. North Manchuria was a land of free farmers who owned or rented land: serfdom did not exist.

The adoption of the well-field system played a vital role in the early settlement of North Manchuria. According to the policy of the Qing, one well [jing] of about six square li [one li equals half a kilometer] was divided into nine equal districts [qu]; each district was further divided into four squares [fang], each square containing forty-five sang [450 mu, i.e., 67 acres] of land. Overall, one well consisted of 36 small squares [fang]. The four central squares were for construction of a village and the remaining 32 squares were to be held by landlords and distributed to farmers.⁴⁴ The policy was continued by the Republic. A government document of 1914 clearly reaffirms the above demarcation of land according to the well-field principle.⁴⁵ The central squares were still designated for the establishment of villages. The system generated a balanced distribution of villages, especially in the plains and river valleys. Irregularities still occurred, especially when

⁴⁴ "Heilongjiang jiangjun yamen dang'an" [Archive of the Office of the Heilongjiang Military Commander], 1898, vol. 190; as quoted in Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, gen. eds., HKS, p. 119.

⁴⁵ "Heilongjiang sheng fanghuang guize" [Heilongjiang Provincial Regulations for Unimproved Land Sales], 1914, HPA, 62-3, vol. 338.

newly apportioned land impinged upon old settlements or skirted rivers, streams or hills. Generally speaking, villages emerged in the center of the well-field unit. Overall, settlements appeared in equipoise, dotting the land proportionally. Thus, the grassroots settlement pattern was one of preplanned grids. As more and more people moved in, further villages might be built within the nine squares. It was the local officials' responsibility to survey the land, delineate the grid, and confirm the location of villages. As the system was extended, the North Manchuria plains became a grand assemblage of grids with villages and hamlets more or less evenly distributed, though the density of settlers varied from one grid to another.

The towns, especially county seats and small commercial hubs, played a distinctive role in the pattern of settlement. Towns were located so that they would strengthen local communication, foster regional business and safeguard rural settlements. They were local pivots where nearby farmers could trade for necessities and seek official assistance. In their genesis, these towns differed from those in China Proper, which had taken shape over a long period of time; most North Manchuria towns were created deliberately and quickly. Their locations were determined by officials who sought to encourage settlement in nearby areas. In the southern part of North Manchuria, there was to be "one village every five kilometers, one roadside inn every two and half kilometers and one town every ten to fifteen kilometers." In the newly opened areas, the pattern allowed more space between towns and villages.⁴⁶ Towns were the centers from which roads were to radiate

⁴⁶ In Boli County, the basic layout was one town every 25 km, one large village every 20 km, and one small village every 15 km. See "Boli xian chengli baogaoshu zaibugao bajian" [Eight Announcements in the Report about Establishment of Boli County, 1917], in HPA, HS, p. 632.

out to the villages; cities were the nuclei from which major thoroughfares would reach the surrounding towns.

Farmers who tilled the land lived in villages, while relatively rich landlords resided in towns or cities. For those with business experience and capital to invest, towns were ideal dwelling places. When a town or a city was first established, it was as small as a village; yet since it was designed to become a town or a city it had the potential to expand. Unlike usual urban development, the town or city here was just a blueprint; sometimes it might only have a few houses in its initial existence. Yet it could grow rapidly and become a sizable settlement by receiving new immigrants. The site of Fujin was only a tract of meadow in the late Qing. In 1912, the decision was taken to establish a town there. Twelve families were settled on the site, and within a year over 200 families had located in Fujin. Satellite villages appeared around the newly founded town, as 2,200 families arrived in the nearby hinterland.⁴⁷

A city normally served as a county seat where the county magistrate and his subordinates worked. The magistrate brought with him a small cohort of police for personal safety and protection of the settlement. The police presence offered psychological reassurance to newcomers as it provided them with something of a shield. Many documents record the important security role played by the city in the settlement process. In the Suidong area, there was no sense of permanence prior to the establishment

⁴⁷ “Daili Fujin xian zhishi Lu Mai wei xiangbao difang qingxing cheng” [Report of Acting Governor of Fujin County Lu Mai on the Local Situation], February 17, 1914, in HPA, HS, p. 675.

of a city. “Those who are already here do not intend to stay long and those who are on the way are reluctant to choose this as their destination.”⁴⁸ The difference following upon the establishment of a city was striking. As one person claimed, “wherever officials drive down their posts, settlers scramble in afterward just like flocks of ducks.”⁴⁹ In Anda, it was said that “as long as there are officials sitting in the county seat, settlers will arrive like a stream flowing to the pond.”⁵⁰

Indeed, the city was so vital for the future development of local settlements that officials took pains in selecting a site in order to attract settlers. For example, the county seat of Huma was moved from its first location Kukou since the town was locked in a tightly compact area surrounded by rivers and mountains. Hence it had little appeal for settlers. Those who came were mostly itinerant gold miners. In the long term, this city could not foster settlement, let alone the prosperity of the local economy. The city was then moved to Guzhan on a fertile plain near a communicable waterway. The new urban site was designed to include villages on its periphery to allure settlers. “Here the settlers

⁴⁸ “Suidong gongmin Li Xutang deng wei qingqiu shezhi de bing” [Appeal of Li Xutang and other Suidong County Citizens for Installation of a County Seat], October 20, 1916, in HPA, HS, p. 663.

⁴⁹ “Libu wei zhizhao Tangwanghe shexian fanghuang deng shizi” [Approval of Personnel Ministry to Establish a County Government in Tangwanghe in Order to Attract Settlers for Cultivation], December 1, 1905, in HPA, HS, p. 654.

⁵⁰ “Heilongjiang minzhengshi Xu Nailin wei Andating fuqing chufang Dongjizhen jieji shicheng” [Report of Heilongjiang Provincial Civil Administrator Xu Nailin in regard to Establishing a County Seat], September 18, 1912, in HPA, HS, p. 535.

will be able to acquire property and will not want to leave.”⁵¹ Huma subsequently attracted many newcomers.

As soon as a location was selected, officials would delimit streets and demarcate quarters for residence and business. Notices would be circulated throughout China to attract farmers and businessmen to migrate. The rich potential of the cities was extolled and advantageous deals for purchasers of business and residential property were offered.⁵² Those who arrived first acted in the dual capacity of merchant and land speculator. They tried to bring in more settlers, as more newcomers meant more profit. This created a chain reaction which stimulated the local economy. For instance, the small county of Wangkui, which was located on a flat plain surrounded on three sides by rivers, soon began to prosper after the establishment of the county seat. Once it had been laid out, “rich merchants and wealthy traders found their journey’s end there, bringing their capital and assets.” The county became one of the richest in the region.⁵³

Relocation of county seats occurred frequently between 1900 and 1931. Because of the importance of the county seat, residents were fearful lest government offices be moved. To assuage such fears, some counties promised not to move the seat within a certain period, even if they had the inclination to do so. For example, Tonghei county seat was at first seen as less than an ideal location. Rumors about an impending move gravely

⁵¹ “Daili Huma xianzhishi Sun Shengwu wei songhe qianzhi huitucheng” [Proposal of Acting Governor of Huma Sun Shengwu to Move County Seat], July 1914, in HPA, HS, pp. 883-884.

⁵² “Boli xian chengli baogaoshu zaibugao bajian,” in HPA, HS, pp. 630-31.

⁵³ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 728.

concerned settlers. To stabilize the settlement, the new governor guaranteed that the seat would not be moved within five years. This would be long enough to lay the foundations of a prosperous settlement. This commitment placated the residents and the town continued attracting immigrants.⁵⁴ Though the locals might regret seeing the county seat move, more often than not they could take solace in the fact that a settlement had already been established, and that the city continued to function as a local center to absorb new settlers. When a county seat was moved, the former city became simply a county town, though this change did not necessarily have an impact on its demographic growth.

Immigrants from the same county in their home province often tended to build new villages together. Since they already knew each other, risks of robbery, banditry and bad financial deals were reduced in their new communities. This pattern of settlement can be termed “native folk habitation.” The new settlement, put simply, was but a relocation of the traditional home setting to the frontier. It was not uncommon to observe that residents of a North Manchuria village all came from the same county or even the same township in Shandong. The Shandong people liked to migrate in “mutual aid bands,” in which they helped each other in travelling to and settling down in their new villages. Immigrants from other provinces also preferred to live together. For example, the Hubei migrants who came to Heilongjiang at the turn of the century were still concentrated in Nehe

⁵⁴ “Shuli Tongbei xian xianzhang Zhang Ren’an wei xiancheng niding wunian buqian yixing difang cheng” [Pledge of Tongbei Magistrate Zhang Renan Not to Relocate County Seat within Five Years in order to Develop the County], September 13, 1930, in HPA, HS, p. 597.

decades later.⁵⁵ Yet no rigid social boundary was established along provincial lines, although the initial settlement pattern replicated provincial identities. As immigrants became established, differences among them lessened, though people still claimed their former province as their ancestral home.

Shandong civilian organizations actively recruited provincial migrants to move together. From 1912 Shandong societies such as the Comrades Society, the Determined Settlers League and the Five Happiness Hall assisted thousands of Shandong migrants. They set up several dozen villages in Tongjiang County alone. Settlers from specific Shandong counties also recruited their own county men for settlement. The Zidong Immigration League in 1915 helped settle nearly five thousand people and built at least four villages in Tongjiang County alone.⁵⁶ The pattern of settlement to some degree resembled that of North America, where immigrants from European countries initially formed German, French, Polish and suchlike villages. The difference is that the settlers in North Manchuria were mostly Han Chinese. Despite varying dialects, it was much easier for them to merge than it was for the different ethnic groups in North America.

Refugees played a particular role in frontier settlement. For example, from June to August 1929, in just three months, more than 20,000 refugees were transported by rail from Henan to Heilongjiang. They stayed in the provincial capital Qiqihar for one or two

⁵⁵ Wu Shiyuan, "Ji Hei yimin wenti zhi yanjiu" [A Study of Immigration to Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces], in *Manchuria Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan*, March 1930, pp. 31-32.

⁵⁶ Guo Bolin and Wang Lanxin, "Dongsansheng nonglin kenwu diaochashu" [Report on the Investigation into Agriculture, Forestry and Cultivation in the Three Northeastern Provinces], 1915, pp. 197-8; quoted in Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, gen. eds., HKS, p. 154.

days, where they were accommodated by both governmental and philanthropic organizations. The policy of the province was that “upon arrival, refugees should be effectively organized in order to prevent them from becoming homeless beggars,” after which they would be distributed among the local communities.⁵⁷ At first, three counties agreed to accept the refugees; this number rose to eighteen and then in 1930, as more Henan refugees arrived, the number of receiving counties increased to thirty-eight.⁵⁸ Altogether, more than 80,000 Henan refugees were settled in about fourteen months. They were first put under charge of representatives of county agricultural associations. The county government then assigned them to rural police officers, who in turn directed them to village chiefs. The latter levied a special land tax on villagers to support the refugees. In some regions, the refugees were immediately placed with landowners as tenants. The rule enforced in Keshan and Hailun counties was that one refugee family was to be assigned to every six li [three kilometers], which was one “well” [jing]. Certainly there were cases such as in Gannan County where one landowner took in two or three families.⁵⁹ This policy, as it was implemented, accentuated a pattern of settlement whereby refugees were settled in a balanced way. This measure was not only used for refugees from Henan, but also for those from other provinces. It generated two results: it found the refugees a new home and it attracted the refugees’ relatives.

⁵⁷ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 600.

⁵⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 601. In 1930, Heilongjiang agreed to accept 60,000 of the 1,000,000 refugees the Henan provincial government wanted to send.

⁵⁹ Chen Han-seng, Notes on Migration of Nan Min [Refugees] to the Northeast, p. 28.

Settlement arranged by large private companies throughout the period also constituted a special pattern. These companies, under Chinese or Chinese-foreign ownership, were set up in the late Qing and prospered in the 1910s and 1920s. Since they were granted special exemptions, such as no limitation on purchases of land, as well as favorable measures to encourage them to import western ploughs and modern machines, many wealthy Chinese bureaucrats and merchants invested in such companies.⁶⁰ Early in 1909, in Dongning, the Funing Reclamation Company was established and bought uncultivated land totaling 50,000 mu [7,500 acres]. At the same time, an investor of Russian-Chinese background organized the Funing Tunken Co. and bought wilderness property of 25,000 mu. These two companies were merged in 1920 and renamed Yuning Reclamation Company. In 1912, a Zhejiang Chinese financial magnate, Zheng Yongchang, and a retired American major, Morgan Palmer, created the Huoli Company in Suibin County. Huoli and four other companies controlled 2,000,000 mu, 40% of the arable land of Suibin county. The five companies were responsible for the cultivation of one-third of the total land cultivated in the county.⁶¹ According to one source, from 1913 to 1926 more than eighteen companies were established in Heilongjiang.

Companies purchased only a small portion of arable land in North Manchuria, yet they recruited many laborers. Poor peasants from China Proper were brought in to settle

⁶⁰ In 1914, the Heilongjiang Reclamation Regulations stipulated that an individual immigrant family could purchase at most four squares of land, i.e., 1,800 mu. Companies were not affected by such regulations. In 1924, a new reclamation policy specified that an individual family could only purchase one square, but companies with modern machinery were exempt from a ceiling. In 1928, government once again reaffirmed these measures. See Guo Bolin and Wang Lanxin, "Dongsansheng nonglin kenwu diaochashu," p. 274; Also see Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, gen. eds., HKS, p.153

on their land.⁶² Funing Reclamation Company dispatched its staff to Shandong to lure settlers with the promise of free transportation and free housing in the more than thirty villages which they established. Other companies also circulated their notices in Shandong to advertise the benefits of migration.⁶³ The Funing Tunken Company even recruited homeless people and offered each family a residence subsidy.⁶⁴ Five companies in Suibin helped settle more than 950 families, around 4,750 people, and furthermore hired another 930 contract farmhands.⁶⁵ Although it is hard to determine the exact number of settlers the companies assisted, it is quite clear that this method of settlement facilitated a significant number of immigrants coming to North Manchuria.

Although the overwhelming majority of newcomers settled at their intended place of destination, misfortune caused some to move to new locations. Personal mishaps, exploitative landlords, unwelcoming communities, roving bandits or a hostile natural environment might contribute to their relocation. Some cases of mass resettlement occurred. For example, in May 1929, 2,000 refugees (360 families) from Shandong were sent to the district of Dongxing for settlement. Initially, the refugees were distributed among landowners as laborers. However, ecological conditions proved unsuitable to the Shandong migrants, who were not accustomed to the prevailing form of local agriculture.

⁶¹ Sun Zhanwen, HST, pp. 288-290; See also Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 155.

⁶² Shi Fang, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁶³ “Jilin shengzhang gongshu dang’an” [Archive of the Office of the Governor of Jilin], 11 (7-7)-1968; as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 123.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 11(7-7)-1968; See also Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 141.

⁶⁵ Shi Fang, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

To solve the problem, the local government resettled them in an uncultivated region, granting them land for residence and farming. Subsequently, eight permanent villages were established for the 2,000 migrants.⁶⁶

Population movements within North Manchuria were also part of the settlement process. Some migrants came from the southern areas of the region, where space was limited. Unlike so many immigrants from China Proper, who arrived as refugees, settlers from southern North Manchuria, more often than not, became rich farmers or landlords, since they had some money at hand and were familiar with the environment. Examples are recorded in different sources, such as local history gazetteers or biographical records of regional elites. Huang You, a farmer born in Acheng in 1899, moved to remote northern Tangyuan County. His family opened up 3,000 mu of land; as a result, they were transformed into rich landlords.⁶⁷ The four Du brothers, natives of Nong'an county, moved north in 1909 and settled in Anda. They speculated in land, opened businesses and joined the richest of the local elite. Later, the four brothers and their families assisted a number of refugees. Their philanthropic endeavors extended to famine relief in North China and even in Russia. The resettlement work of the Du brothers brought them good fortune, helping them rise in social status from common farmers to the moneyed elite.⁶⁸ This rapid route to social advancement occurred for some who undertook "inner

⁶⁶ Chen Han-seng, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ Ma Fang, *HRZ*, vol. 5, 1994, p. 92.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 1996, pp. 242-3.

resettlement” within the region. Many, however, remained middling farmers. Compared to the dominant trend of settlement from North China, this kind of regional resettlement was a minor trend, yet worthy of note.

A somewhat different pattern of settlement emerged in the late 1920s in the form of military colonization. Its history was brief, but the experiment left a legacy. In July 1928, the Northeastern Authority under Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang established the Xing'an Military Reclamation Region and organized four regiments of retired soldiers for the purpose. Headquarters for the project were set up in Taonan in the southwestern part of North Manchuria. By the end of the year, the so-called Reclamation Army was mobilized in the region. Its members built houses and started to open up the wilderness. Officers and soldiers obtained land in proportion to their ranks.⁶⁹ Military settlement carried two objectives: one was to solve the problem of surplus soldiers within the Northeastern Army and the other was to open up the wilderness in order to boost the local economy.⁷⁰ Within a year, the soldiers opened up about 50,000 mu of land.⁷¹ However, further expansion was interrupted in 1931 when the Japanese conquered Manchuria, and the military settlements were deserted. Only some soldiers-turned-farmers stayed behind. The military settlements, in short, did not yield the expected results. However, this policy

⁶⁹ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 61.

⁷⁰ Ma Fang, gen. ed., HRZ, vol. 2, p. 86.

⁷¹ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 62.

set a precedent for the later military settlements undertaken by the communist authorities in the region in the 1950s.⁷²

III. The Making of Frontier Society

From the sociological perspective, North Manchuria saw the emergence of a new society between 1900 and 1931. Since the majority of immigrants were Han Chinese, it is reasonable to conclude that the society was an extension of Chinese traditional society, a replica of China Proper. The new frontier society was in fact almost homogeneous, despite the fact that a number of small ethnic groups were also to be found there. To be precise, Han frontier society was to a large degree indistinguishable from that of Shandong, since Shandong migrants, as refugees and coolie labourers, made up greater part of the population. Shandong social relationships and family values were carried over. “Shandong people reside together and live as neighbors. Nearby their dogs are barking and roosters crowing. For the settlers, this is but a familiar scene from ‘home’. Thus, everyone is eager to settle down, and will rarely consider leaving.”⁷³ Most Shandong migrants resided in the rural areas. Although they were Chinese speakers, their diverse accents and dialects were not convenient for communication, which led them to adopt

⁷² In 1958, General Wang Zhen led about 100,000 soldiers demobilized from Korea in opening up the Three River Plains. Almost all the soldiers settled down permanently and turned the wilderness into fertile land. See Zhang Xiangling, *Heilongjiang sishinian* [Forty Years in Heilongjiang], Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang Chubanshe, 1986, pp. 294-295.

⁷³ “Xin yimin chengdao zhengfu bangzhu gei daoyin de xin” [Letter of Appreciation to the Prefectural Governor by a Group of New Settlers from Shandong], February 1915; Heilongjiang yimin zongbanshichu dang’an [Archive of the Heilongjiang Immigration Office], HPA, 132-2-580.

standard Chinese (Mandarin). As time passed and contacts with people from other provinces increased, Shandong settlers gradually lost their native dialects for standard Chinese. But the traits for which they were known, such as friendliness, frankness and impetuosity, remained in the new society.

Yet by using this concept of replication—that Shandong migrants relocated themselves to the frontier and recreated Shandong society—we only see stasis. This ignores gradual incremental change and may lead to underestimating what differentiated the new society from the old. It is better to take this frontier society as a new society and examine it as such. Shandong migrants, as well as migrants from other areas, had their origins in their specific provincial society, but the impact of the frontier made them members of a new society which possessed features uncommon to their native provinces.

One feature of this new society was the lack of the traditional clan system, which was so deep-rooted in China Proper. Traditional Chinese clan society was an isolated, self-disciplined and autonomous social organization. The head of the clan, usually a male, had paramount power over each member. A blood relationship linked the members. Often one clan covered a cluster of villages as a small domain, a territory which in effect functioned as a “small kingdom.” The clan usually co-operated with the state, but if conflict arose, an uprising might be sparked. The clan system was the result of long historical evolution of the extended family. In North Manchuria, however, settlers arrived

either as single males or as males bringing their nuclear family with them. Thus the clan system had little chance of immediate replication.

On the frontier were mixed together not only immigrants from Shandong but from all of north China.⁷⁴ They left their clan system behind and set up new communities with people of no blood relationship. Very often, new communities were made up of settlers with different surnames, multiple dialects and various backgrounds. This posed a striking contrast to China Proper. In theory families might have reestablished their clan identity in time, but the mobility of the population worked strongly against this. Some inhabitants of North Manchuria who had long been illegally settled in isolated locations, such as in the Song-Nen Plains, developed large family groupings.⁷⁵ But since the majority of migrants to North Manchuria were recent immigrants, frontier society, as a whole, was but an aggregation of segments of the original clans.

The people of the North Manchuria frontier were relatively young. From 1900 to 1931, several million young immigrants settled in the region. Some brought their whole family with them. However, most immigrants arrived as unaccompanied young males

⁷⁴ In Yanshou County, even though immigrants settled there in the 1860s, most settlers as of 1907 still belonged to different surnames [zahu]. There were no dominant family names. In some of the larger settlements, the dominant surname was shared by three or four families. See Liu Chengdong, Qingdai Heilongjiang guben fangzhi sizhong [The Four Extant Local Histories of Heilongjiang during the Qing Dynasty], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1989, p. 500.

⁷⁵ As A. R. Lindt observed in the early 1930s, a village in the northern part of the Song-Nen Plains consisted of a family of 150 people of five generations. They all lived within the walls of a village. The family had a ninety-three year old great-grandfather who was the first settler. This village in question was typical of a pioneer settlement family village (in contrast to a traditional clan village). See A. R. Lindt, Special Correspondent: With Bandit and General in Manchuria, London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1933, pp. 154-156.

whose aim was to open up land and establish farms.⁷⁶ After they established a stable life, they sent for their women and children. The governmental census clearly shows that most counties were populated mainly by young settlers.⁷⁷ The presence of so many young men and women as laborers, combined with the ready availability of land, supplied the first two of the three vital elements of production in classic economic theory: labor, land and capital. Even though capital was insufficient, the abundance of land and young laborers combined to transform the wilderness.

This youthful society was largely illiterate. North Manchuria was populated by men of little education. In contrast to China Proper, where traditional Confucian education was passed down through elite channels, North Manchuria absorbed several million labourers who established an illiterate society. It might even be said that this frontier society was of lower educational level than the former penal colonies, where banished literati or officials ensured that their children and those of their neighbors were well educated.⁷⁸ Some locally grown literati emerged from elite families, such as Xiao Hong who was born into a wealthy family in Hulan county and later became a well known

⁷⁶ Li Debin and Shi Fang, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Xu Shichang, Dongsansheng zhenglue [A Sketch of Northeastern Politics], Beijing: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1911, pp. 4371-4373.

⁷⁸ During the Qing Dynasty, literati opposed to government policies were banished to North Manchuria. Their presence afforded local children the opportunity to receive Confucian education. For example, the Lu family, when sent into exile, contributed much to local education in Qiqihar. See Zhang Shuyuan, gen. ed., Heitu jinsha lu [Records of Black Soil and Golden Sands], Shanghai: Shanghai Shuju, 1993, pp. 192-193.

novelist in China in the 1930s.⁷⁹ Local governments endeavored to establish schools during the 1910s and 1920s. Literacy slowly began to improve among the younger generation, though their parents remained illiterate. These first settlers lacked education, but were driven by their strong will to survive.

In contrast to China Proper, privately owned weapons played an essential part of daily life in North Manchuria. This particular trait was noted by Governor Zhao Erxun, who in 1910 wrote that the settlers possessed both a valiant manner [qianghan] and a militant spirit [shangwu]. People “whether young or old, are all good at marksmanship. Every family has horses and the men carry guns.... It is easy to turn them into soldiers.”⁸⁰ In North Manchuria, these qualities found two outlets. First were the government-organized police. Whenever a county government was set up, the district magistrate brought a police force with him, but he had to supplement this unit with a county militia drawn from young men of the locality. Second were the civilian militia. To guard the villages year round and to protect crops in the summer, a number of villages combined to set up special joint associations (lianzhuanghui) of young men to maintain twenty-four hour vigilance. In some isolated settlements, rich farmers paid young men to as militia

⁷⁹ Xiao Hong (1911-1942) was a famous female writer in 1930s China. Her novels, which mainly focused on frontier life in North Manchuria, have long been admired by Chinese readers. See Jiang Shizhong, gen.ed., *Hulan Xianzhi* [A History of Hulan County], Zhonghua Shuju, 1994, p. 869.

⁸⁰ Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan [Number One Chinese Historical Archive], Beijing: No. 543 75-1, *Zhao Erxun dang'an* [Zhao Erxun Archives], No.142: “Heilongjiang xieling Chengchun deng wei zhengdun Dongsansheng zhi guanzhi, junwu, licai deng fangmian zhi tiaochen ji ‘Fengtian youji cuoyao’” [Statement of Heilongjiang Military Leader Chengchun about Governmental, Military, and Financial affairs in the Northeast and ‘A Tour of Fengtian’], 1904-1905.

during the harvest season.⁸¹ The creation of civilian militia was a spontaneous response to bandits who otherwise might harass settlers at will. This militarized society was defensive in intent, despite the fact that some militiamen turned themselves into bandits to prey upon their fellow settlers.

Generally speaking, possession of weapons by settlers created a balance of arms between themselves and potential offenders. Settlers, therefore, were not only pioneer farmers but also well-equipped militiamen. This was vividly described by A. R. Lindt, who visited North Manchuria in 1931. “They do not live in farms, they shut themselves up in fortresses which are true counterparts of the medieval stronghold. Night and day, watchmen, with rifles in their hands, scan the countryside. Each family has its arsenal, its lances, its daggers, its antique cannons which discharge upon the aggressor a hail of lead and stone.” This weaponry was not directed at peaceful transients. Lindt continued, “Every stranger who approaches the village is greeted by a rifle-shot, fired into the air. It is the alarm signal for the inhabitants, warning them to take refuge within the walls. Should the stranger be a bandit, he will know that the village is ready to defend itself. A peaceful man has but to continue his way; the peasant will let him pass in peace.”⁸² Since Lindt visited the region after the Japanese seizure of Manchuria, his description might not precisely fit the pre-1931 period, but it conveys a sense of the armed character of the

⁸¹ Zhao Shumin illustrates North Manchuria militancy in her book *Songhuajiang de lang* [The Waves of the Songhua River], Taipei: Zhongyang Ribao She [Central Daily News Press], 1985, p. 150; See also HPA, HTCZ, p. 769.

⁸² Lindt, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

society. In some areas, where settlers were numerous and government garrisons strong, the civilian militia would be less prominent.

The militaristic ethos and availability of weapons would seem to have given North Manchuria the potential for revolutionary activity. This, however, did not materialize. While China Proper experienced continuing revolutionary agitation, often leading to violence and even war, North Manchuria remained free from radical uprisings. It is true that there was some revolutionary influence from the south. For example, while the 1911 Revolution did not incite violence in North Manchuria, it inspired locals in its own particular way. Since the revolution removed some of the old taboos, it became the fashion in Heilongjiang after 1911 to adopt different hairstyles to express freedom. Wearing the queue was no longer mandatory. "Some simply disheveled their hair; others made horns from it, or wove it into three poles to indicate the separation of power among executive, judicial and legislative branches. Some laced their hair into five strands to show the harmonious relations among the five Chinese nations."⁸³ New hairstyles became a vogue for young men, but irritated conservatives so much that they urged the provincial government in 1914 to prohibit strange styles, in the name of preserving national dignity and traditional values.

That the revolution from the south did not exert great influence in North Manchuria was caused first of all by the fundamental conservatism of the settlers. Most immigrants, as refugees, were concerned first for themselves and were uninterested in politics, not to

⁸³ Zhu Qinglan, "Guanyu renmin qu fabian" [On the People's Hair Styles], HPA, 62-3-930

mention violent struggle. With memories of their bitter life in their home provinces, survival was their first priority. Because of the availability of fertile land, most of them were satisfied with their new life and were reluctant to participate in the sort of struggles prevalent in China Proper. A further important reason for the relative quiescence of the frontier is that the newly shaped society lacked the long accumulation of social hatreds that could be utilized by revolutionary agitators. Agents from the south found it impossible to launch a revolution here. For example, Chiang Kai-shek was dispatched by Sun Yat-sen from Tokyo to North Manchuria in 1914 with the intention of igniting a rebellion to support the revolutionary forces in the south. Using a Japanese alias, Ishida Yusukei [Shitian Xiongjie], Chiang Kaishek secretly visited Harbin, Qiqihar and other places, staying for almost two months. To his disappointment, he found “no revolutionary atmosphere there.” He advised Sun that the revolution should be launched from the south, ideally from his own province of Zhejiang.⁸⁴ In the 1920s, Communist agitators trained in the south encountered the same difficulties. Ma Jun, educated in Tianjin and a comrade of Zhou Enlai, was sent back to North Manchuria to promote communist revolution. Ma worked assiduously for years but never succeeded in building a revolutionary base. The most he succeeded in doing was to organize some demonstrations, though these were motivated by nationalist rather than communist ideals.⁸⁵

Social unrest, when it occurred, was prompted by immediate threats to the settlers’ survival. Maltreatment of tenants by landlords, exploitation by merchants or abuse by

⁸⁴ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, 1992, p. 365.

⁸⁵ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 64-66.

local officials, could lead to social unrest. Nevertheless, the unrest was on a very small scale and more often than not, spontaneous and episodic. The most serious case was the Salt Disturbance of 1916, when several thousand settlers in Tonghua, Mulan, Fangzheng, Suihua, Bayan and Qingcheng seized salt from the salt bureaus, where officials were abusing their power. This protest was but an action for survival, since salt, like food, was essential to life. The trouble lasted only a few days and did not take a revolutionary course.⁸⁶ When the government offered concessions, the unrest suddenly ceased.

Despite being an inland region, North Manchuria was not a closed society as was that of China Proper. Such a new society could not shut its doors to outsiders, since cultivation of the land necessitated the steady influx of new laborers. The linkage to the international market also contributed to this openness. By the 1920s the major crops of soybeans and wheat had become international commodities. The stations of the Chinese Eastern Railway and the local Chinese railways functioned as vital transshipment points in sending farm produce to the international market. Commercialization was the invisible hand opening up the new society to the world beyond.

The inhabitants of North Manchuria thus had contacts not only with their native provinces of Shandong, Hebei and Henan, where they learned of national issues, but also with foreign countries, especially China's two neighbors Russia and Japan where they learned something of the global economy. Although both these nations were seen as threats to China, the people of North Manchuria still had to be engaged with them

⁸⁶ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, pp. 376-377.

commercially. Hence they held ambivalent feelings toward their two powerful neighbors. Whenever Russia or Japan suffered from natural disasters, the settlers lent a hand. For example, after the great Tokyo earthquake of 1923, North Manchuria launched a campaign to raise relief funds. A civilian organization, “The Japan Disaster Relief Provision Society,” was set up. In Hulan county alone, locals raised more than \$141,794.15.⁸⁷ During the Civil War in Russia, Russians in the Far East were short of food. The settlers contributed money and grain to aid their stricken neighbors. For example, in Anda Du Shounian and his brothers canvassed the local villages and collected \$4,000 in cash and thirty train cars of grain. They themselves contributed five carriage loads of grain. They then went to the Russian side to distribute the money and food. Du Shounian, exhausted from his journey, died soon after his return. His deeds were acclaimed by the president of China, who spoke of his high-mindedness and philanthropy.⁸⁸

Since the initial settlements consisted of fragmented and isolated communities peopled by adventurers fully occupied with opening up the land, there was little in the way of an established local elite. But as communities matured there emerged out of the initial amorphous social order an elite which owed its position primarily to wealth rather

⁸⁷ Wang Hanyu, “Hulan xian zhenji Riben dizhen zaimin” [Hulan County Relief Measures for Japanese Earthquake Victims], in Zhang Shuyuan, *Heitu jinsha lu*, pp. 200-201. Chinese historians have commented on the “ingratitude” of the Japanese who invaded Manchuria eight years later.

⁸⁸ President Li Yuanhong personally wrote four Chinese characters and ordered them be inscribed on a special wood tablets. They read “Tong guan zai bao” — one who bears in mind the suffering of others. To receive such praise from the president was esteemed a great honor by the local elite. See Ma Fang, *HRZ*, vol. 6, 1996, p. 242.

than office. This elite stratum consisted of landlords and merchants, most of whom arrived as settlers and then made their money locally. Although some members of the elite had carried wealth to the frontier, there were more rags-to-riches stories. A poor immigrant, through personal endeavor and proper management of land or business, might gradually lift himself into the ranks of the elite. Local histories document this phenomenon. One example is a member of the Yanshou County elite by the name of Zhang, whose father, a poor immigrant from Hebei, died before he was born. Zhang, with his mother's help, ran a business, made good money from it and established himself as the richest man in his county.⁸⁹

There were various names for the elite of North Manchuria, such as big household [dahu], county gentleman [xiangshen], gentry businessmen [shenshang], representative of the local citizenry [gongmin daibiao], or leader of agriculture and business [nongshang daibiao].⁹⁰ Many of these people belonged to the earlier stratum of settlement, and had established themselves before the waves of new immigrants and refugees came in. They speculated in land, gained control of local commerce and accumulated wealth. They welcomed newcomers whom they either employed as tenants or to whom they sold land. The more immigrants, the greater the opportunities for profit. Whatever relationship they had with the latecomers, their own elite status remained unaffected.

⁸⁹ Liu Chengdong, *Qingdai Heilongjiang guben fangzhi sizhong*, pp. 495-496.

⁹⁰ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 334; see also HPA, HS, p. 412, p. 663, p. 403, and p. 774.

Economic factors underlay the emergence of the elite, but its members still sought close ties with political power, and some tried to enter the political arena. Frontier life necessitated political protection. Thus the local elite sought to strengthen its connection with the ruling authorities. In many cases, members of the local elite first requested the provincial government to establish a county administration in the town where they had settled. Without doubt, the establishment of such a local authority benefited them. For example, the town of Dongxing, in the northern part of Mulan County, was located sixty kilometers from the county seat. The local elite in Dongxing felt that they needed a county government based in their town. They started to lobby the provincial government in 1914 and continued until their request was finally granted in 1927.⁹¹ One year before this happened, members of the local elite promised to fund the future county administration for five years if the province was short of cash.⁹² In many areas the elite endeavored to make their towns the county seats.⁹³

⁹¹ “Dongxingzhen shangmin daibiao Cui Wanquan dengwei qingshexianzhi liancheng” [Petition of Dongxing Town Merchant Representative Cui Wanquan for Establishment of a County Government], July 1, 1914, HPA, HS, pp. 403-405. See also “Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei sheli Dongxing shezhiju gei shenghui jingchating de xunling” [Directive of Heilongjiang Governor’s Office to Provincial Police Department in regard to Establishment of a County Government in Dongxing], March 28, 1927, HPA, HS, pp. 413-415.

⁹² “Heilongjiang caizhengtingzhang Zhang Xinggui, Suilan dao daoyin Song Wenyu fuyi Dongxing zhen yiyu shezhi cheng” [Report of Head of Finance Ministry Zhang Xinggui and Governor of Suilan Prefecture Song Wenyu concerning Establishment of a County Government in Dongxing], December 29, 1926, HPA, HS, pp. 410-412.

⁹³ “Suidong gongmin daibiao deng wei qingqiu shezhi de bing” [Petition of Citizen Representatives headed by Li Xutang of Suidong concerning the Establishment of a County Government], HPA, HS, p. 663; “Minzheng tingzhang Li Tingxuan wei qingheshi paiyuan chakan Fuyu shezhi chengji didian ji huafen jiexian qingxing cheng” [Report of the Head of Department of Civil Administration Li Tingxuan concerning the Survey of the County Seat of Fuyu in Order to Demarcate the Streets], HPA, HS, p. 758. Also see “Heilongjiang shengzhengfu wei zhun Kedong lingxing shezhi yang nongkuangting zhizhao de

Whatever the circumstances, the influence of the local elite reached its fullest extent when combined with political power. Some members dropped down the social ladder when a political patron fell from power. Usually, though, members kept ties with all parties and weathered the vicissitudes of turbulent change. For example, Chen Xiaode, an immigrant from North China who settled in Ning'an in the 1920s, raised himself to membership in the local elite. Chen was employed by the Japanese during the 1930s and 1940s, was appointed a local government officer by the Soviet Army when it occupied Manchuria in 1945, and later became a Nationalist Government official. When the Communists came to power, he supported the new regime and became a vice-chair of the local political consultative committee.⁹⁴

Chen was an example of those political gymnasts who used their high position to collaborate with whoever was in power. But often those who supported the former authorities fell victim to the new regime. Some elite members loyal to China were persecuted by the Japanese. Some who developed close ties with Japan were purged by the Nationalists, while those close to the Nationalists were swept away by the Communists. But during these tumultuous decades many members of the elite managed to survive quite well. They held their dominant position in society until the Communists inaugurated land reform and socialist construction in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Through violent or otherwise coercive means, land was redistributed to the peasantry and

xunling" [Directive of Heilongjiang Provincial Government to Department of Agriculture and Mining concerning Establishment of a County Government in Kedong], HPA, HS, p. 778.

⁹⁴ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 5, 1994, pp. 111-113.

merchant property confiscated by the state. These measures eliminated the social elite that had been a part of frontier society almost since its beginning.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Sociologists have often applied Tonnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to analyze pre-modern and modern societies. The North Manchuria frontier society exhibited characteristics of a *Gemeinschaft* and was distantly related to a *Gesellschaft*, yet it was different from both. Since *Gemeinschaft* was a natural outgrowth of rural communities where traditional values and natural kinships prevailed, and where social contact took the form of face-to-face relations, it did not fit the North Manchuria case, since both natural kinship and the clan system were basically absent. Frontier society differed from *Gesellschaft* as well. In North Manchuria, government bureaucracy, a system of law and various social organizations all played an important role. These are the main components of a *Gesellschaft*, yet they did not shatter traditional social bonds or values, or change the rural nature of the society.⁹⁶ From 1900 to 1931, a frontier society took shape so quickly that roots could not be put down to replicate the traditional society

⁹⁵ From 1946 to 1948 the land reform movement deprived the landlord class of its land through equal distribution to peasants. In some areas, radical actions such as "felling big trees" [kan dashu] and "sweeping the hall" [sao tangzi] completely deprived the landlords of their land and property. Through the socialist reconstruction campaign of the early 1950s, local merchants were dispossessed of their property, which was transferred to state ownership. These two movements virtually brought about the disappearance of the former social elite. See Zhang Xiangling, *Shishuo Heilongjiang*, pp. 97-100. See also Zhang Xiangling, *Heilongjiang Sishinian*, pp. 256-261.

of China Proper. Yet lack of industrialization prevented a leap into modern society. Hence North Manchuria was a distinctive society lying between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

Migration to North Manchuria was determined both by push and pull factors. Push factors were the disadvantageous conditions of life in the sending provinces; pull factors were the advantageous conditions of North Manchuria that it so attractive a destination. In the first three decades of the 20th century, the push and pull factors combined in particular ways to cause a great exodus of humans from North China. This migration was unprecedented in the history of modern China. North Manchuria acted as a magnet to at least four million newcomers during the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931. By 1931 these people made up two-thirds of the region's population. Most frontier residents therefore were but recent immigrants.

Though it possessed its own distinctive features, the frontier society was still part of the greater Chinese society. Since immigrants were almost exclusively Han, the frontier was virtually a homogeneous Chinese society. Confucianism, which still remained the dominant social creed in China, served to unify settlers. Confucian temples were built in cities, towns and villages in North Manchuria. They served to regulate communal relations and to emphasize acquiescence to authority. The customs and social institutions brought from China Proper enabled settlers to live a Han life. The laws enforced were made by Chinese, which helped maintain Chinese culture in this new environment. The

⁹⁶ Many Chinese scholars use the two concepts to illustrate the difference between a traditional society and a modern one. See Fei Xiaotong, *Xiangtu Zhongguo de shengyu zhidu* [Human Fertility in Rural China],

burgeoning frontier was in large measure a replica of China Proper, though the haste with which it developed inevitably endowed it with special features. In time it would become a fully-fledged Chinese society, which, if not exactly identical to, would be almost the same as that of China Proper. And even though the region fell under Japanese colonial control for fourteen years from 1931 to 1945, it suffered little damage to its essential Chinese characteristics.

Chapter Two: Land, Tenancy and Economic Transformation

Never in the history of North Manchuria did land utilization go through such dramatic change as in the period from 1900 to 1931. This transformation occurred without violent revolution or rapid industrialization. The partition of the wilderness for private ownership, the economic relationship of owner and tenant, and the linkage of the region with the outside world all centred on land. It is impossible to understand the frontier without an exploration of land possession, tenure and utilization.

The first important change was the termination of the official policy that forbade Han immigration, and stipulated state ownership of the land. In 1904 the whole region was opened to Han Chinese settlement, and in 1907 both private ownership and free transaction of land were sanctioned. In the ensuing decades, the government continually auctioned land. The result was the emergence of a small number of large landlords, although most settlers were either small landholders or tenants. Transactions of land occurred frequently during this period when the region was being opened to settlement. The change of status from tenant to small holder was commonplace. A tenant could jump in status while a new immigrant filled his position as tenant.

It is noteworthy that not only had land become a commodity, but products grown on it were traded to both domestic and international market. Hence, farmers maintained

direct contact with local trade centres and had an indirect connection with the international market to which a considerable portion of their produce was sold. Within just three decades, the land had been turned into a granary supplying Europe, the Russian Far East and Japan. Regional dependence on international demand was risky. North Manchuria would be adversely affected by the global depression of the 1930s. Regardless of this setback, the economic development of the region in the years from 1900 to 1931 proved a remarkable story.

I. Privatization, Speculation and Large-scale Land Ownership

North Manchuria had been described traditionally by the Chinese as the “Great Northern Wilderness” [Beidahuang]. It was portrayed as “an uncultivated land like America and Australia.”¹ Scholars called it “a remote wild land” [xiahuang], “a sterile area” [jueyu], or “an imperial desert” [longsha] to convey its bleak desolation.² Since the region was an imperial preserve protected from settlers and cultivators, the imperial court in Beijing—the source of absolute power—to a large extent bore responsibility for its existence as a wilderness.

The Qing excluded Han settlement, while allowing banner troops to use the land in limited areas. The banner land [qidi] was one of the main forms of land allocation in the

¹ Yi Zhou, “Dongsheng nongye zhi yanjiu” [A Study of Agriculture in the Eastern Provinces], in *Dongsheng jingji yuekan: Eastern Province Economy Monthly*, Feb. 15, 1930, p. 15.

² Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 13.

region. Banner land could not be sold or transferred. Bannermen enjoyed the fruits of a system under which political exiles or illegal Han immigrants were used as cultivators. While some bannermen farmed the land, it was these Han cultivators who provided most of the labour. Contemporary sources note that the “number of exiles who work the land is several times more numerous than the bannermen,” and that because the latter “have to devote themselves to military service . . . it is impossible for them to engage in farming.”³ Although banner lands increased in size as more exiles and illegal Han immigrants arrived, the total acreage was tiny in comparison to the vastness of North Manchuria.

The second form of land use before 1900 was the so-called official manor [guanzhuang]. Each villa had ten males, comprising one head and nine laborers. Laborers included exiles and a small number of bannermen. They tilled land, raised poultry, made charcoal and undertook minor tasks. The villas produced for local military administrators. More than one hundred official villas existed in North Manchuria, but the total amount of villa land was small.⁴

The third form of land use was soldier cultivated land [tuntian]. It was created in order to supply food for local troops at the three garrisons of Qiqihar, Nenjiang and Aihui. Soldiers cultivated the land themselves, in contrast to the banner land that was tilled by hired hands. Its acreage was also very small. Eight hundred soldiers cultivated 60 mu [10 acres] per person. Civilian land [mindì] was the fourth form of land use. It was

³ Fang Shiji, *Longsha jilue* [A Brief Record of Longsha], and Xi Qing, *Heilongjiang waiji* [An Informal History of Heilongjiang], both quoted in Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 105.

⁴ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 104.

found only around Ning'an and Sanxing. In the nineteenth century illegal immigrants had settled these areas and eventually the government recognized their occupancy of the land. The acreage in question was so small that it was often omitted in official records, though it represented a first breakthrough against the prevailing state monopoly.

With the exception of these four types of land use, most of the region remained uncultivated wilderness, which the government enclosed in special zones [weichang] for bannermen to practise riding, shooting and military exercises. The Bodune Enclosure covered today's Fuyu and Yushu counties, the Feiketü Enclosure Binxian, Yanshou and Shangzhi, and the Donghuang Enclosure Hailun, Qinggang, Lanxi, Suiling, Qing'an, Wangkui and Suihua. By law, both the wilderness and the cultivated land belonged to the state, there being no private ownership.

The transition of land from state to private ownership was a long incremental process during which Han illegal immigrants and exiles played an important role. The Han worked the land from generation to generation, and came to perceive it as their own. At the turn of the twentieth century, as the financial situation for the government deteriorated, the Qing decided to levy a tax on banner land. Jilin first issued the order in 1902 and Heilongjiang in 1907. Bannermen were now urged to become farmers, and the former hired hands were allowed ownership of a portion of the land they tilled. Both bannermen and Han farmers would pay tax directly to the government. In this way, the state not only intended to change the role of the bannermen farmers but also gave the Han a chance to transform themselves into independent farmers. In some cases, the Han had to

pay a sum of money to their former bannermen landlords in order to gain ownership of their “portion” of the land.

In 1907, the central government sanctioned free sale of land, opening a new page in land tenure.⁵ Privatization of land converted the former bannermen into farmers and landlords, granted equal status to Han civilians and turned land into a marketable commodity. Since this policy was applied to banner land and all officially owned land, state ownership was swept away, just before the dynasty itself met its end.

It is true that from 1861 the region was partially open [jubu kaifang] to Han settlement and cultivation, but it was limited to areas around Hulan and Wuchang. According to local records, land was rented out to immigrants who had to pay tax in their sixth year of occupation. Two political factions in Beijing heatedly debated even this partial opening to colonization. The conservatives, who were opposed to the opening, won out. In 1869, the traditional prohibition policy was renewed.⁶ Hence, as of the late nineteenth century, the cultivation of North Manchuria remained very limited. In 1895, partial opening was resumed near the Hulan region, particularly along the Tongken River. This continued in limited areas until 1904, when the policy of overall opening [quanbu kaifang] was promulgated. Likewise, prior to the turn of the century, land tenure took the form of state ownership. Despite efforts by civilians to own land, private ownership was out of the question. It was the Order of 1907 that finally sanctioned private tenure.

⁵ “Jilin xingsheng dang’an” [Jilin Provincial Archive], 1 (6-1)-276. As quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 86. See also “Yuzhe huicun” [A Collection of Memorials Presented to the Emperor], in *Jingji diebao* [Economic News], January 22, 1908, as quoted in Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 246.

During the last few years of the Qing, land in North Manchuria was auctioned to purchasers who were first given a “trust ticket” [xinpiao] to register the acreage and payment. Then a “minor license” [xiaozhao] was granted. Finally, in the fifth year a formal license [zhizhao] affirming ownership would be issued.⁷ The government rapidly expanded private ownership throughout the region.⁸ Privatization of the wilderness was so hurried that in many areas it was accomplished almost overnight. The government sent out surveyors to delimit the purchased tracts and to confirm “permanent private ownership” [yongyuan weiye]. From 1904 to 1911, the total amount of auctioned land reached 5.63 million sang [9.38 million acres], of which almost 75% was sold between 1905 and 1907.⁹ Through this process the government realized immediate revenue from land sales, and created a long-term source of revenue in the new tax-paying landholders.

During the Republican era the remaining wilderness [yuhuang] was sold. While “remaining” may suggest small parcels of land, in many areas huge tracts of land remained. Statistics show that from 1912 to 1927 more than seven million sang [11.68 million acres] were sold.¹⁰ During this period, official emphasis was laid not only on the sale of land, but also on its cultivation. The government pressed the purchasers to open

⁶ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 115.

⁷ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 266.

⁸ In 1904, land in the Tongken River valley was put on sale, followed in 1905 by land in Gannan and Nehe. In 1908, land near Qiqihar, Mulan, Suihua, Nenjiang was auctioned, followed in 1909 by land in the border areas. See Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengming and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, pp. 123-124; Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 264.

⁹ Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 266.

¹⁰ Zhang Xiangling, *Shishuo Heilongjiang* [A Brief History of Heilongjiang], Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin Chubanshe, 1999, p. 64.

up the land in five years, after which they received their formal license and began paying taxes. By 1931 over 95% of the land in North Manchuria had become private property.¹¹

A number of problems and abuses emerged during the auctions. Some land dealers illegally sold wilderness and issued their own license, a so-called “horse ticket” [mapiao]. They collected rent and land tax in the name of the authorities but kept it for their own use.¹² This posed a problem for local administrators. In Wuchang and Tongbin, the so-called “big tail license” [daweizhao] allowed land purchasers to register acreage without official confirmation. Many buyers registered several sang of land but in fact they had several dozen or even hundreds of sang. In some serious cases, a few sang covered up several thousand sang. The term “big tail” was well deserved.¹³ These practices deprived the government of revenue. To redress such problems and to decrease lawsuits over disputed claims, the Heilongjiang and Jilin governments initiated a “clear-up survey” in 1914. The survey was completed in the western region in three years, but in the eastern region where land was plentiful, it was not completed until 1924. Heilongjiang established a Clear-up and Reclamation Bureau, under which twelve district offices managed their respective localities.¹⁴

¹¹ Zhang Xiangling, *op. cit.*, p. 64; also Zhang Xiangling, *Heilongjiang sishinian* [Forty Years of Heilongjiang], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1986, p. 14; Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 308.

¹² “Jilin jiangjun Changshun wei Binzhouting yizai Mayanhe qingfulishui shipi” [Approval of Jilin General Changshun to Redress the Land Tax Problem in Mayan River Valley of Binzhou Prefecture], April 13, 1902, in HPA: HS, p. 454.

¹³ Sun Zhanwen, HST, pp. 296-297.

¹⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 419.

The clear-up survey was intended to ascertain the actual acreage occupied and farmed by owners. It defined the boundaries of land blocks through new registration. During the survey, the so-called extra land [fudi] that was missed in the initial registration reverted to the state. It was later either legally repurchased by the former occupants or sold to other parties. In the western region of North Manchuria, the total income of the clear-up was 413,310 Chinese dollars. The government at once taxed the newly registered land. In twenty counties of Jilin, about one-third million sang [523,500 acres] of fudi was tracked down and sold.¹⁵ Overall, revenue from land sales and the land tax stood at approximately half the provincial budget in 1913, and rose to two-thirds of the budget by 1930.¹⁶ The clear-up survey boosted official revenue and minimized fraud, while reconfirming private ownership.¹⁷

The clear-up survey could not curb the trend toward large-scale land possession. After the opening in 1904, vast expanses of land were auctioned in large tracts to officials, military men, merchants and wealthy locals. Those in power, taking advantage of their position, “consolidated in their hands much of the best available land, buying

¹⁵ Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 299, p. 304.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 282.

¹⁷ The most well known example is the Wang Hongyou-Wang Fude case in Baiquan County. The Wangs purchased 226,800 sang [378,000 acres] of land. But they concealed 50,000 sang and sold them to settlers. During the clear-up survey, settlers refused to pay the land price, since they had bought the land much earlier, but the surveyors insisted they do so. The case drew much attention and was eventually settled in 1917, with the Wang family found guilty. The reconfirmation of private possession by the government emphasized the direct tie between the state and the individual owners. See Sun Zhanwen, HST, pp. 298-299, and Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 444-449.

hundreds or thousands of acres at low price.”¹⁸ For example, provincial officials Tian Shuchun and Hu Zhenqing bought 5,310 sang [8,850 acres] of land when the Dulu River valley was auctioned.¹⁹ In 1910, a surveyor named Sun “bought 1,350 sang [2,250 acres] of choice land when he conducted a cadastral survey in Baoqing county.” In 1908, according to an official report from Tangyuan, of 630,000 sang of land sold, 420,000 sang, or 67% of the total, was bought by a few influential persons. In Dalai in 1905, all of the auctioned land of 130,000 sang was bought by a man named Li Xin. In Tangwang River valley, ten merchants from Guangdong bought 9,000 sang.²⁰ Mishan county magistrate Qingkang in 1914 purchased at low price 34,000 sang within his circuit. In Boli, 70% of all land sold was bought by a few men of influence. At a single sale in 1917 Chinese prime minister Duan Qirui bought 17,989 sang in Zhuhe [Shangzhi], paying only a few cents per sang.²¹ Between 1921 and 1928, Wu Junsheng, in his seven years as governor of Heilongjiang, acquired land throughout the province at low cost. Another governor of Heilongjiang, Chang Yinhuai, had land assets valued at Chinese \$600,000 in and around Harbin and Shuangcheng. Many cabinet ministers, members of parliament, provincial governors and members of the business elites across China purchased state-sold land in North Manchuria at bargain prices.²²

¹⁸ Nongxie Gongbao [Agricultural Association Bulletin], No. 14, September 1915; as quoted in Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 284.

¹⁹ “Heilongjiang xingsheng guanguanchu dang’an” [Heilongjiang Provincial Management Archives], 21-3-298. See also Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 91.

²⁰ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, pp. 284-288.

²¹ Zhang Xiangling, *Heilongjiang sishinian*, p. 15.

²² Yi Baozhong, DNJY, pp. 113-114.

Large-scale land ownership dominated the region. In twenty-one counties in 1925 there were more than two thousand landowners who held in excess of 2,000 sang. This high degree of landlordism was only to be found in North Manchuria, small landholding being the norm in most of China.²³ Land ownership is illustrated in the following table.

Table 2.1

Distribution of Land Ownership in North Manchuria in 1925

Acreage of Land [1 sang = 1.67 acres]	Number of Families	Percentage of Total Households
More than 150 sang	5,000	0.5
75-150 sang	20,000	2.0
30-75 sang	75,000	7.5
10-30 sang	300,000	30.0
1-10 sang	250,000	25.0
Below 1 sang	50,000	5.0
Landless	300,000	30.0
Total	1,000,000	100.0

²³ In Nenjiang, ten owners each had land from 900 to 2,800 sang for a total of 17,380 sang. In Nehe, fifteen owners each had from 15 to 45 square li [1 li equals half a kilometer]; in Keshan, one owned 5,000 sang, two owned 1,600 sang, one owned 1,000 sang and one 600 sang; while 600 owners each had 100 sang. In Mulan, twelve owners each had from 100 to 1,000 sang. In Tonghe, one-fourth of landowners possessed 2,250 to 18,000 sang. In Binxian, twenty owners each had more than 500 sang while 500 owners had land from 100 to 500 sang. In Fangzheng, one owner had 4,000 sang. In Yilan, one had 850 sang while several had 500 sang. In Boli, six owners had from 1,800 to 3,600 sang. In Huachuan, two had 2,000 sang, and forty-three had 2,000 sang. In Zhaozhou, one had 1,700 sang, one had 1,000 sang, one had 900 sang, one 600 sang and 900 owners each had 100 sang. In Shuangcheng, 100 owners each had from 300 to 1,000 sang. In Wuchang, one owner had 45,000 sang, one 9,000 sang. In Acheng, several each had 1,200 sang. In Zhuhe, one owner had 90,000 sang, one 45,000 sang, six had from 32,500 sang to 45,000 sang. In Ning'an one had 112,000 sang, one 3,000 sang, one 2,000 sang, one 1,500 sang. In Muling, two owned 1,200 sang. In Mishan, four had 9,000 sang, and fourteen had 4,500 sang. In Hulin, one 18,000 sang, four had from 630 to 4,500 sang. In Raohe, four had 45,000 sang. In Tongbin, three had from 700 to 800 sang and more than 100 owners each had more than 200 sang. See Sun Zhanwen, HST, p.322. [One sang equals 1.67 acres].

(Source: Sun Zhanwen, Heilongjiang shengshi tansuo [Exploration of the History of Heilongjiang Province], Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1983, p.323)

The above statistics show that around 30% of residents had no land, while poor peasants (those with less than 10 sang), constituted another 30%. In other words, the majority of settlers (60%) possessed little or no land. Further figures indicate the concentration of landholding in 1925.

Table 2.2

Land Possession of 700,000 Families in North Manchuria, 1925

Category	Number of Families	Percentage of Total Population	Percentage of Land Owned
Landlords and Rich Families [30 sang+]	100,000	14.3	52.0
Middle Peasants [10-30 sang]	300,000	42.8	39.0
Poor Peasants [less than 10 sang]	300,000	42.9	9.0
Total	700,000	100.0	100.0

(Source: Sun Zhanwen, Heilongjiang shengshi tansuo [Exploration of the History of Heilongjiang Province], Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1983, p. 324)

Statistics vary according to time and place of collection. However, the data clearly show that land was concentrated in the hands of a small number of owners, while a large

number of settlers possessed little or no land. However, seen from a different angle, it is possible to say that majority of settlers had some land even if it was only a little.

Land transactions were frequent. Each year about seven percent of the total land in North Manchuria changed hands.²⁴ When land was sold, relatives were given priority to purchase. If relatives declined to buy, the land would be sold to other parties.²⁵ Up to the 1920s, as more and more immigrants poured in, the opportunity to purchase often fell into the hands of tenants who had worked the land for many years and had saved enough money to buy.²⁶ Transactions such as these might have reduced large landholdings, since more small farmers became owners. Yet since landlords also had the chance to acquire more land, large properties still dominated. Another factor that might have reduced large landholding was the inheritance practice that gave all male descendants equal rights of ownership. The absence of primogeniture might have undermined large landholding. However, even when large estates were divided, the portions received by the sons would still rank as a substantial holding.²⁷

In discussing the acquisition of land, some consideration should be given to the impact of land prices on the evolution of ownership. While prices were affected by specific local circumstances, speculation was the primary factor driving them generally upward. In the first decade of the twentieth century, land was sold in large parcels at low

²⁴ DTJD: BMN, p. 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁶ Franklin L Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

price, especially to officials. Once title was granted, speculation followed. In some areas, prices rose several times in a few years. For example, when land in Mishan was sold at the turn of the century, the price was 120 diao per fang [45 sang, or 75 acres]. By 1914, the price had reached 5,000 diao.²⁸ The second factor affecting price was the quality of land. Generally speaking, the land was graded into several categories.²⁹ The third factor was the degree to which land had been improved through investment of labour. In this regard, land was divided into two classes. Wilderness [shengdi] which was arable but unimproved was naturally cheaper than cultivated land [shudi] that had been tilled for some years. In the southern part of North Manchuria, where agriculture was more developed, cultivated land was at its most expensive.³⁰ The fourth factor was geographical location. In the remote areas, where communications were poor, the price was low. Finally, some land was tainted with natural chemicals, such as soda which increased the saline-alkali content of the soil, thus reducing its value. Land in river valleys that were susceptible to inundation, as in Suihua, Qinggang and Baiquan, went at a low price. Not only did cultivated land in private hands become more expensive, but so did wilderness land sold by the government. For example, between 1919 and 1922, the price of uncultivated land was \$1 per sang, while in 1928 first-class land was valued at

²⁷ The law gave preference to males to inherit land. The sons had absolute right to the deceased father's land. In case a man had no son, his brother or brother's son would take over ownership. The last inheritor was the owner's daughter. DTJD: BMN, p. 50.

²⁸ "Ji Chang Ribao" [Jilin-Changchun Daily], November 14, 1914, quoted in Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 265.

²⁹ For example, in Boli in 1914 the first class was sold at ninety Jilin dollars per fang [45 sang], the second class at seventy and the third class at sixty. See: "Ji Chang Ribao," November 8, 1914, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 36. In 1914, the Heilongjiang provincial government established three classes of land, the first to be sold at three silver dollars per sang, the second at two dollars and the third at one dollar. See Kenwu Gongbao [Reclamation Bulletin], No. 1, December 1914, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 38.

\$10 per sang and second class at \$7.³¹ In twenty-four counties of North Manchuria, in the two years from 1925 to 1927, land prices increased by 22.3%, and in Binxian prices jumped by 64% between 1922 and 1923.³²

While settlers regarded land as their most valuable asset, sometimes they had to abandon it. Besides bandit attacks which forced settlers to leave their land temporarily, other factors such as the presence of toxins also played a part. In an area of Qingcheng [Qing'an] County, the water contained toxins that "caused many women and children to perish. Fearful of what was happening, many families fled." In another area of the same county, settlers who had lived there two decades came down with a mysterious disease.

Most women, children and youths died. Only the old men survived without serious physical damage. The young survivors all grew short, with broad waist, big joints and twisted legs and arms. They were unable to undertake manual labor. Seeing the tragedy, many deserted the land. Before leaving, they affixed their land licenses to their walls to attest ownership.

However, they never returned and their ownership was eventually forfeited. In an area of Baiquan, the contaminated water apparently afflicted women who died in great numbers, forcing settlers to evacuate and relinquish the land they had cultivated.³³

Surrender of ownership was encouraged by government when owners were unable or unwilling to cultivate the land. This policy was termed "promotion of cultivation"

³⁰ DTJD: BMN, p. 113.

³¹ "Jilinsheng zhengfu dang'an" [Jilin Provincial Archive], 11 (7-7)-2199, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 117.

³² Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 116.

³³ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 441-442, p. 449.

[cuiken]. Some purchasers had no immediate plans to develop the land or else intended to hold it for speculation. Procrastination and deliberate delay impeded frontier development. In 1908 Heilongjiang Governor Zhou Shumo noted:³⁴

Of the land sold, only 30% is under cultivation. It has become common practise that wealthy and influential families buy large tracts for profit. As soon as the land is bought, the purchasers raise the price so high that ordinary settlers have no money for purchase. Regrettably, the land remains wilderness.

Most officials remained silent since they feared that any action would incur the hostility of wealthy landowners. Only a few adventurous officials challenged absentee landlords, urging them either to give up ownership or begin cultivation. For example, by 1913 most land had been sold in Raohe. Few big purchasers undertook cultivation; consequently, county magistrate Zhao Bangze enforced a policy in 1913 demanding cultivation within six months. Landlords failing to do so would surrender ownership while receiving compensation at half the original price. If a landlord let the deadline pass, ownership was automatically forfeited and the government had the right to sell the land.³⁵

As of the mid-1920s, a large amount of the land sold earlier by the government in North Manchuria was still unimproved. Some absentee landlords might have passed away, and some might have abandoned their land without concern, since they had spent so little to obtain it. Whatever the reason, their idle land “delayed tax collection and seriously hampered local development.” To redress the problem, the Heilongjiang

³⁴ Governor Zhou Shumo’s Memorial Presented to the Emperor, vol. 1, as quoted in Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 264 and Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 121.

provincial government in 1928 implemented the “rush tilling policy” [qiangken], which allowed local magistrates to issue new licenses to whoever paid to open up the land. Any Chinese citizen who filed an application and paid the fee to a county magistrate could become a new owner, a so-called mandatory tiller [qiangkenhu]. However, owners facing dispossession could keep their land, provided they undertook cultivation within half a year. The policy manifested the power of the state to terminate previous ownership.³⁶ It embodied three fundamental concepts: payment and residence on the land would lead to ownership, ownership would be guaranteed by labor invested in the land, and residency and management of the land would be inseparable from possession. Favourable to settlers and unfavourable to absentee landlords, the policy initiated a land rush. Consequently the acreage of cultivated land increased.³⁷ The policy was heralded as “one of the greatest political measures in the development of the whole Northeast.”³⁸ Nevertheless, there were cases of powerful families using their influence to make it a dead letter.³⁹

Although almost all land in North Manchuria became privately owned, it is noteworthy that there still existed a small amount of “no-man’s land.” It belonged neither to the state nor to individual owners. Such land was to be found throughout the region,

³⁵ “Shu Raohe xianzhishi Zhao Banze tiaochen zhengjiancheng” [Statement of Raohe Magistrate Zhao Banze on the Local Situation], December 28, 1913, in HPA: HS, p. 688.

³⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 719-721.

³⁷ Liaoningsheng Dang’anguan [Liaoning Provincial Archive], No. 160, vol. 11, quoted in Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 295.

³⁸ Wu Xiyong, “Jindai Dongbei yimin shilue” [A Brief History of Recent Migration to the Northeast], in Dongbei Jikan [Northeast Forum], No.2, as quoted in Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 696.

³⁹ Franklin L. Ho, op. cit., p. 41.

and was usually referred to as common land. “This kind of land is shared by the community for herding cattle. It is on the perimeter of several families’ private property, and is not suited to cultivation. When the area was surveyed, this land was not officially defined as privately owned. It is not to be monopolized by any single family . . . but is to be used as common grazing ground.”⁴⁰ While small in area, this type of land presented a contrast to the prevailing pattern of private land ownership.

The rapid rise in private ownership depleted government-held land. Although the latter amounted to no more than 5% of the total area in 1931, it played a special role in frontier life. This land was utilized, for example, as education land [xuetian] for the support of schools and as experimental land [shiyantian] for crop improvement. Education land was especially important. In 1909, as land was being sold off, the government allocated a certain amount to local education. Each prefecture was to reserve 4,000 sang and each county 3,000 sang. All income from the land went to fund schools. The same year, the Heilongjiang provincial government established an administrative section called the Education Land Bureau, with special responsibility for cultivation of 20,000 sang of land in Gannan. This bureau also obtained another large parcel of 40,000 sang in the Nehe river valley. By 1910, this bureau had recruited 123 families as tenants and had bought 470 cattle in order develop the land to support local schools.⁴¹

The Republic continued the reservation of education land. In 1913, the Heilongjiang provincial government reiterated that each county “must allot 4,000 sang as education

⁴⁰ DTJD: BMN, p. 50.

land and improve it as soon as possible.”⁴² Within a short period, most of the education land was cultivated. Educational facilities were provided for and sometimes student tuition was covered. For example, in 1914 Heilongjiang set up its first Women’s Training School to assist poor girls. It was supported by 500 sang of land.⁴³ In the management of education land, Ma Shufang played a key role. Ma, an immigrant from Shandong, was educated in a Heilongjiang normal school. From 1907 to 1931 he held various positions in the local school system, the most important one being director of the Education Land Bureau. For overseeing the cultivation of land and boosting its income, he received many awards and was later elected a member of a national educational committee in Beijing.⁴⁴ As one of the most important forms of state property in North Manchuria during the first three decades of the twentieth century, education land served the public interest through the benefits it provided to the children of the region.

II. Land Lease, Tenancy and the Economic Life of Tenant Farmers

North Manchuria appeared as a promised land to the many immigrants who sought to escape the insecurity that characterized life for them in China Proper. For some, the land they acquired was seen as a commodity for speculation and greater wealth; for most it offered the opportunity to become self-supporting and modestly prosperous. But the

⁴¹ Jilin xingsheng dang’an [Jilin Provincial Archive], 1(6-1)-221, quoted in Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 226.

⁴² Lin Chuanjin, *Heilongjiang jiaoyu zhuangkuan* [The Educational Situation of Heilongjiang], quoted in Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 704.

⁴³ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1108.

land did not come free, and its potential wealth was not realized without much hard toil. For many immigrants their future relationship with the land was as a tenant. Some chose that role voluntarily.

There are a number of reasons why settlers leased rather than purchased land. Although ownership of land was the frontier ideal, hardships and uncertainties faced the buyer. If an immigrant failed to build a successful farm, he would lose the land, his home and his investment. Purchase of auctioned land was highly risky for the poor. The psychological pressure intimidated those settlers into leasing. Even a small tract of land selling for a few dollars was expensive for the near penniless. Moreover, an immigrant who decided to own land had to bear the initial financial burden of erecting a house, digging a well, building a pen and purchasing food, fodder, seeds and other items. This amounted to a considerable sum. Hence, to be a tenant was a practical and necessary step for many new settlers.⁴⁵

Furthermore, having been tenants in their home provinces, immigrants arrived without the skills in land management, or the experience in coping with difficulties, which ownership imposed. Instead, they preferred caution to risk-taking. Tenancy could help them weather adversity. Through accumulation of savings, a tenant still might be able to purchase a small farm in a few years. Tenancy was a means by which immigrants

⁴⁴ Ma Fang, gen. ed., HRZ, vol. 5, 1994, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁵ Chen Han-seng, Notes on Migration of Nan Min [Refugees] to the Northeast, Shanghai: China Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1931, printed by Thomas Chu and Sons, Shanghai. This pamphlet was bound with other articles in one book by Cornell University Library and was entitled Institute of Pacific Relations: Publications on China, 1931, Cornell University Library, 1931, pp. 29-30.

might improve their life within the first decade of their arrival. As for refugees assisted by the government, they had no choice but to accept tenancy. Landlords allotted them land, seed, houses and food. In some cases, refugees were assigned to open up land, but had to return it to the landlord at the end of the fifth year, when they would retain 40% of it on lease.⁴⁶ Refugees generally had little control over their fate, and had to accept whatever was arranged for them.

The large acreages possessed by landlords compelled them to lease out land. There was no advantage in holding land to sell and not leasing it to tenants in the meantime. Speculators looked for tenants to make good their investment. Rental income was desired not only by landlords who owned several hundred sang of land, but even by those who owned only a few dozen sang.⁴⁷ While tenancy guaranteed income, the leased land also increased in value due to the investment of labour. Seeing that leased land made for profitable earnings, many landlords preferred to lease it out, rather than treat it purely as a speculative commodity, to be unloaded as quickly as possible.

Not all tenants persisted as lessees, since tenancy was regarded by many as a springboard to land ownership itself. As one researcher put it in 1929, “The Chinese . . . are hardworking, parsimonious and industrious . . . [they] keep the money and in time become established. . . . These traits are noticed in the gradual purchase of land by the tenant farmers who save up enough of their yearly earnings to become independent of

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁷ One male farmer was able to till about 3 to 5 sang annually. See DTJD: BMN, p. 102, p. 308.

their landlords.”⁴⁸ It was not uncommon to see rapid changes of status. It was claimed that “tenants soon became small landholders and hired hands overnight became tenants, while poor immigrants at once took over from them as hired hands. This is common in rural North Manchuria. The spiral of change continues like an endless stream.”⁴⁹

The social fluidity of the region makes it difficult to establish the number of tenants. The Chinese Eastern Railway Economic Investigation Bureau stated in 1928 that the total number of lessees was more than 35% of all rural families. This figure, according to the report, did not include petty landholders who cultivated their own small parcels and meanwhile leased some from landlords. In studying the incidence of tenantry, attention should be paid to regional variations. In some counties more than 50% of the population were tenants.⁵⁰ Tenants and semi-tenants made up 50.7% of the population of Huachuan County in 1921.⁵¹ The figure for Binxian in 1923 was 61%⁵²; and for Wuchang, 57.6%.⁵³

There was no single model of tenancy. Generally speaking, the most prevalent form of tenancy in North Manchuria from 1900 to 1931 was the system called pangqing, which had two sub-categories. One was pangneiqing [comprehensive tenancy], under which the landlord supplied land, cattle, house and seed in return for 70% of the crop. The other

⁴⁸ Tsao, Lien-En, Chinese Migration to the Three Eastern Provinces, Shanghai: The Bureau of Industrial and Commercial Information, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor, National Government of the Republic of China, Series No. 15, 1929, p. 52.

⁴⁹ DTJD: BMN, p. 82.

⁵⁰ DTJD: BMN, p. 87.

⁵¹ Huanchuan xianzhi [Huachuan County Register], vol. 2, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 377.

⁵² Jilin shengzhang gongshu dang'an [Archive of the Office of the Governor of Jilin Province], 11(7-7)-2084, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 378.

was pangwaiqing [land-only tenancy], under which the tenant met all farming expenses as well as the cost of a house, while the landlord supplied only the land. Under this latter arrangement, landlords received 30-40% of the harvest.⁵⁴ Other practices existed. In Yilan, some landlords practised “shared land” [fendi], under which the landlord leased uncultivated land to tenants who would obtain half of it as soon as they turned the wilderness into improved land. In the same county, “year sharing” [nianfen] permitted tenants to live rent-free during the first three years or so, after which they began payment. In Acheng, two forms of tenancy were dominant. One was the “floating lease” [fuzu], which allowed the landlord to terminate tenancy. The other was the “deposit lease” [yazu]: the higher the deposit paid by the tenant, the lower the rent.⁵⁵ In Aihui, a tenant had to pay deposit equal roughly to half the expected annual output.⁵⁶

Rent was most commonly paid in kind. Two forms of sharecropping prevailed. The first was “fixed rent” [ding’ezu], under which rent remained unchanged for a specified number of years. Figures for the last years of the Qing give the following rents, measured in dan [103 litres] per sang [1.6 acres]: Ning’an: 1.5 dan, Suifenhe: 1.0, Yilan: 2.0, Yanshou: 2.0, Wuchang: 1.5, Harbin: 1.4, Binzhou: 1.2, and Suihua: 1.3.⁵⁷ Rates for selected counties in the early Republic are, on average, somewhat higher, e.g., Binxian:

⁵³ Jilin shengzhang gongshu dang’an,” 11(7-7)-2096, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 378.

⁵⁴ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 371; Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 326.

⁵⁵ Jilinsheng dang’an [Jilin Provincial Archive], 1(6-1)-220.1

⁵⁶ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 372.

⁵⁷ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 290.

2.0-2.5; Dongning, 1.0; Fujin: 0.6-1.2, Harbin: 2.2 dan, and Shuancheng: 2.3.⁵⁸ Fixed rents were set for limited time periods, since land values were steadily rising, and landlords intended to profit from this.

The second form of sharecropping was called “proportional rent” [fenchengzu]. The rate depended on the quality of land and the amount invested by the two parties. During the late Qing, the common formula was 40% for landlords and 60% for tenants. In some areas, 50% for each was the norm, in Mishan County where landlords received more since they supplied tools. In some villages of Wuchang County, 60% went to the landlord. There were also cases of landlords asking exceptionally low rents in order to attract new tenants, as in the Tongken region, where the initial rate was set at 20%.⁵⁹ By the 1920s, proportional rent prevailed in most areas. A study by the CER Economic Investigation Bureau in 1923 remarked that in Jingxing “tenants and landlords share the crops equally and tenants are allowed all the straw. Landlords provide seeds, tools, cattle and houses.” It noted that in Hulan and Suihua, landlords generally took 40% of the crop and paid the land tax, while tenants provided their own seed and tools. When landlords took 50% of the crop, they also bore responsibility for seed and tools, while tenants invested only their labor.⁶⁰

A small proportion of tenants paid rent in cash. While convenient for the landlord, cash payments placed a burden on tenants, who had to sell produce on the market to raise

⁵⁸ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 370.

⁵⁹ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 291.

the amount required. Cash rent was first practiced during the late Qing in Ning'an, Mishan, Binxian, Duiqingshan, Yuqing, Bayan, Hulan and Qiqihar.⁶¹ Rates varied from county to county, but were no lower than 30% of the value of the total produce; in some areas they were much higher. Geographical location was an important factor in determining the prevalence of rent in cash. As commercialization advanced, more landlords demanded money rents. This was especially true of areas near the cities, where land increasingly was given over to vegetables and other products for the urban market.⁶²

Three to five years was the usual length of a tenancy agreement. Few landlords would commit themselves to a longer term. Seeing the rise in output and market value of their property, landlords sought higher rents when agreements were renegotiated. Rent levels steadily rose. For example, in Hulan County money rent equaled 1/16 of the value of the land in 1905, but by 1915 had reached 1/7 of the value. In the same county proportional rent under the sharecropping system stood at 40% of the crop in 1909, but by 1914 had risen to 50%.⁶³ In one district of Fujin, the fixed rent in 1921 was 0.9 dan per sang; by 1924 it had risen to 1 dan, and in 1927 reached 1.2 dan.⁶⁴ Further comparisons drawn from surveys conducted in 1911 and 1923 are given below.

Table 2.3

⁶⁰ DTJD: BMN, pp. 184-185.

⁶¹ Jilixingsheng dang'an [Jilin Provincial Archive], 1(6-1)-220.1, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 360.

⁶² DTJD: BMN, p. 183; Sun Zhanwen. HST, p. 327.

⁶³ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 370.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

Rents in Kind in North Manchuria [dou per sang: 1 dou = 10.3 litres]⁶⁵

County	1911	1923
Anda	10	18-22
Baiquan	10-20	22-26
Mulan	12-20	18-22
Shuangcheng	20	18-28
Wuchang	12-20	15-24
Ning'an	2-4	6-8

(Source: Sun Zhanwen, Heilongjiang shengshi tansuo [Exploration of the History of Heilongjiang Province], Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1983, p. 327)

It was manageable for a tenant to hand over 50% of his produce to the landlord in favourable years. The difficult moment came when a tenant experienced a poor harvest, or worse, a crop failure. Some landlords postponed payment of rent, allowing a tenant to pay a small portion annually over several years. Investigators found that in some counties, “lenient landlords during a poor harvest year waive or postpone rents . . . Some even give up their rent for the full year.”⁶⁶

In surveying tenant obligations, one special phenomenon should be noted. This is required labour. Lack of sufficient data makes it hard to measure the extent of the practice, but in some areas it was definitely part of the tenant’s obligations. For example,

⁶⁵ Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 327.

⁶⁶ DTJD: BMN, pp. 184-185.

in Lanxi tenants and landlords equally shared the crop, yet tenants had to work “voluntarily” for the landlord for twenty to thirty days per year.⁶⁷ This kind of required labour was a form of *corvée*, except that it was not government that demanded it. The labour was used in fieldwork, house construction, road building and suchlike tasks. Required labour was calculated on an accumulative basis. The tenant was not required to fulfill it in a consecutive period.

Even though landlords were deemed responsible by government for payment of the land tax, they shifted much of this obligation onto tenants. The land tax was not a big sum, but it tended to increase steadily. Beginning in 1914 the government required payment in cash at the rate of twenty cents to half a dollar per *sang*, depending on land value.⁶⁸ By 1925 the rate had risen to about five dollars per *sang*.⁶⁹ Thus in little over a decade the land tax increased more than ten times. In the late 1920s, five dollars was equivalent to about 5% of the value of the land. One study shows that many landlords paid only two dollars, while requiring their tenants to pay three. Additional surtaxes were also shifted to tenants.⁷⁰ Furthermore, a tenant farmer could not avoid paying the special grain tax, a direct tax charged at the market when he sold his grain for cash.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶⁸ Heilongjiang Gongbao [Heilongjiang Bulletin], August 19, 1914.

⁶⁹ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 384.

⁷⁰ Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁷¹ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 759-760.

Since a certain portion of the land tax, usually 30%, went to county administration, the county government had to hold on to all of its territory as a tax base.⁷² Counties thus might fight over title to an intermediate zone. For example, in 1928 the Mingshui magistrate refused to surrender the county's eastern zone, whose "heavily populated choice land" was vital to local revenue.⁷³ In the same year, Anda County refused to accept the loss of its northern zone to the neighboring county of Lindian, since relinquishment of the territory meant a "reduction of ten percent of the county's revenue."⁷⁴ In 1929, the Lindian magistrate pleaded with the provincial government that his county retain Xiaohaozi when the province planned to assign it to Taikang county. The magistrate stated: "It will be hard for the county to manage its finances if it loses Xiaohaozi . . . taxes will be diminished, and money for police and schools will disappear. This will deeply affect our county."⁷⁵

Cash played an important role in the life of peasants, as they needed money to buy land, pay taxes and sometimes rent, and purchase from the market. An investigation conducted between 1922 and 1924 showed that cash transactions constituted 58.8% of the farmer's income, and 57.3% of his expenditures.⁷⁶ The circulation of numerous

⁷² Ibid., p. 708.

⁷³ "Mingshui shezhiyuan Zhao Quanbi zhuanbao minyi qingqiu gengzheng xianjie bingqing gai xiancheng" [Petition of Mingshui Administrator Zhao Quanbi on behalf of the Local People to Redemarcate the County Boundary and Establish a County Government], HPA: HS, pp. 545-546.

⁷⁴ "Anda xianmin daibiao yaoqiu tingzhi chonghua jiezhi cheng" [Petition of Anda County Representatives to Stop Boundary Redemarcation], HPA: HS, p. 539.

⁷⁵ "Lindian xianzhang Zhang Mianlu zhuanbao nongshanghui shengshu Xiaohaozi yinghuagui Taikang cheng" [Lindian County Magistrate Zhang Mianlu Delivers Statement of Agricultural and Commercial Association that Xiaohaozi should be Part of Taikang], HPA: HS, p. 810.

⁷⁶ DTJD: BMN, p. 162, p. 235; Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 186.

currencies presented problems for farmers. In contrast to China Proper, there circulated in North Manchuria a wide range of banknotes, including foreign currencies.⁷⁷ While this may have been partly inescapable, given the nature of frontier commerce, the presence of so many currencies inconvenienced the farmer, who might obtain one currency for sale of his produce at market, and then have to convert it into a different currency required by the landlord. Fees and discounts imposed in currency conversion depreciated the value of the farmer's product. According to one estimate, the loss on each monetary transaction was 3% of the original value.⁷⁸

Commercialization compelled the farmer to obtain cash. When he desired to purchase even a small parcel of land, or to purchase seeds, tools and other necessities, he needed money. Since the spring farming season demanded considerable outlays, a farmer short of cash had to borrow from any source. Statistics show the interest rate on loans increasing decade by decade. For example, in 1909 the rate was 1% per annum in Ning'an and Yilan counties, but by 1916 it had climbed to 2.5% in Ning'an and 2.7% in Yilan. In some places, the rate was as high as 6%.⁷⁹ In 1909, the interest rate on loans in Wuchang, Bayan, Hulan, Lanxi and Shuancheng counties was 1.5% per month, but

⁷⁷ There were over a dozen different currencies circulating in North Manchuria, among which were copper coins, silver coins, governmental notes, provincial notes, city notes such as the Harbin dollar and private banking notes. Both Russian and Japanese currencies were also widely used. See "Bei Man liutong huobi zhi gaishu" [A Brief Introduction to North Manchuria Currencies], December 1927, in Ha'erbin jingji ziliao wenji [Harbin Economic History Materials], Ha'erbin Shi Dangan'guan, vol. 4, 1991, pp. 152-169.

⁷⁸ Franklin L. Ho conducted a personal investigation during his trip through Manchuria in 1930. He carried five dollars to change into various local currencies. At the end of his trip, he had \$2.75 left, \$2.25 having disappeared in the process of exchange. The loss on each exchange was about 3%. See Franklin L. Ho, op. cit., p. 49.

⁷⁹ Zhongguo jingji nianjian [Chinese Economic Yearbook], 1934, chapter 5. See Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 376.

fifteen years later it had reached 8%-15% per month, with a shortened six-month repayment period replacing the former one-year term.⁸⁰ Some creditors demanded interest of 40%-100% per crop season. In Hailun in 1930, one usurer charged an interest rate of 1% per day, with a forty-day limit on the loan. Despite the high cost of money, borrowers were still plentiful. According to one observer, most were farmers who had put themselves at the mercy of loan sharks.⁸¹

The high rate of interest, however, did not guarantee all farmers access to loans. As one scholar observed, “in the rural areas it was difficult to obtain loans even at high interest.”⁸² The poorer farmers more often than not had to sell their crops long before harvest time, a practice termed “green sale” [maiqing]. This was common among small tenant farmers who had to pay rent or a deposit or buy farming essentials. These farmers took a heavy loss, since green sale prices were about two-thirds of what their produce would fetch at harvest time.⁸³ Local governments banned the practice in 1928. However, green sales continued surreptitiously, as many farmers were in desperate need of cash.⁸⁴

Even at normal market time farmers were at a disadvantage. Grain transactions in North Manchuria were monopolized by merchants who bought from the farmers, and

⁸⁰ Sun Zhanwen, HST, pp. 328-329.

⁸¹ Franklin L. Ho, op. cit., p. 46.

⁸² Liu Guoming, “Gailiang Dongsansheng nongye zhi wojian” [My Suggestions for Improving Agriculture in the Three Northeastern Provinces], in *Dongbei xinjianshe* [New Construction in the Northeast], vol. 1, no. 3, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 385.

⁸³ Franklin L. Ho, op. cit., p. 47.

⁸⁴ Jilin shengzhang gongshu dang’an” [Archive of the Office of the Governor of Jilin], 11(7-7)-2163, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 386.

sold to urban residents, food companies and foreign dealers. As food exports became more prominent in the region's economy, grain stores were set in every town throughout the region. Major grain exchanges were concentrated in Harbin, Qiqihar and other large cities. Some landlords even ran seasonal stores called xuejipu ['til the snow falls store], which operated from the autumn until winter set in.⁸⁵ County seats were the site of numerous grain stores. For example, in 1926 the Baiquan Commercial Association listed 28 of them in the town. These stores purchased about 80% of all agricultural products, while farmers themselves sold the remaining 20% directly to merchants in Anda and Harbin.⁸⁶ Farmers received an estimated 80% of the value of their grain, while the middlemen took about 20%.⁸⁷ Merchants, it was said, employed fraudulent methods, such as dishonest weights and unjustifiable deductions, to exploit farmers. Sometimes merchants victimized farmers because the latter failed to deliver on a green sale. An instance of this occurred in 1912, when merchants confiscated carts, cattle and other belongings because farmers could not meet their obligation as a result of a poor harvest.⁸⁸

In surveying the farm economy of the frontier, it is important to note the role played by hired hands. Most of these people were recent immigrants to the region. Hired hands might be seen as para-tenants, who worked as salary earners for a number of years and saved enough money to lease land as tenants or even purchase a little land and become

⁸⁵ Chen Jisheng, "Heilongjiangsheng liangzhan gaikuang" [Granary Stations in Heilongjiang Province], in *Heilongjiang Wenshi Ziliao*, Ha'erbin, 1980, p. 178.

⁸⁶ Wang Wei, "Xia'erwenmin de 'labuwande Baiquan'" [The Famous 'Agriculturally Rich Baiquan County'], in *Baiquan Wenshi Ziliao*, vol. 3, Baiquan: Baiquanxian wenshi ziliao bianweihuan, 1988, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

semi-tenant farmers. While it is true that the majority of new arrivals immediately became tenants, there were always some who first worked a short time as hired hands. Generally speaking, the number of hired hands tended to be high in the newly opened areas. For example, in eastern Heilongjiang, which had just been opened for settlement, hired hands in 1908 made up as much as 30% of the population. It was higher in some other counties: in Yanshou it was 50% and in Mishan 60-70%.⁸⁹ The proportion dropped as hired hands turned themselves into tenant farmers or independent landholders. In 1929 the figure for hired hands in Heilongjiang province stood at 13% of the population.⁹⁰ Income statistics help explain the rapid improvement in the position of so many hired hands. In 1910 the average annual wage in Fangzheng County was 200 diao for a hired laborer between the age of 20 and 30, and 100 diao for one below 20. At this time the price of land in the same county was 200 diao per sang. After deducting a portion of his wage for consumption, a hired hand still was able to save enough to lease or purchase land within a few years.⁹¹ In 1917, the annual wage of a male hired hand in Heilongjiang ranged from \$38 to \$75, while land prices ranged from \$100 to \$300 per sang. Rental or purchase of land still remained in sight for the hired hand after several years of labour.⁹²

⁸⁸ Chen Jisheng, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186.

⁸⁹ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 292.

⁹⁰ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 382.

⁹¹ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, pp. 291-292. In Shuangcheng, the annual salary for a hired hand was usually 100-150 diao; in Ning'an 80-100 diao; in Mishan 200 diao; Sanxing [Yilan] 170-180 diao; Bayan 90-160 diao; Suihua 150-160 diao; Qiqihar 140-150 diao; Yanshou 130-140 diao. See Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 373.

⁹² Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 373.

III. Small farms, Pre-modern Technology and an “Economic Miracle”

While large-scale landholding existed in North Manchuria, huge latifundia never developed on the Latin American model. The formation of large estates was balanced by the steady growth of small farms. According to a scholar writing at the time, farms of less than 30 sang [48 acres] constituted nearly 75% of all farms in North Manchuria in the late 1920s. Small-scale farming was the economic backbone of frontier agriculture.⁹³

Chinese writers have taken a number of perspectives on the small farm economy. Some consider it an example of capitalist development, some explain it in terms of the burgeoning commodity economy, and some see it a part of a semi-feudal, semi-colonial economy.⁹⁴ Each viewpoint contains a kernel of truth but overstates the case. Although North Manchuria was part of the Chinese economy, it had its own distinctive frontier features. It carried capitalist elements in its urban industrial sector, yet capitalism was not dominant in the whole region. It possessed traits of the commodity economy, since products were sold on the market, yet it preserved characteristics of a subsistence economy. It exhibited elements of colonialism, since the Russians controlled the Chinese Eastern Railway, but beyond the railway zone Chinese dominated the rural areas. Since most rural residents engaged in small-scale production, they consumed much of what they produced. It is inappropriate to conceive of their economy as capitalist. It is better see it as a mixed economy, with the traditional Chinese small peasant household at the forefront, against a commodity, capitalist and colonial background.

⁹³ Franklin L. Ho, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

At the grass roots level, farmers were highly self-sufficient. They made most of their own tools, and produced most of the vegetables and fruit they consumed. Almost all settlers grew cabbages, turnips, onions, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers, and potatoes and stored them for year-round use.⁹⁵ Sorghum and millet from their farms provided their staple food.⁹⁶ Farmers did not need or rarely needed the market for their basic provisions. Yet farmers maintained constant contact with both the domestic and international market. They sold soybeans and wheat in order to obtain cash. Direct and indirect ties with the outside world brought them into contact with international commerce. It was demand from the world market that presented the frontier with the fastest avenue to prosperity.

Farmers in North Manchuria were blessed with fertile soil, along with a favourable climate. The colour of the earth was so dark that it earned the name of “black soil.” It was at least half a meter—sometimes even several meters—deep, and contained rich organic materials that conserved water and stimulated crop growth. Although winter was long, the region benefited from the summer climate, when it received abundant sunlight and rain. The fertility of the soil was such that, as one observer noted in 1930, “for twenty years no fertilizers are needed.” Some even joked that chopsticks could grow from this rich soil.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 417, p. 185; Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 300.

⁹⁵ DTJD: BMN, p. 108, p. 177.

⁹⁶ Settlers in North Manchuria consumed sorghum and millet as staple foods, supplemented by soybean products and the like, while they sold wheat and soybean to the domestic and international markets.

⁹⁷ Nan Yang, Kaizhi Dongbei yu minsheng guoji (The Development of the Northeast and the People’s Livelihood), in Chinese Eastern Railway Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan, October 1930, p. 1.

A commercial economy necessitated the investment of many years' hard work. The wilderness was poorly served by roads. Most of it was crossed only by narrow trails and man-trodden paths. The winter was long and harsh. Living in dugouts or crude shelters in the first year brought great hardship. Bitter cold penetrated the rough shingles, and many mornings settlers awoke to shake off a mantle of ice from their quilts. In the spring, they burnt the grass cover and ploughed the earth. Settlers wagered their lives against "ice, snow, fire, and wild animals like bears, tigers and wolves." The building of farms, in one writer's words, was but "a crystallization of blood and tears."⁹⁸ The hardships the settlers endured bound them to the soil. As one scholar of the region proclaimed, "the Chinese are an agricultural race . . . everywhere they go, sand dunes become wheat fields, tropical jungles become habitats, and even frozen Manchuria and Siberia become productive."⁹⁹ While this observation may be tinged with patriotism, the fact is that settlers weathered misfortune, conquered the wilderness, built their small farms, and established an agricultural economy. Without their hard labour, the emergence of North Manchuria as a prosperous frontier region would not have been possible.

The small farm was commensurate to the settlers' level of farm technology. Possessing few modern machines, settlers relied upon traditional farming tools. Farming techniques were adapted to the new circumstances. Two methods deserve special attention. One was the traditional practice of planting on ridges. It reached a degree in North Manchuria not hitherto seen. Farmers built ridges, four to seven inches high and

⁹⁸ Zhao Shumin, *Songhuajiang de lang* [The Waves of the Songhua River], Taipei: Zhongyang Ribaoshe [Central Daily Press], 1985, pp. 28-30. This novel reflects frontier life in Heilongjiang.

seventeen to twenty-five inches wide, with furrows between. Seeds were sowed with man-made tools to make crops in neat lines. The advantage of this was that summer rain was trapped in these furrows. There was irrigation without inundation. A second advantage was that farmers need not leave fallow any part of their land but could alternate ridge and furrow annually. Most deep-rooted crops gained sufficient nutrients from the rich soil and enough water from the furrows.¹⁰⁰

The second practice was crop rotation. In the first year, settlers usually sowed millet. The second year they moved to wheat. Only in the third year were soybeans and sorghum sown. From then on, a triennial rotation of millet, wheat, soybean and sorghum was followed.¹⁰¹ In some counties such as Wuchang, rotation was combined with complex planting. Settlers simultaneously sowed several crops on the same ridge; since many pathogens did not attack multiple crops this method benefited farmers greatly.¹⁰² In some parts of the southwestern region where the soil contained a certain amount of alkalinity, settlers let land lie fallow for one year in three in order to retain soil fertility.¹⁰³

The adaptation of traditional techniques earned settlers a reputation as pioneer farmers. They brought with them traditional techniques of tool making and adapted them to the new land. At least several dozen farming tools were used to sow, hoe, weed, cut, thresh, winnow and store. As in *China Proper*, men and oxen were the sources of power

⁹⁹ Tsao Lien-en, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ DTJD: BMN, p. 61. See also Tsao Lien-en, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰¹ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 275.

¹⁰² Jilin xingsheng dang'an [Jilin Provincial Archive], 1(6-1)-220, as quoted in Kong Jinwei, QDDJ, p. 307.

in the fields. Techniques belonged to the pre-industrial era. While modern machinery began to penetrate the frontier region, its use was limited to large companies which cultivated only a small proportion of the land, such as in Suihua County. The overwhelming majority of settlers worked small farms, where machines were rarely to be seen. Settlers could not afford to purchase a tractor priced at \$10,000.¹⁰⁴ An official report claimed that foreign machines “were not suited to farming in the region.” Some who bought tractors refilled the engines with soybean oil instead of more expensive engine oil, thus “turning the tractors into a pile of scrap iron in a short time.”¹⁰⁵ In 1929, there were only about 100 tractors operating in North Manchuria, a territory bigger than France or Germany.¹⁰⁶

Machines gradually gained a foothold. However, adaptation for special conditions was modest. For example, Zhang Hongjun, an agriculturist who earned a master’s degree in agriculture from a U.S. college, noted the unsuitability of western machines to the small farm economy of the frontier. In 1930, he adapted them by modifying their ploughs, hoes and sowers and by removing the motor. His alterations earned plaudits from settlers, even if the original machines were no longer mechanized.¹⁰⁷ Farmers remained indifferent to modern technology or else found its cost beyond their means. A

¹⁰³ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 698.

¹⁰⁴ Nongshang gongbao [Agricultural and Commerce Bulletin], No. 14, September 1915, in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 274.

¹⁰⁵ Haiguan shinian baogao, 1922-1931, [Customs Reports, 1922-1931], Vol. 1, pp. 212-213, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 287.

¹⁰⁶ Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 156.

CER study indicates that in the early 1920s expenditures on tools made up only 6% of the farmer's outlay, as opposed to 57% on land, 15% on housing, and 9% on cattle.¹⁰⁸

Scientific agriculture was practised on a limited scale. As early as 1907, Heilongjiang established its first agricultural experimental farm in Qiqihar. Others were then set up throughout the province. They delivered useful information to farmers, supplied them with choice seeds, and inculcated in them basic knowledge of modern farming.¹⁰⁹ Jilin Province encouraged settlers to participate in its annual agricultural exhibition. In 1918, at the ninth meeting, Zou Taisheng of Dongning County was awarded for his high-grade soybean seeds.¹¹⁰ Such activities contributed to raising awareness of modern farming techniques among the rural population.

Settlers allocated usually one-third of their land to millet and sorghum. They consumed these crops and used the stalk as fodder for cattle. Most other crops, especially soybean and wheat, were sold. The demand from the outside world played an important role in the mix of crops. From 1900 to 1931, two trends in international demand were decisive. Until about 1918, Russian demand for wheat encouraged settlers to grow this crop. They supplied Russian soldiers in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-05, and settlers

¹⁰⁷ Fengtiansheng gongshu dang'an [Fengtian Provincial Administration Archive], vol. 4481, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, pp. 286-287.

¹⁰⁸ DTJD: BMN, p. 308.

¹⁰⁹ Heilongjiang tixueshisi dang'an [Heilongjiang Province Education Ministry Archive], 21-5-148 and Heilongjiang shengxingzheng gongshu dang'an, [Heilongjiang Provincial Administration Archive], 62-3-1392, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 266, p. 271.

¹¹⁰ Jilin shengxingzheng gongshu dang'an [Archive of the Office of the Governor of Jilin], 11(7-7)-1975, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 273.

living in the Russian maritime province.¹¹¹ A survey done in 1908-1909 shows that most counties in North Manchuria had given over approximately a third of their land to wheat, for example: Yilan: 50.9%, Binzhou: 35.4%, Mishan: 40.4%, Suifen: 47.3%, Bayan: 33%, Mulan: 30%, Lanxi: 35%, Hailun: 30%, Suihua: 30%, and Hulan: 25%.¹¹²

However, because of rising European demand after World War One, a soybean mania broke out. North Manchuria farmers began switching from wheat to soybean, and by the late 1920s were dedicating about 35% of their land to the crop.¹¹³ In some localities, the figure reached 80%. “Since soybean enjoys high export demand and is an easy way to earn cash, farmers are mad over this crop.”¹¹⁴ Statistics display the rapid growth of soybean acreage in North Manchuria. In 1909, the figure was 15%, by 1922 it had jumped to 26.7%, in 1924 it was 31.3%, and by 1930 it had reached 37.8%. Most North Manchuria settlers had become soybean growers by the late 1920s. While settlers continued to grow millet and sorghum to provide their own food needs, the acreage devoted to soybean was increased at the expense of wheat. In 1922 wheat acreage stood at 17.6% of the total land area, but by 1926 had dropped to 9%.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ During the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian army consumed large quantities of wheat flour supplied by local producers. Afterwards the Russian Far Eastern provinces imported wheat heavily from North Manchuria. In 1910, the Chinese Eastern Railway transported four million puds [1 pud equals 16.38 kg] to the Ussuri region and one million puds to the maritime region. See Yuandongbao [Oriental News], December 6, 1910, quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, pp. 217-218.

¹¹² Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 216.

¹¹³ DTJD: BMN, p. 56, p. 307.

¹¹⁴ Ha'erbin jingji ziliao wenji [Harbin Economic History Materials], Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin shidang'anguan [Harbin City Archives], vol. 3, 1991, p. 101.

¹¹⁵ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 137, p. 235. In 1927 the percentage of land devoted to soybean in the following select counties was: Zhuhe [Shangzhi], 45, Mishan 43.6, Zhaodong 45, Baiquan 45.8 and Keshan 47.7.

Factors that affected output included weather, the use of fertilizer, and the quality of soil. Bumper harvests were expected annually unless natural disasters intervened. Farmers endeavored to maximize the yield, but output per acre was limited due to the lack of modern technology.¹¹⁶ In effect, gross productivity rose on account of manpower, not mechanization. As more immigrants arrived and more land was cultivated, the total output of the region rose dramatically. In the mid-1920s, annual soybean output for North Manchuria was 3,295,000 tons, and for South Manchuria 1,880,000 tons. According to one estimate, the total output of soybean from Manchuria as a whole represented 60-70% of global production. In other words, North Manchuria alone was producing about 40% of the world's soybean in the 1920s. The international market consumed over 91% of the North Manchuria's soybean production.¹¹⁷

With so much production going to foreign countries, the regional transportation system merits some note. The Chinese Eastern Railway, the South Manchuria Railway and the Chinese built railways played a key role in facilitating international trade. At the same time, traditional means of transportation were also important. By the time crops were harvested in October, snow was usually falling. What might seem to be an impediment actually proved an advantage. Since no comprehensive highway system existed, and since muddy local roads thwarted traffic, settlers did not have easy access to market during the summer. However, when the winter arrived, the frozen roads and tracks were readily used. In fact, the whole countryside solidified into a thoroughfare.

¹¹⁶ In some areas, the output per sang [1.6 acres] reached 650 kg to 910 kg; see DTJD: BMN, p. 70, and Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 275.

“Horse-drawn carts move without difficulty over the plains in the winter . . . a cart loaded with 3,500 kilograms of grain can run at a high speed anywhere at this time.”¹¹⁸ In Hulan, an important communication center, “every year the earth froze in October and thawed in March. During wintertime, grain carts jammed streets and roads. At night, the noise of horses’ hooves often awoke the settlers.”¹¹⁹ The horse-drawn carts were an inseparable part of settlers’ economic life. In 1916 in Baiquan alone there were 6,987 carts. In 1926, despite losing half of its territory to adjacent counties, Baiquan still had 8,159 such carts for winter transport.¹²⁰ According to one estimate from the 1920s, North Manchuria, apart from the Lower Sungari [Songhua], depended on the horse-drawn cart to deliver 95% of its total cash grain to market.¹²¹

The carts hauled grain to the railway stations and then the railways took it on its next stage to the international market. After the completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway, North Manchuria grain was carried out through Vladivostok, Habarovsk, Dalian and other ports. Little freight went via Siberia to Europe. Events such as the Russo-Japanese War and the Russian Civil War reduced the volume of rail traffic from North Manchuria, but generally speaking the lines operated at full capacity. The grain trade turned urban centres such as Harbin into major communications hubs. Harbin was a fishing village in 1898. It soon developed into an international city. By the late 1920s, its population

¹¹⁷ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 185, p. 237.

¹¹⁸ DTJD: BMN, p. 36.

¹¹⁹ Hulan fuzhi [The Register of Hulan Prefecture], vol. 8, p. 22. See also Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 343.

¹²⁰ Wang Wei, “Xia’erwenmin de ‘labuwande Baiquan’”, p. 5.

¹²¹ DTJD: BMN, p. 36.

reached a third of a million. In 1928, total grain cargo moving through the city reached more than one million tons.¹²² One of the main reasons for building the Chinese Eastern Railway had been to carry North Manchuria grain. In 1908, 56% of the freight handled by the CER was grain.¹²³ By 1928, according to one estimate, agricultural products made up 80% of its cargo.¹²⁴

Besides Russia, the countries purchasing North Manchuria grain included Japan, Germany, Britain and a number of other European nations. The United States and Canada occasionally bought soybean from the region. Japan demanded large amounts of soybean cakes as fertilizer for its farms, and maintained regular business connections with the region. Second to Japan, Germany had special ties with the region; in the 1920s, Germany absorbed 40% of all soybean exported from Manchuria and took 60% of those exported to Europe. Other European countries purchased soybean to use for the extraction of oil, which was much cheaper than olive, coconut or peanut oil.¹²⁵ After World War One, Manchurian soybean gained an important place in the European economy. Germany for example imported 22,675 tons of soybean from Manchuria in 1920. The figure rose to 137,331 tons in 1924, and then soared to 847,724 tons by 1928. Statistics indicate that in 1929 Manchuria exported 2,800,786 tons of soybean overseas, about two-thirds of which was delivered to Europe. Moreover, Europe purchased soybean

¹²² Xi Xin, “You Haiguan maoyice laiguancha Ha’erbin zai jingji shangzhi jiazhi” [Harbin Economic Performance from the Customs Trade Records], *Ha’erbin jingji ziliao wenji*, vol. 1, 1990, p. 244.

¹²³ Kong Jingwei, QDDJ, p. 343.

¹²⁴ DTJD: BMN, Preface by Yi Lichun, p. 1.

oil; in 1926 some 147,500 tons of oil went to Europe, which accounted for 81.6% of the total export of soybean oil that year. The greater portion of soybean oil was also produced in North Manchuria.¹²⁶

The Chinese authorities were impressed, if not amazed, by the remarkable agricultural progress of the region and the profit gained from its international ties. The economy of North Manchuria was substantially rural and with respect to technology much behind the West, yet the speed with which it grew was startling. Terms such as “a high level of achievement,” “a quick march to modernization,” and “an economic miracle” were repeatedly used.¹²⁷ Not only did the rural areas enjoy this rapid growth, so did the urban. The expansion of farming and the huge demand of the global market stimulated affiliated industries, noticeably flourmills, oil-extracting plants and farming tool factories. The first flour mill was built in Harbin in 1900 and the second the following year. From 1900 to 1929 at least forty-two mills were established in the city.¹²⁸ Small farms were largely without modern machines; however, certain farm tools adapted from the West sold well. Hence, manufacturers from America, Germany, Britain, Russia and Italy established firms in Harbin in the 1920s which produced mainly farming

¹²⁵ Wang Shaocan, “Yi Ha’erbin wei zhongxinde Dongbeibu diqu sandou chukou qingkuang” [Export of the Three Varieties of Bean Products from Harbin, Centre of the Northeast], *Ha’erbin jingji ziliao wenji*, vol. 1, 1990, p. 264.

¹²⁶ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 181.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186, p. 389.

¹²⁸ Xian Yi, “Habu zhifenyue fazhan gaikuang” [An Outline of the Flour Industry in Harbin], *Ha’erbin jingji ziliao wenji*, vol. 3, 1991, pp. 82-83. One statistic shows that by 1927 there were 53 flour mills operating in Harbin. See Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 188.

tools.¹²⁹ Oil extracting industries in Harbin experienced a sudden boom in the two years from 1919 to 1921, when the number of oil plants jumped from 28 to 43. By 1923, there were fifty-six in the city.¹³⁰ According to one estimate, in the 1920s the output value of flour mills and oil plants in Harbin made up 80% of the total industrial product.¹³¹

Hence the “economic miracle” came from seeds planted deeply in the soil. The frontier could not have accomplished so much without the diligence of the settlers. The growth of the farming sector was so rapid that it accelerated the advancement of related manufactures and sped up urban growth. The economic miracle continued until the crash of 1929. The sharp drop in demand from the international market hit North Manchuria very hard. Some local people blamed the bumper harvests of the late 1920s for the sharp decline in prices, but it was the falloff in global demand that was the real cause. The price of soybean plummeted in Harbin. Taking the year 1928 as 100, the price index dropped to 62.7 in 1930 and fell further to 29.4 in 1931.¹³² The total amount exported in 1930 was only 1/6 of a typical year of the 1920s. Wheat and soybean piled up, and grain merchants went into bankruptcy.

¹²⁹ Cheng Shaojing, “Yi Ha’erbin wei zhongxin Xiyang geguo zai Man gangtieshi zhi xiaozhang [The Rise and Fall of the Western Steel Industry in Harbin], Ha’erbin jingji ziliao wenji, vol. 1, 1990, pp. 342-343.

¹³⁰ Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 187.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹³² Liu Zhuyin, Manzhou nongye jingji gailun [An Introduction to the Manchurian Agricultural Economy], p. 76, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 197.

The depression affected manufacturers as well, since their products had no purchasers. In 1930 more than 10% of Harbin's workforce was unemployed.¹³³ The sharp drop in demand for grain had caused a chain reaction. As the chairman of the Harbin Commercial Society put it in 1931, "after the Great War set off such high demand for soybean, our rural and urban economy prospered greatly . . . but now the depression has driven all business, whether in agriculture or in manufacturing, to the brink of ruin."¹³⁴ The depression especially affected frontier farmers. In the face of this sudden catastrophe, they were almost pushed back to a subsistence economy. For some farmers, it was more advantageous to burn soybean as fuel rather than sell it at such a low price.¹³⁵

What had been exposed by the onset of the depression was the problem of a one-crop dependency on the international market. Over three decades North Manchuria increasingly had tied itself fortunes to demand from the outside world. The local people seldom calculated the risks involved. The depression made the farmers of North Manchuria realize that dependence on a single export crop such as soybean put them at the mercy of forces beyond their control. After 1930, settlers sought a remedy by growing multiple crops instead of focusing so much on soybean production.¹³⁶ At the same time,

¹³³ Zuo Fei, "Minguo shijiunian Ha'erbin maoyi jiankuang" [General Commercial Conditions in Harbin in 1930], *Ha'erbin jingji ziliao wenji*, vol. 1, 1990, p. 283. See also Wang Cenbo, "Ha'erbin jinnianlai maoyi buzhen zhi yuanyin" [Reasons for the Recent Decline of Trade in Harbin], in *ibid.*, p. 288.

¹³⁴ "Jilin sheng zhengfu dang'an" [Jilin Provincial Government Archives], 11 (7-7)-2336, as quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 197.

¹³⁵ Chen Jisheng, "Heilongjiangsheng liangzhan gaikuang" [Granary Stations in Heilongjiang Province], *Heilongjiang Wenshi Ziliao*, 1980, p. 182.

¹³⁶ "Jilin shengzhengfu dang'an" [Jilin Provincial Government Archive], 11 (7-7)-2336; Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 199.

they endeavored to optimize the quality of their soybean in order to maintain its superiority in the reduced space of the global market.

Conclusion

Through the first three decades of the twentieth century, the working of the land was the central theme in the evolution of the region. With private ownership sanctioned early in the period, the great wilderness tracts held by the government were sold off, so that by the end of the 1920s over 95% of the land was privately owned. Because land became a profitable commodity, large-scale landholding emerged, fueled further by speculation. Small-scale peasant agriculture, usually tenant-based, was not lacking in importance, however. Seventy-five percent of the farms in North Manchuria in the 1920s were of under 30 sang in size.

New settlers had the chance to lift themselves out of the ranks of hired hands or tenant farmers and into the ranks of small landholders. They saw tenancy as an intermediate step towards this goal. Tenancy served the interests of landowners as well. Not only did tenants pay rent, they also had to share the land tax and various surtaxes. Because of commercialization, farmers had to undertake transactions in cash and pay high interest for loans. Farmers lost 10%-20% of the value of their produce when they dealt with grain merchants. Even though tenants carried such burdens, they were

normally better off than their counterparts in China Proper. The fertility of the frontier region enabled them to do more than merely survive.

Settlers developed contacts with the international market. North Manchuria supplied a growing world demand for soybean and wheat. This earned the frontier a place in the world economy. Through the 1920s millions of tons of food were supplied to Japan, North America and Europe each year. Agricultural production boosted the local economy, stimulated urban manufacturing, and spurred the growth of the cities. However, North Manchuria became too dependent on the global market. The economic crisis which began in 1929 struck a heavy blow at the frontier economy. Remedial measures were taken, but were interrupted by the Japanese invasion in 1931 and the subsequent imposition of colonial status upon Manchuria. However, the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931 laid solid ground for the future. Rapid economic growth took place after World War Two, especially following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949.

Chapter Three: Ethnic Transition to Agricultural Life

While the frontier may bring to mind a romantic image of native life, too often indigenous peoples around the world have found themselves at risk of assimilation or even annihilation as newcomers encroached on their land. From 1900 to 1931, the ethnic minorities of North Manchuria underwent a profound transformation, being largely assimilated into the growing Han population. The change was so radical and widespread that it amounted to a process of political, social and psychological revolution.

During the early Qing, ethnic peoples predominated in the frontier region, although isolated Han Chinese settlements of penal colonists or illegal squatters were to be found. In 1780, the Han made up thirty-nine percent of the total population, but by 1812 the Han outnumbered the ethnic population. An estimate of 1909 shows that the Han were overwhelmingly dominant in the region.¹ Statistics may be crude, but the trend is clear.

The indigenous ethnic minority groups had assisted the Qing in the seventeenth century by defending the border against Russian penetration. In return, they were subsidized by the government. However, as the dynasty declined in the nineteenth century, the ethnic minorities found themselves struggling for survival. The Manchus,

¹ Although several sources offer figures for Han Chinese in the region, it is difficult to determine the actual number in the absence of a proper census. Xu Zongliang, a late Qing scholar, estimated the Han Chinese population in North Manchuria in 1909 as over 99% of the total. This is an exaggeration, but undoubtedly the figure was very high. See Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 48.

who were organized in military banners and funded by the state, led an impoverished life as official subsidies dwindled year by year. The other ethnic groups found settlement increasingly pressing upon the lands from which they drew subsistence. The Solon made their living by hunting, while the Hezhe were fishermen living along the rivers. The Mongols led a nomadic life within the areas assigned to their banners.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 the total non-Han population amounted to less than a hundred thousand. Though small in number, ethnic minorities were spread across most of the region. The Manchus, as banner soldiers, were stationed in barracks across the region. The Elunchun, Ewenke and Dawoer, who collectively were called the Solon, roamed in the mountainous regions in the Greater Xing'an and the Less Xingan ranges; the Mongols had their banners located between the Greater Xing'an range and the Nen River; and the Hezhe were concentrated mainly along the Heilong [Amur] and Ussuri rivers. The Manchus were the largest group, the Solon the second largest, then the Mongols, and finally the Hezhe with fewer than a thousand.

Between 1900 and 1931, the life of the ethnic minorities was influenced primarily by the late dynastic reforms of the Qing, the 1911 Revolution, the accelerating pace of Han Chinese immigration, and continued Russian penetration. The central government in Beijing, in order to enforce the shibian [border fortification] policy, encouraged ethnic groups to embrace agricultural life. This chapter will concentrate on the transformation of the Manchus from the banner system to civilian livelihood, and of the Solon and Mongols

from the hunting and pastoral to the sedentary, agricultural life. In each case the minority was increasingly integrated into Han Chinese culture.

I. From Bannermen to Farmers: The Transformation of the Manchus and Mongols to Farming Life

(a) The Manchus

The Manchus, or ruling Qing dynasty, constituted an ethnic minority of about one percent of the total population of China. This small ethnic group had been able to conquer China in the mid-seventeenth century because of the excellence of their banner troops (and the cooperation of local Chinese forces). The banner system of organization molded Manchu ethnicity. There were eight banners into which the Manchu population was enrolled. Four banners were of plain colours: yellow, red, blue and white; and four more formed by adding borders to the first four. Each banner managed the military, political and social lives of its members. Following the conquest of China, banner garrisons had been established at strategic points south of the Great Wall. In North Manchuria, banner soldiers were stationed to guard the frontier region. Since Han Chinese were officially excluded from the area, North Manchuria remained virtually a military barracks until 1900.

The bannermen in North Manchuria were stationed in important strategic towns, such as Qiqihar, Mergen [Nenjiang], Aihui and Acheng. Their responsibility was to defend the border, suppress banditry, and generally safeguard the region. Bannermen

were allowed to make use of nearby land but not to own it. Illegal Han immigrants and exiles were employed in the limited farming areas around the barracks. Upkeep of the Manchus, who numbered about 50,000 by 1900, was provided by the central government in Beijing. Bannermen underwent periodic training, which was the only demand made on them in peacetime. Among the bannermen were some soldiers of Han origin [Hanjun], usually the product of Manchu-Han intermarriage, and largely assimilated into the Manchu ways. Widows of Manchu troops who died in frontier campaigns often had to find a second husband among the Han population.² Han and Manchu identities were already becoming mixed in North Manchuria.

Several factors prompted changes to the banner system and compelled bannermen to seek survival on their own. As the population attached to a banner multiplied, it could not be sustained by limited state funds. Pay and provisions were often in arrears, and sometimes the government defaulted. Even when paid, the amount often was only half or even as little as thirty percent of the officially stipulated sum.³ The balance owed by government to bannermen in North Manchuria skyrocketed to several million taels by 1900.⁴ By this time most bannermen were living in penury. Travelers to the region were shocked to find that the rulers had become paupers: “The old Manchu towns are in a decayed condition,” their only hope being to obtain “a fresh lease on life from new blood

² Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Chuantong yu biange: Ha'erbin jindai shehui wenming zhuanxing yanjiu [Tradition and Change: A Study of the Transformation of Modern Harbin Society and Culture], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1995, pp. 89-90.

³ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1201.

from the South.”⁵ Banner heads had to work dilapidated offices, such as that in Shuangcheng, where everything was “worn out . . . the walls falling to pieces, the windows broken, and the structure in partial collapse—a truly woeful scene to be witnessed.”⁶

The defeats inflicted on China by the western powers and Japan in the nineteenth century had demonstrated that banner troops could not provide national defense. They were even ineffective within the borders of China in suppressing peasant disturbances. However, it was the anti-foreign, anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion of 1900 that marked the beginning of the end for the bannermen. Russian contingents of the “Eight-nation army” dispatched to put down the Boxers crossed into North Manchuria. The bannermen displayed heroism in battle with the Russian forces, but were routed and retreated in disorder. Thousands died confronting Russian modern weaponry, as most banner soldiers were equipped with spears, knives and old rifles.⁷ The town of Aihui was reduced to rubble after three days of heavy fighting. Many other towns in the region suffered the same fate. This war taught China that modern techniques were superior to outdated arms, however valiantly wielded. As a result of the Russian invasion, the banner system in

⁴ Zhang Xiangling, *Shishuo Heilongjiang* [A Brief History of Heilongjiang], Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin Chubanshe, 1999, p. 60.

⁵ Kemp, E. G., *The Face of Manchuria, Korea & Russian Turkestan*, Toronto: Musson Book Company Limited, 1910, p. 7.

⁶ “Shuangcheng qiwu chengbanchu wei qing zengshou jieji zuqian gei Jilin xingsheng de xiangwen” [Request of Shuangcheng Banner Office to Jilin Province for Funds from Street Land Rental Tax], 1910, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, gen. eds, *Jilin qiren shengji* [Bannermen's Conditions in Jilin], Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Chubanshe [Tianjin Classics Press], 1991, p. 22.

⁷ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2522.

North Manchuria practically ceased to exist as a military force, though it still remained as a unit of social organization.

The response of the Qing dynasty to the defeat inflicted upon it in 1900 was to announce a program of reform, including the creation of a smaller, highly trained “new army.” Scarce funds were directed primarily to it, rather than to the outdated banner troops. In 1905 military reform came to North Manchuria. The new army there numbered 4,000, based on battalions of about 360 men. Former bannermen and Han Chinese were enrolled. The soldiers underwent regular military training, and were armed with modern weaponry mostly from the Hanyang military factory in central China. Though small in number, the army was revolutionary compared to the bannermen. Like the bannermen, their duties were to patrol the borders, suppress bandits, and maintain local order.⁸ Over the years the name of the army changed several times. It was the police patrol police army in 1905, the police defense regiment in 1906, the provincial defense army in 1924 and the defense league in 1925. In 1926 its complement stood at 6,400 men. Following the 1911 Revolution this army steadily gained prominence in political and military affairs of the region.

The New Army developed at the expense of the banner system and further sealed its doom. The bannermen had lost their military role. Their former penurious but privileged status had left them without practical skills. They despised manual labor, looked down on

⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1204, p. 1206, p. 1210, p. 1216, p. 1223 and p. 1237. These were respectively: xunjingjun [police patrol army], xunfangdui [police defense regiment], shengfangjun [provincial defense army] and baoweituan [defense league].

all other occupations and cherished only their banner tradition. In 1907, the Guangxu Emperor said of them, “they are tainted with indolence, and idly consume their official stipends; their numbers multiply and they fall ever more into poverty, . . . but they never think of living as civilians; now, however, they must seek ways of self-support and must survive through their own toil.”⁹ How were they to survive, then? There were three possible avenues open to them. The first was to join the new army. Some bannermen did, a notable example being Han Guangdi, who came from a distinguished banner family (his father was a colonel). He gained a modern military education, rose to brigade commander in just a decade, and became a national hero in the 1929 border clash with Russia.¹⁰ However, the number of bannermen exceeded by tenfold the number of places available in the new army. A second possibility was to go into business, but their traditional mentality combined with a lack of capital limited this outlet, though a few aggressive bannermen were successful.

The third avenue, the one taken by most, was to engage in agriculture. The government policy of turning bannermen into farmers actually predated the establishment of the new army system. Several years earlier the Qing had announced that they sought “to eliminate the difference between the Manchus and the Han and to embrace both in one family.”¹¹ Since Han Chinese had been farmers for more than three millennia, this

⁹ Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, p. 1; see also Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, gen. eds. *Jilin qiwu* [Bannermen Service in Jilin], Tianjin: Tianjin Guji Chubanshe [Tianjin Classics Press], 1990, p. 1.

¹⁰ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2173.

¹¹ Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, p. 165.

meant that bannermen needed to engage themselves in agriculture, not only for economic survival, but also to remove the cultural barrier between the two peoples. In North Manchuria, it was even more important that bannermen be turned into farmers, since as farmer-soldiers they would serve the national policy of fortifying the frontier against further Russian incursions. In 1908 the Manchu official Rongguang, in his memorial to the Guangxu Emperor, urged that the banner system in North Manchuria be abolished and bannermen turned into farmers. “They should be given frontier land to plough for grain; they should open up wilderness for their own benefit.” He was confident that the border could be made secure from Russian designs if his proposal was adopted.¹² As they lost their privileged position in the first decade of the century, the great majority of bannermen came to see land as their means of economic salvation.

The bannermen, however, were not entitled to private land until 1907. Previously, they were given land near their barracks, but this land was common banner land [qidi], not for private ownership. In the late nineteenth century, Han immigrants were allowed to rent this land from bannermen, who assumed the role of absentee landlords. The situation inevitably resulted in perpetual tenure of the rented land by the Han. Thus the divide between the Han as farmer and the Manchu as soldiers was further sharpened.¹³ After

¹² Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan [China Number One Historical Archive, Beijing]: No.552-93 (35-3-2), (Reports from Provincial Officials to the Guangxu Emperor, 1907), 552-95: “Hanlinyuan Shidu Rongguang zou Shibian Kaiken Yubingyunong Yizhe” [Memorial of Rong Guang to the Emperor on Reforming the Outdated Banner System of Border Defense in Heilongjiang], 1908.

¹³ “Jilin Jiangjun yamen husi, huangwu zongju wei Boduna shu qidizhaodian shi gei Jinlin Jiangjun de bingwen” [Report from the Department of the Household to the Office of the Jilin Military Commander in regard to Tenancy of Bannerlands in Boduna], January 1906; in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, p. 4.

1900, and especially after 1905, when the bannermen began to turn to farming in large numbers, the problem arose of Han farmers refusing to surrender the land they had leased. Furthermore, some Han farmers cultivated nearby wilderness, which they declared private civilian land [mindì]. Lawsuits proliferated, which officials often found difficult to resolve. The official response was to state that all uncultivated banner land should henceforth be reserved for cultivation by bannermen, and that every measure would be taken to prevent civilian (i.e., Han Chinese) occupation of banner land.¹⁴ In 1907, an edict was issued under the Guangxu Emperor's name to solve the land problem in North Manchuria. It required the survey of all official land and stipulated a new policy of private ownership that allowed bannermen to receive a certain amount of land according to the size of their family [jikoushoutian]. The bannermen were also allowed to purchase uncultivated land at very low price. The edict attempted to solve the dispute between bannermen and civilians by setting forth a formula for dividing leased land equally between tenants and bannermen.¹⁵

In 1907, the Bannermen Service Bureau was established in North Manchuria. During its ten-year existence, the Bureau granted land to bannermen without charge, or at very low price. The Bureau conducted surveys of official land and nearby wasteland, that it then partitioned and distributed. The Bureau issued licenses [dazhao] authorizing

¹⁴ “Jilin Jiangjun yamen wei Boduna shu Qidi bei dianmin qinduo de zhazhiwen” [Report of the Jilin Military Commander concerning the Infringement of Banner Land by Tenants in Boduna], August 23, 1906; in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, pp. 5-8.

private ownership and provided transportation, tools, seeds and housing funds to assist those who settled on uncultivated land. The Bureau dispatched “instructors” to help settlers and promised to guarantee security. The Bureau also granted six years of tax exemption from the beginning of cultivation.¹⁶ Land obtained from the Bureau by bannermen could not be alienated. Those who refused to accept allocated land were considered as having renounced their privileges as bannermen, and henceforth would be responsible for their own survival. This warning helped enforce the new policy.

Throughout North Manchuria soldiers were converted into farmers. Land distribution took nearly a decade, during which an overwhelming majority of bannermen gained land and started a new life. In 1908 in Tieli about 1,200 banner families gained land. Each acquired 450 mu [75 acres], of which 150 mu were permanently exempt from tax and 300 mu were to be taxed after five years.¹⁷ In 1909 in Shuangcheng 4,000 banner families obtained over 900,000 mu, on average 225 mu per family [37.5 acres].¹⁸ The following year in Sanxing 1,000 landless banner families (half of the community)

¹⁵ “Jilin quansheng diaocha qi wuchu wei biantong qiren shengji gei Jilin Xunfu de bingwen” [Report of the Jilin Bannermen Service Bureau on Bannermen Living Conditions], September 20, 1907; in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, pp. 163-171.

¹⁶ “Chouhua qiren shengji shiban jianzhang” [Plans for Solving the Problem of Bannermen Living Conditions], January 23, 1912, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, pp. 175-181.

¹⁷ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 332.

¹⁸ “Shuangchengbao xieling wei xiangbaiqidingshu Yang Yishun dengren tuidijiangding jieling gei Jilin xingsheng de shengwen” [Statement of Shuangcheng Commander to Jilin Provincial Government on Transaction of Banner Land by Yang Yishun and Others], April 30, 1909, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, p. 146.

received 150,000 mu.¹⁹ In Nehe, adjacent to the Mongol Wilderness, 2,000 banner households (about 11,000 people) each gained 200 mu.²⁰ Overall, North Manchuria bannermen gained on average about 200 mu [33 acres] per family. Bannermen now embarked on a new way of life as land-holding farmers.

The bannermen, similar to refugees from China Proper, proved to be diligent workers and soon turned the wasteland into productive fields. The government sent agriculturalists to assist them, and bannermen rapidly became familiar with traditional Chinese farming techniques. They followed the practice of the Han in opening up the land: “First they root out all the grass and shrubs, and turn over the land through ploughing. Then they crumble and rake the land into fine sandy earth. After planting, weeds are hoed two or three times. During harvest season, they use sickles to cut the crops. Finally they use horse-driven round stones to thresh and winnow the chaff from the grain.” These old Chinese farming techniques took hold among the Manchus. They achieved good harvests, soon attaining an output of five dan [13.7 bushels] per 10 mu [1.6 acres], which almost caught up with Han farm production.²¹

In the course of the transition to agriculture a Manchu landlord class emerged. Most Manchu landlords tended to be small landholders, who hired seasonal laborers or

¹⁹ “Jilin xingsheng guanyu huiyi biantong Sanxing qiwu shiyi de zhawen ji fujian” [Report of Jilin Provincial Government on Sanxing Banner Affairs], September 23, 1910, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiwu*, p. 194.

²⁰ “Jilin Ziyiju wei qiye Shoushan dingshishiwuren qing bo Menghuang yichou shengji de chengwen” [Decision of Jilin Provincial Assembly to Allocate Mongol Wilderness to Bannermen], October 16, 1910, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiren shengji*, p. 30.

²¹ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 51.

sometimes long term farmhands. The hired hands might share a proportion of the produce. Often Manchu landlords worked some of their land themselves. There were a few Manchus did become large landholders. For example, Qinglu, a Manchu commander in Acheng, accumulated 30,000 mu at low cost soon after the turn of the century. His position as a large landowner increased his local influence. Promotion to higher rank allowed him to “purchase” another 9,000 mu of fertile cultivated land in Fangzheng and to occupy 200,000 mu of wasteland in Sanxing. Qinglu became one of the largest landlords in North Manchuria.²²

By 1911 the Qing government was levying taxes on bannermen who had first obtained land. This measure was designed to increase local governmental income. However, it put pressure on those families who were short of laborers. Since the newly acquired land could not be sold, hardpressed bannermen appealed to the Bannerman Service Bureau for the right to surrender a part of their land. As difficulties mounted, more bannermen surrendered portions of their land, because they were “unable to cultivate and fearful of paying tax.”²³ The returned land was not put up for sale, but was reallocated to bannermen from within or without the locality. This land was termed “surrendered” or “fill-in” land.²⁴ When the Service Bureau reassigned it, the grantees

²² Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 50.

²³ “Shuangchengbao xieling wei xiangbaiqingdinghu Yang Yishun dengren tuidijiangding jieling gei Jinlin xingsheng de shengwen.” in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, Jilin qiren shengji, p. 146.

²⁴ “Shuangshengbao Xieling wei qiding tuidi he dingbu gei Jilin xingsheng de shenwen” [Report of Shuangcheng Commander on Surrendered land and Fill-in Land], December 26, 1909; in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, Jilin qiren shengji, p. 148. The surrendered land was called “tuidi” and the fill-in land was termed “dingbudi.”

became known as “fill-in” Manchus. The fill-in replacement process continued throughout the first two decades of the Republican period, and attached more Manchus to the land in relatively compact communities. In sum, then, between 1900 and 1931 the Manchu community in North Manchuria underwent a profound transition from a warrior to a farming culture.

(b) The Mongols

The experience of Mongol bannermen in moving to agricultural life appears similar at first to that of the Manchus. In fact it was quite different. It is true that all Mongols were organized into the banner system and rendered military service upon summons. However, in contrast to the Manchus, the Mongols led a semi-nomadic “banner” life. The Qing enforced a special banner system [Mengqizhi] which required Mongol bannermen to live within the boundaries of their own banners. In North Manchuria, there were several Mongol banners, such as the Yikeming’an, Zhalaite, Duerbote, South Gorlos and North Gorlos. Bannermen were not permitted to transgress other banners’ borders. Within their banner confines, the Mongols established villages. By 1900, North Manchuria Mongols, unlike their kinsmen in Outer Mongolia or the Barga region, led a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural life. They still roamed and herded their cattle within their banner border, living up to the reputation as a nation on horseback.²⁵ This semi-nomadic life co-existed with a primitive agriculture. One source states: “They switch

²⁵ Fang Yan, gen. ed. *Heilongjiang shaoshuminzu jianshi* [A Brief History of Ethnic Minorities in Heilongjiang], Beijing: Zhongyang Minzu Chubanshe, 1993, p. 257.

farming fields annually by abandoning the previous 'overused' land. They plant when it rains and allow crops and weeds to grow side by side. With no knowledge of weeding, they move on to locate new land for next year." "If it does not rain, the seeds will not break through the soil. Therefore, they suffer frequently from hunger . . . Even when harvesting, they gather in weeds along with the crops. The output per mu seldom reaches half that of a Han farmer."²⁶

The hierarchal social system was characterized by rigid class divisions. Each banner had a prince as a ruler. Below him, there were six ranks of nobility.²⁷ The titles of each level were hereditary. The succession, however, had to be granted by the central government in Beijing. Unlike Manchu bannermen, who relied solely on funding from the government, Mongol bannermen often had to count on their banner for support to supplement the stipends they received. This strengthened the power of the prince who governed his banner like a petty monarch. The Mongol hierarchy was so stratified that it was sometimes compared to the social order of pre-Revolutionary France. Unlike the Manchu bannermen, Mongol banners outlived the Qing Dynasty, survived the Republican period, outlasted Japanese colonial rule, and continued even under the Communist government.

Land cultivation was limited. Mongols had not developed the concept of private ownership, but conceived of land as a common possession. The greater part of the

²⁶ Shi Fang and Gao Ling, *Chuantong yu biange*, p. 175.

²⁷ Below a prince were, in descending order, yijun, tuotuosi, jiagansi, meilun, zhalan and daguan. See "Tailai shezhiju zhishu" [A Record of Tailai Administration], HSMZ, p. 302.

Mongol lands remained fallow grassland. The Qing termed the land the “Mongol Wilderness” [Menghuang]. The west part of the wilderness in North Manchuria was near the mountains. Though largely sandy, it was fertile near the Song-Nen plain. Contemporary visitors were struck by the region’s emptiness: “birds and wild animals multiply,” “few villages and few people are to be found,” “a scarcely inhabited boundless land of lush grass in black fertile soil.”²⁸ The population of the Mongols, at rough estimate, was no more than 30,000 in North Manchuria.

The Mongol wilderness had been off-limits for Han Chinese settlement for more than two hundred years. It was not until the late nineteenth century that it was opened for large-scale cultivation. Mongol princes, observing the Manchus employing Han farmers to extract profit from the land, began to follow suit. The princes “hired Han farmers as laborers and established a tenancy relationship.”²⁹ Some princes even fashioned policies to attract Han farmers. For example, the prince of Duerbote supplied Han farmers with tools and food for the first year and then began to collect rent in the second year, at which time the tenants needed only to supply vegetables to the prince. Such encouragement led to the arrival of more and more Han settlers.³⁰

²⁸ Wu Jisun, “Duban fu Taonan, Xincheng Qiqiha’er yantu riji” [Diary written on the Way through Taonan, Xincheng and Qiqihar], April 13-23, 1908, in Li Shutian, Menghuang anjuan, [Documents on the Mongolian Wilderness]. Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990, pp. 1-11.

²⁹ Xu Shichang, Dongsansheng zhenglue [A Sketch of Northeastern Politics], Beijing. Wenhai Chubanshe, 1911, vol. 2 (Mongol Affairs). See also Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 52.

³⁰ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 52.

In the late Qing, government financial assistance to Mongol banners diminished steadily, and the Mongols, like the Manchus, were compelled to seek self-sufficiency on a large scale. The difference is that the Mongols, within their banners, were ruled by their own princes. These princes, despite financially straitened circumstances, continued to maintain their sumptuous life. Consequently, most of them ran heavily in debt. In 1902 the prince of the South Gorlos Banner owed 389,000 silver taels. The prince of Zhalaite at the turn of the century had accumulated debts of 567,360 taels, including a sum borrowed from the Russians.³¹ To find new income the princes looked to the land. Hence, more and more Han farmers moved in to rent or even purchase land. The princes engaged in clandestine sales in order to circumvent the Qing government regulations banning alienation of land. These practices subverted Qing policy and forced the government to lift the ban.

In 1899 the Zhalaite Banner opened the first area of the Mongol wilderness for cultivation. The income generated was shared equally by the banner prince and the provincial government.³² Settlement developed rapidly as large areas of land were opened up. North Gorlos Banner was opened in 1905 and within three years cultivators held 6,323,410 mu [1,041,466 acres] of land. Duertote Banner was opened in 1905 and within two years cultivators held 2,524,320 mu [415,755 acres]. Yikeming'an Banner was opened in 1906; only one year was needed to dispose of an astonishing 2,491,530 mu

³¹ Kong Jingwei. QDDJ, pp. 272-273; see also Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 387.

³² Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 383.

[410,355 acres].³³ The land was usually rented at first, with tenants paying rent to the Mongol nobles. As time passed, Han immigrants accumulated enough capital and began purchasing land. In this way, over the first three decades of the twentieth century the Mongol wilderness was gradually transformed into farmland held by private owners.

The newcomers were predominantly experienced Han Chinese farmers. “The people from China Proper [neidi] settled in the Mongol Wilderness and managed well. Here, there is no person who has not gained profit.”³⁴ Examples of profitable farming inspired Mongol bannermen. “Seeing Han farmers’ abundant annual harvest, the Mongols were most admiring of this and thus began to concentrate more on farming than on raising herds . . . in their cultivation of the land they imitate the techniques of the Han farmers.”³⁵ The land opened up to agriculture greatly reduced the pastoral areas. In a short period, the number of cattle decreased. In Duerbote, the number of cattle decreased from 100,000 head to 20,000 head during the five years between 1905 and 1910. In North Gorlos, “since the opening of the Mongol wilderness, a large stretch of grassland, ideal for cattle, was put under cultivation . . . and cattle raised by bannermen have greatly declined in number.” Furthermore, compulsory cattle purchases by the Russians during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 did severe damage to Mongol animal husbandry. “During the war, the Russians drew their supplies from North Manchuria. Mongol cattle,

³³ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 53; Sun Zhanwen, HST, p. 246.

³⁴ Wu Jisun, op. cit., (1908), in Li Shutian, op. cit., p. 8.

³⁵ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 697.

requisitioned at low price, provided meat and animal skins needed by the Russians. Half of the livestock was lost to this prosperous region.”³⁶

The decline in cattle raising compelled more and more Mongols to turn to the soil. With Han farmers as neighbors, the Mongols soon adopted traditional Chinese farming techniques. They also accepted the notion of private ownership by demarcating their own property. The Mongol wilderness required slash-and-burn as the first step in cultivation. Since the wilderness was covered with tall grass, it took days to burn a stretch for setting up a village. With government assistance and support from the princes, land surveys and field clearance proceeded smoothly. The government also supplied Mongol farmers with ploughs, tools, cattle and oxen. Meanwhile, instructors were dispatched to provide farming tutelage.³⁷ After the 1911 Revolution, the government in Beijing, in order to hold the loyalty of North Manchuria Mongols and prevent a second breakaway along the lines of Outer Mongolia, enacted further favourable policies. In 1913 every adult Mongol noble was given a licensed holding of 900 mu [148 acres], and sons under eighteen years received 500 mu [82 acres]. Among the commoners, every adult male received a licensed holding of 450 mu [74 acres]; sons under eighteen received 250 mu [41 acres], while widows were given 150 mu [25 acres] for sustenance.³⁸ To avoid disputes with Han

³⁶ Fang Yan, *op. cit.*, p. 259; Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 53.

³⁷ “Heilongjiang xingsheng zongdu Xu Shichang, xunfu Cheng Dequan wei pizhun minzhengsi chengqingbo Zhalaite Hala huoshao huangdi banli tunken shizha” [Approval of Northeast Governor-General Xu Shichang and Heilongjiang Governor Cheng Dequan to Burn the Zhalaite Wilderness for Farming], April 9, 1908, HSMZ, pp. 328-329.

³⁸ “Xufang Zhaqi Mengfang zhangcheng jianyao shicheng” [Report concerning Continuing the Opening of the Mongol Wilderness], October 30, 1913, HSMZ, p. 330.

farmers, officials repeatedly forbade the Mongols to sell land to them. In 1917, the governor of Heilongjiang intervened to declare such a transaction invalid and to order the land returned to the original Mongol owner.³⁹ Although Mongol farmers gained experience, their output of crops such as wheat, corn and soybean was roughly half that of Han and Manchu farmers. Lower productivity was caused by several factors, most important of which were broadcast hand sowing and insufficient weeding.⁴⁰

The Kirgiz Mongols' transition to agriculture has been well documented and studied. Although the Kirgiz in North Manchuria today are identified as an independent ethnic minority, before 1952 they were considered as Mongols and thought of themselves as such. This ethnic group originally lived in Northwest China, but they were exiled to North Manchuria after participating in a rebellion against the Qing in the eighteenth century. In Manchuria they adopted the nomadic life of the Mongols and lost many of their former ethnic traits. Kirgiz Mongols, like their Mongol neighbors, led a nomadic, roaming life, and their livelihood depended on livestock. They let their cattle graze freely in the vast grassland and checked them only once every ten days.⁴¹ However, as the Mongol wilderness was opened for cultivation at the turn of the century, the Kirgiz began

³⁹ “Heilongjiang Shengzhang Gongshu wei dujue Zhalaite Mengding jiang shengjidimu dianmai yumin suosheng jiuge bing zhuoding chulibanfashi gei Longjiang daoyin xunling” [Decree of the Heilongjiang Governor Forbidding the Zhalaite Mongol Banner to Sell Land to Han Farmers], June 10, 1917, HSMZ, p. 334.

⁴⁰ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 64.

⁴¹ Ge Ruoyu, “Qiantan Heilongjiangsheng Ke’erkezi zu jingji fazhan jingcheng” [Economic Improvement of Ethnic Kirgiz in Heilongjiang Province], in Po Shaobu, gen. ed, *Heilongjiang minzu lishi yu wenhua* [The Ethnic History and Culture of Heilongjiang], Beijing: Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan Chubanshe, 1993, p. 185.

to move into agricultural life. The government allotted land to them and waived taxes for a certain period of years. Some Kirgiz even became landlords. The crops they planted included buckwheat, barley and millet. In the 1910s, wheat, corn and soybean were introduced. Their farming techniques were greatly influenced by their Han neighbors, and step-by-step the Kirgiz caught up in productivity. Cattle raising declined, however. Around 1900, it was common for every Kirgiz family to have at least a hundred cattle. For example, in Wujiazi village [Fuyu County], the Kirgiz had several thousand head in total, with six households each in possession of 100-800 head. By 1930 there were less than 200 head in the village. Four households each held between 10 and 40, and ten households held 1 to 10. Most families had no cattle at all. In three decades the Kirgiz Mongols had almost completely gone over to an agricultural pattern of life.

II. The Solon Transition from Hunting to Agriculture

The ecological surroundings in North Manchuria profoundly affected the life of the indigenous inhabitants. Two mountain ranges several hundred kilometers long and a hundred kilometers wide, were a source of abundant game, as was the hilly wilderness to the south. In these areas lived the Solon, whose economy was based on hunting.

Chinese observers were struck by the fact that the Solon lacked permanent dwellings. "Houses did not exist. The natives, with their face to the rivers and back to the mountains, dig caves in the slopes, make roof beams out of wood and cover them with

soil. In the summer, they roam along the waterways and grasslands; in the winter, they hibernate in caves. They constantly migrate and never fix their homes.”⁴² Another witness recorded: “The Solon move . . . and live in the wilderness and do not maintain permanent dwellings. They clothe themselves in deerskin and migrate on the heels of the wild animals. When the beasts move, they simply follow.”⁴³ Raised in this eco-environment, the Solon were skillful hunters. As modern guns became more available, the Solon no longer killed game only for their own consumption; by the turn of the century they began to engage in the sale of furs to merchants from North China and Russia.

Hunting compelled the Solon to roam. More often than not, they set up shelters as temporary abodes. The shelters, “cuoluozi” in their language, were simple but afforded enough protection against the harsh climate. The shelter was put up among four trees or stands, then covered with grass or birch bark to form walls. Inside, bear and tiger skins were piled up as bed, while fox, otter, marten and raccoon furs were attached to the four walls. Thus, “even snowstorms cannot penetrate within.”⁴⁴

The most valuable animal to the Solon was the dog. “Canine culture” was part of Solon life. The dog helped the hunter in tracking game during the winter, often assisted

⁴² Guan Chenghe, Ha'erbin kao [A Study of Harbin], Ha'erbin: Ha'erbin shehui kexue yanjiusuo, 1985, p. 11.

⁴³ “Tieli shezhiju diaochabiao” [Report of a Study by the Tieli Administration], 1915, HSMZ, p. 20.

⁴⁴ Zhao Xian, “Suolun Jilue” [A Brief Record of the Solon], in HSMZ, p. 469. See also “Jiancha Elunchun xuewuyuan Zou Zhaotang diaocha neixing'anling nanlu Ezu qingxing baogaoshu” [The Educational Commissioner Zou Zhaotang's Report on the Elunchun Living in the Southern Lesser Xing'an Range], 1920, HSMZ, p. 195.

catching otter in the rivers. Furthermore, as one observer noted, “Dogs warm humans since fire cannot be kept in the shelters; thus humans often sleep with dogs for warmth.” The dog was also used to protect cattle and guard the family, especially children. In the winter, dogs drew sledges.⁴⁵ Hence, a trusted dog was often worth more than several horses.

Most of the Solon were, at least in the estimation of some outside visitors, enthusiasts for liquor. “Both men and women are mad over wine; when drunk, they fall asleep in the snow. When they awaken, they seek fresh air for their lungs.”⁴⁶ Liquor allegedly became a daily necessity and the Solon traded furs for it. Liquor was valued more than many trade articles, except for guns. The frigid weather made alcohol a comfort. It was also seen as a tonic which boosted vitality. The Solon were regarded as especially prone to excessive drinking. One observer drew a particularly negative picture: “The Solon are alcohol addicts. Whenever they encounter a liquor vender, they will use up all their money and, if possible, buy on credit, without asking about quality or bargaining on prices. At any time, a group of three or five, smoking while passing a cup to each other, drink wine like tea and do not stop until everyone is drunk, meanwhile

⁴⁵ Zhao Xian, “Suolun Jilue,” p. 473.

⁴⁶ “Nenjiang Elunchun chudengxiaoxue xiaozhang Wang Shuzeng dui biandi Elunchun fengsu zhi diaocha” [Investigation of Nenjiang Elunchun School Principal Wang Shuzeng of the Customs of the Elunchun], 1914, HSMZ, p. 128.

neglecting all of their important tasks.”⁴⁷ The liquor sometimes caused fighting, yet drunken fighting did not affect long-term friendships.⁴⁸

Population growth among the Solon was slow, and may be attributable in part to traditional midwifing practice. Women were segregated during childbirth. “When a woman gives birth, she will be put into a separately built shelter and nobody, whether man or woman, is allowed to approach.” The woman took care of her own delivery, her own baby and her own health. “When mealtime comes, a person will hang a parcel of food from a long pole and direct the pole towards the lying-in woman. As soon as the child is born, the mother immediately uses snow in winter or cold water in summer to clean the baby.” The mother had to stay in such a shelter for at least a month before she could rejoin her husband and her family.⁴⁹ This practice apparently took its toll among women and children and contributed to very low population growth.⁵⁰ However, the strongest survived. Robust health made the women good at hunting. “They are brave and excellent at shooting. Whenever guests come, they take arrows and jump on horses. Soon they catch rabbits and cook them for the guests.”⁵¹ Solon women were engaged for

⁴⁷ “Qingxiangyuan Han Zhonghai, Liu Mingshan baogao diaocha Xibuhate fujin getun ji yantu suochoqingxing qingzhe” [Report of Investigators Han Zhonghai and Liu Mingshan on Ethnic Minorities in West Butha], 1925, HSMZ, p. 28.

⁴⁸ “Qigan xian zhishi Li Yushen jubao diaocha xianjing shanli Elunchunren hukou ji shoufu shouling fagei zhizhao shicheng” [Report of County Magistrate of Qigan Li Yushen on the Elunchun], 1923, HSMZ, p. 115.

⁴⁹ Xu Xilian, “Elunchun xingshi bianbie bing hunsang lisu ji ge lilun” [Elunchun Names, Customs and Other Matters], 1918, HSMZ, p. 130.

⁵⁰ “Qigan xian zhishi Li Yushen jubao diaocha xianjing shanli Elunchunren hukou ji shoufu shouling fagei zhizhao shicheng” [Qigan County Magistrate Li Yuchen’s Report on the Elunchun], 1923, HSMZ, p. 115.

⁵¹ Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 43.

marriage at young age, often at thirteen or fourteen. They lived with their future husband for three or four years before formal marriage.

Outside observers approached the Solon with feelings of superiority, regarding many features of their society as primitive. Solon funerals were seen as overly simple and unclean. The body was wrapped in birch bark and placed in a rough made bark coffin. The coffin was then fastened high in a tree to deter wild animals from devouring the body. Horses might be sacrificed for the dead. Soon afterward, the family chose a day for a special memorial service, at which they served meat and wine to relatives and friends. Three years later, the coffin would be taken down and the bones placed in a wooden trough. Outsiders regarded the burial rites as unhygienic, especially in the summer, when a rancid smell was said to spread widely through the area.⁵²

The Solon did not have a written language. In the whole of North Manchuria only Manchus and Mongols possessed written characters. The hunting life of the Solon stood in the way of their undertaking formal training in reading and writing. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, ten to twenty percent of the Solon had some knowledge of the Manchu written language and a few understood written Chinese.⁵³ Like

⁵² “Heilongjiang xun’anshi gongshu zhunzi zhuanfa dujun huituyuan Sun Guodong bingchen shoulong Elunchun banfa yanggeshujijian yifuchi” [Comments of Heilongjiang Governor Zhu Qinglan on Draft Proposals of Sun Guodong on Methods of Placating the Elunchun], 1916, HSMZ, p. 248.

⁵³ “Ali, Duopuku’er luxieling Jin Chunde chabao suoshu Elunchunzu xingshi cheng” [Ali and Duopukuer Commander Jin Chunde’s Report on Elunchun Clan Names], 1918, HSMZ, p. 111.

their ancestors, they kept no calendar, and looked to the arrival of the green spring grass as their principal indicator of time.⁵⁴

While the Solon traditionally maintained good relations with the Manchus and the Han, their relations with the Mongols were embittered. During the Qing, the Solon areas had been part of the Mongol domain. According to Solon testimony, “the Mongol masters treated us as slaves, . . . even to the present time, sorrow over our maltreatment lingers in mind and makes us weep.” When the Qing fell, Solon headmen pledged allegiance to the new republic and said they would never serve the Mongols.⁵⁵

The Han and the Manchus tended to look down upon the Solon way of life, regarding it as belonging to the barbarian age—it was primitive and uncivilized.⁵⁶ The Solon were described as rude and vulgar in their habits.⁵⁷ Their alienation from agriculture was seen as evidence of laziness. Their alcoholic indulgence represented dissipation of the most shortsighted kind. As one observer charged: “They are lazy and only care for today. Most of time, they live in hardship; yet once they make some money

⁵⁴ A Cheng, Ha'erbin Ren [Harbin People], Taipei: Daotian Chuban Youxian Gongsi [Rice Field Press Ltd.], 1997, p. 59.

⁵⁵ “Heilongjiang Zhenyou jiangjun xingshu dui Nenjiang xian zhishi jian qiwu tidiao Yao Mingde zhuangqing jiang A Duo luxie Ye Jian’e liuren shipi” [Official Permission for Retaining Position of Yejiame in Ali and Duopuku’er Region, in Reply to Proposal of Banner Administrator and Nenjiang Magistrate Yao Mingde], 1915, HSMZ, p. 95.

⁵⁶ “Nenjiang Elunchun chudengxiaoxue xiaozhang Wang Shuzeng dui biandi Elunchun fengsu zhi diaocha” [Investigation by Nenjiang Elunchun Elementary School Principal Wang Shuzeng of the Customs of the Elunchun], HSMZ, p. 128.

⁵⁷ “Jiancha Elunchun xuewuwei yuan Zou Zhaotang huibao shicha Elunchun gexiao qingxingcheng” [Report of Elunchun School Councilor Zou Zhaotang on Elunchun School Conditions], 1920, HSMZ, p. 216.

they spend it all on drink. They seldom think whether they can get food and clothes for tomorrow.”⁵⁸ Their unhygienic habits provided much cause for disapproval. Their dwellings were regarded as particularly foul, as they never washed their clothes, while they shared their quarters with dogs, cows, sheep, pigs and chickens, and spat all around them.⁵⁹ Their marital practice was condemned as immoral, since women lived with their men for years before formal marriage. To the Chinese, the practice was termed adultery first, marriage later.⁶⁰

Among the Solon, the Dawo’er were closest to embracing agricultural life. Influenced by the Han, some of them in the nineteenth century took up farming, though most remained hunters. The word “Dawo’er” was often mistaken as “da huli,” meaning foxhunters, which would have been consistent with nomadic life.⁶¹ Up to 1909, the Dowo’er were still referred to in provincial documents as nomads with a cloistered conservative mentality.⁶² However, some Dawo’er employed slash-and-burn techniques on the hillsides where they roamed. After ploughing the new fields, they randomly threw seeds and covered them with willow twigs. The Dawo’er “let crops run their own course

⁵⁸ “Qingxiangyuan Han Zhonghai, Liu Mingshan baogao diaocha Xibuhate fujin getun ji yantu suoचाqingxing qingzhe” [Report of Investigators Han Zhonghai and Liu Mingshan on the Ethnic Minorities in West Butha], 1925, HSMZ, p. 28,

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 28.

⁶⁰ “Nenjiang Elunchun chudengxiaoxue xiaozhang Wang Shuzeng dui biandi Elunchun fengsu zhi diaocha” [Investigation of Nenjiang Elunchun School Principal Wang Shuzeng of the Customs of the Elunchun], 1914, HSMZ, p. 129.

⁶¹ Guo Kexing, “Heilongjiang xiangtulu” [A Record of Heilongjiang], HSMZ, p. 497.

⁶² “Heilongjiang zongdu Xiliang shu xunfu Zhou Shumo wei Mo’ergen zuoling Deqingzhu shikang juan zouzhuon gezhi shizha” [Decision of Governor-General Xiliang and Heilongjiang Governor Zhou Shumo to Remove Mo’ergen Commander Deqingzhu], 1909, HSMZ, p. 495.

and they never hoe.”⁶³ Yet this unsophisticated farming supplied a variety of fibre foods and vegetables. Dawo’er farmers thus played a distinctive role in the survival of the three Solon ethnic groups, who peacefully co-existed on a mutually beneficial basis.⁶⁴

There are a number of factors that contributed to the Solon transition to agricultural life. Changes of the ecological setting were one of the most important. In the nineteenth century, the annexation of the trans-Amur and trans-Ussuri regions by Russia, totaling over one million square kilometers, greatly reduced the Solon hunting domain. Furthermore, the European market for furs led the Russians to hunt and trap extensively in their newly gained territory. Russian hunting reduced the annual migration of animals from Siberia to North Manchuria, adversely affecting the latter region. One source observed: “Since the northern land passed under Russian control . . . animal life in our forests has gradually decreased.”⁶⁵ The reduction of game North Manchuria thus put the Solon in the position expressed by the traditional saying of “draining the pond to catch the fish.” By the early twentieth century, the consequences of “draining the pond” had forced many Solon to abandon their traditional way of making a livelihood.

⁶³ Fang Yan, gen. ed. *Heilongjiang shaoshuminzhu jianshi* [A Brief History of Ethnic Minorities in Heilongjiang], Beijing: Zhongyang Minzu Xueyuan Chubanshe [Central Nationalities Institute Press], 1993, p. 191.

⁶⁴ Liu Jinming, “Suolunbu san minzu guanxi ji wenhuafuhe qianxi” [An Analysis of Relations among the Three Solon Nations and their Complex Culture], *Heilongjiang minzu congkan* [Journal of Heilongjiang Ethnicity], January 1993, as quoted in Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 43.

⁶⁵ “Jiancha Elunchun xuewuweiyuan Zou Zhaotang diaocha neixing’anling beilu E’zu qingxing baogao” [Report of Elunchun Educational Councilor Zou Zhaotang of the Elunchun], 1920, HSMZ, p. 200.

The arrival of Han Chinese immigrants was the major factor in the Solon transition. After the Qing lifted the ban on settlement, major ecological change accompanied the huge numbers of new settlers. The Han were determined farmers. As soon as they arrived in a region, they cut down trees and ground cover, laid out roads, dug wells and drained streams, and built their dwellings. The new immigrants created their own habitat to replace that which had belonged to the game of the plains, river valleys and hill slopes. Human settlement drove animals deep into the mountains. Official documents from the turn of the century frequently mention this ecological transformation and record the hardship the Solon encountered. “In recent years . . . arable land was opened up, roads were laid, and the animals fled and hid in the mountains. All of this leads to hardship for the Solon.”⁶⁶ The two different ways of life of the Solon and the Han collided. The Han agricultural settlements spreading in the region were a new phenomenon to the Solon. Although ethnic relations were not overly hostile, contacts between the Han and the Solon forced the latter step by step to adopt a farming culture.

The pace of change accelerated for the Solon in the 1920s. Having witnessed the transformation of so many Han from penurious refugees to prosperous farmers, many Solon sought to follow. “Seeing the success gained by Han settlers every year in farming, the envy of the Solon turns to admiration. In recent years, some have begun to raise crops . . . and to give up hunting. Their techniques have been learned from the Han.”⁶⁷ Once a

⁶⁶ “Ali Duopuku’er xieling Yejian’e qingbo suoshu Elunchunren shengji dimu niuju zizhong xiang” [Ali and Duopukuer Commander Yejian’e Request to Assist Elunchun with Farming Tools], 1914, HSMZ, p. 161.

⁶⁷ Xin Peilin, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 49.

Solon family started farming, others would follow. There were no organized tribal debates; rather, personal contact with Han farmers drew them to sedentary agricultural life. Han settlers drew benefit from their contact with the Solon, who were familiar with the environment and who were still a source of game. On balance, Han impact on the Solon far outweighed that of the Solon on the Han.

The government played a key role in the Solon transition to agricultural life. The late Qing reforms intended to turn the Solon into farmers. The Qing assisted them with farming tools and hired Han farmers as instructor. Ploughs, seeds, oxen and cattle were provided and tax exemption was granted for limited periods. The policy was termed “conversion from hunting to farming” [yilieyigeng].⁶⁸ The Qing granted title to land to a number of male Solon, thus making them landowners.⁶⁹ However, for some Solon the change was so sudden that their unpreparedness for farming pushed them back to hunting. As a result, in some parts of North Manchuria, half of the land granted to the Solon during the late Qing for cultivation was abandoned.⁷⁰ The reversion to hunting, however, could not solve the growing problems faced by the Solon; in fact it exacerbated them, since the shrinking hunting grounds were now put under greater population pressure.

⁶⁸ “Xingdongdao jian Bilaer lu xieling Qingshan weiqingshi Bilu shoufu shengding nishu xuetang ji quanzen yiji xiezuo bangong jiexiang gexiangcheng” [Bilaer Commander Qingshan’s Appeal to the Elunchun to Adopt Farming and Other Issues], 1908, HSMZ, p. 62.

⁶⁹ Zhang Xiangling, Zhang Fengming and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 342.

⁷⁰ “Xibuteha zongguan Jin Chunde nisong shiban duken baqishengjidi jianzhang zi” [West Butha Commander-General Jin Chunde’s Plan for Improving Solon Livelihood], 1916, HSMZ, p. 49.

The Republican government continued the effort to persuade the Solon to “abandon hunting for farming” [qilie weinong] and repeatedly sent local officials into the mountains to promote settlement.⁷¹ There were several aspects to this policy, which was designed, among other things, to stabilize the frontier by “pacifying” the Solon rather than by turning them into enemies ready to harass Han settlers. First, the government sponsored the construction of Solon villages in many locations near the Greater Xing’an Mountains. The state undertook to build houses, dig wells and even provide for future maintenance of the villages. This paternalistic scheme attracted increasing numbers of Solon to take up permanent settlement. Villages corresponded in size to the density of the local Solon population. Several dozen villages in total were established in the 1910s and 1920s. Funds for the settlement program initially came from the central government, but with the spread of civil war in China Proper the burden fell upon the Heilongjiang provincial government at Qiqihar. The popular governor Zhu Qinglan was enthusiastic in implementing this policy.⁷²

Second, the government sought to develop the concept of private ownership among the Solon through the allocation of land adjacent to the new villages. A land survey was conducted by local officials and cadastral maps were kept by prefectural and district administrators. As soon as the villages were established, “each family was allotted 50 mu

⁷¹ “Kuma’er lu Elunchun xieling Xu Xilian ducui gezuo mianli E min zuosu xingken jianfang huasu tongfeng lun” [Kumaer Route Commander Xu Xilian’s Encouragement of Elunchun Farming], 1918, HSMZ, p. 72.

⁷² Ibid., p. 72. See also “Shu Kuma’er lu xieling Meng Xilu jubao xianshoufu E min bianpei siqibazuo guizhididian bing qingbogekuan cheng” [Petition for Funds by Kumaer Commander Meng Xilu to

[8.22 acres], while big families with many hands might possess 100 mu” [16.44 acres]. Families were granted minor (or initial) licenses [xiaozhao] for cultivation. According to the plan, within two years each family should cultivate fifty mu and each year afterwards ten mu. All the allotted land was to be opened up within six years. At that point, it would be transferred to private ownership through granting a major (or final) license [dazhao] to the cultivators for permanent possession of the land.⁷³ This scheme was intended to convert the Solon to acceptance of land tenure. Previously the Solon occupied certain lands seasonally for hunting. Now, for the first time in their history, the Solons were confronted with the notion of private ownership, which required them to reside in a limited space, take up seasonal farming, constrain the range of their activity, and follow the pattern of Han farmers. They were given title to definite but limited private lands, while surrendering their vast hunting realm.

Third, the government tried to promote Solon acceptance of agrarian life through training. Farming specialists [quankenyuan] were dispatched to Solon villages, where they lived for a number of years. They offered instruction in traditional Chinese techniques of planting, weed control and harvesting. If they persuaded more Solon to come down from the mountains, they were rewarded by the government. One source noted that there were Solon who “appreciated government help, accepted guidance,

Organize Elunchun], HSMZ, p. 101. See also “Jiancha Elunchun xuewuweiyuan Zou Zhaotang diaocha Neixing’anling beilu E zu qingxing baogao shu,” HSMZ, p. 197.

⁷³ “Heihe daoyin Zhang Shouzeng weisonghe suoni Ku Bi lianglu qiding shengji dimu fangken zhangcheng xiang” [A Program by Prefectural Governor Zhang Shouzeng for Elunchun Farming in Kumar and Bilaer], 1915, HSMZ, p. 171.

aspired to produce crops and took the decision to settle down.”⁷⁴ The specialists also functioned as intermediaries on behalf of Solon seeking government assistance. They worked hand-in-hand with the Solon, offering them personally their professional experience.⁷⁵

Fourth, the governmental frequently allocated special funds for assistance. During the first year of settlement, food was supplied and seeds were distributed. In some regions, the government provided long term interest-free loans. Seed grain could be obtained on credit and repaid in grain three years or longer afterward.⁷⁶ The crop seeds supplied were traditional Chinese grains, such as wheat, barley, millet, buckwheat, soybean, sorghum, corn and peas. Vegetables provided included potato, turnip, cabbage, cucumber, eggplant, stringbeans and gourds, all popular Han vegetables. Ploughs, sickles, saws, spades, axes, mortises and pickaxes were provided, too.⁷⁷ Since horses had been part of the traditional Solon hunting life, the government expected the Solon to provide their own horses for farming. This was officially termed “self-provision” [zichu] or “self-

⁷⁴ “Mohe shezhiyuan Zhao Chunfang wei quanfu Elunchun xianghua zhiyuan tuntian chenming banfa xiang” [Mohe Administrator Zhao Chunfang’s Exhortation to the Elunchun to Embrace Farming], 1916, HSMZ, p. 173.

⁷⁵ “Guanli Ali Duopukuer Elunchun xieling YeJian’e weiqingfa jianzhu fangjian goumai liju zizhong jingfei shixiang” [Petition for Funds by Ali and Duopukuer Commander YeJiane to Assist the Elunchun], 1914, HSMZ, pp. 162-163. See also “Heilongjiang xunfushi gongshu wei chouhua Elunchun ren shengji shichi” [The Government of Heilongjiang’s Plan for Improving Elunchun Life], HSMZ, p. 163.

⁷⁶ “Nongye jiaodao chang ji yubingyunong banfa dagang” [A Plan for Farming Instruction and Local Security], 1916, HSMZ, p. 251.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

equipment” [zibei].⁷⁸ However, the government supplied oxen and cattle, along with fodder for the first year. The replacement of horses by cattle marked a significant social transformation for the Solon, for whom horses had not only been a measure of wealth. They had carried the Solon into the mountains and forests to hunt game. Riding skills had been a source of pride. The introduction of cattle now anchored the Solon further to a single locality and to the enterprise of tilling the land.

Official encouragement of the Solon to forsake their old ways is expressed aptly by the magistrate of Mohe County, Zhao Chunfang, who in 1916 wrote the following.⁷⁹

In past years, I went into the mountains several times to visit you and now am familiar with your hunting life. Most importantly, I know the hardship of your life. For generations, you have roamed in the deep mountains and forests. Often you move several times within even a month. You pursue animals while keeping no fixed homes. In the summer, you roam along rivers, sometimes catching fish [and animals] to assuage hunger; you suffer from the strong winds, heavy rain and scorching sun. In the winter, you move into the mountains to hunt for food; despite the icy weather and frigid conditions, you climb steep cliffs for game. When lucky, you share; when unlucky, you all endure unbearable hunger . . . This is especially hard for the aged and the young. Hunting cannot be relied upon . . . Now that more and more people have moved into this region, will not the bear and deer run afar from here? It is impossible for anyone to solely depend on hunting. How can your families live, in the long run, without considering another way of life?

The provincial and prefectural governors deeply cherish you and often instruct me to try all means to help you attain a reliable livelihood. How much better it will be if you adopt farming and live in houses which prevent painful exposure to rain, heat and cold. The land along Pangu and

⁷⁸ “Heilongjiang xun’anshi gongshu zhunzi zhuanfa dujun huituyuan Sun Guodong bingchen shoulong Elunchun banfa yanggeshujijian yifuchi”, HSMZ, p. 245. See also “Mohe shezhiyuan Zhao Chunfang wei quanfu Elunchun xianghua zhiyuan tuntian chenming banfa xiang,” HSMZ, p. 174.

⁷⁹ “Quandao Elunchun sugai youlie erli tunken baihua yanshuo ” [Zhao Chunfang’s Address to Persuade the Elunchun to Farm], Feb. 25, 1916, HSMZ, pp. 175-176.

Xilagenqi rivers is flat and fertile; farming there will yield abundant food. I shall apply for government monies on your behalf for construction of houses and you will live the same as your neighbors. First two villages will be established. You will elect your most prestigious men as village heads. Since you all have horses, it will not be difficult to begin cultivation. I will order the nearby station leaders to teach you farming. As soon as the snow melts, you will open up the nearby land for planting crops and vegetables. I will dispatch teachers to teach your children. When they grow up, they will be eligible to be officials and the state will surely employ them. If you open up the land for farming, you will surely be rich within a few years!

As more and more Solon came down from the mountains, safety became a priority. It was necessary to organize protection from bandit raids for the newly built villages. The government's acculturation plans included enlistment of Solon into a local border force. Since the Solon were excellent horsemen they could find a place in the traditional soldier-farmer system [yubingyunongzhi], whereby settlers bore arms and provided their own security. What was different in the case of the Solon was that they were exceptional marksmen. Their skills as hunters were utilized for local security and border patrols. The local government requested each family contribute young men who would be trained in modern weaponry during the off seasons from plough and harvesting. During emergencies, these men could be mobilized. The government even planned to train "Chinese Cossacks" from the Solon as local police for bandit suppression and border defense.⁸⁰ Soon after the establishment of the Republic, district governments organized mounted patrols and militia squads from the Solon for local security. In the 1920s, many counties close to the mountains organized a special police force from the Solon to

⁸⁰ "Nongye jiaodao chang ji yubingyunong banfa dagang," HSMZ, p. 256.

suppress the opium trade, deal with bandits and assist in other operations.⁸¹ In the 1920s, some 468 Solon were organized by the provincial government into a special force in Kuma'er County.⁸² Solon police forces in this period were given different names, varying from county to county, such as horse team, defense league, cavalry troops, cavalry guerrillas, or simply guerrillas.⁸³ The policing function of the Solon assisted the process of acculturation.

The decline of fur trade in North Manchuria was an indicator of the Solon transformation. In the nineteenth century, the fur market in the provincial capital Qiqihar every May was a scene of hectic activity: "Tents were erected in the suburbs, furs were piled up, and throngs of merchants and customers gathered at the fair like huge flocks of birds." The market was still being held in the early twentieth century, but now the quantity, variety and quality of furs stood in marked contrast to the richness of the previous decades.⁸⁴

⁸¹ "Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei pizhun Tongbei xian bianlian Elunchun ren wei jingbeidui bingsuoni jiangzhang gei caizhengting zhiling" [Heilongjiang Governor Sun Liechen's Approval for Tongbei County to Organize the Elunchun into a Special Police Force], 1916, HSMZ, p. 141. See also "Nongye jiaodao chang ji yubingyunong banfa dagang," p. 256. Various names were coined for the Solon squads, such as horse squad [madui], militia squad [mintuan] and police squad [jingbeidui].

⁸² "Kuma'er lu guanbing fengxiang jiaofei biao" [A Table of Salary Information for Kumaer Soldiers], HSMZ, p. 142.

⁸³ "Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei pizhun Bilaer luxieling gaibian madui fang'an ji niju zhi xinxiang shumu ziling" [The Endorsement of the Governor of Heilongjiang for Reorganization of Bilaer Elunchun into Horse Squads and Related Salary Issues], 1924, HSMZ, p. 145. See also "Heihe daoyin Zhang Zengshou weiqingshi Humaxian nibian Xilinren youjidui shicheng" [A Petition of Heihe Prefecture Governor Zhang Zengshou to Organize Elunchun of Xilin into Guerillas], 1927, HSMZ, pp. 152-153. The Chinese names were: horse squad [madui], defense regiment [baoweituan], cavalry force [qibingdui], cavalry guerrillas [qibing youjidui], and guerrillas [youjidui].

⁸⁴ Xu Zongliang, "Heilongjiang shilue" [A Brief Narrative History of Heilongjiang], vol. 4, as quoted in Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengming and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 54.

Some Solon who failed in farming returned to their former way of life. But due to the decreasing animal population, they had to travel deeper into the mountain. The Solon, hence, found themselves divided into two societies: one belonged to agriculture and one was still associated with hunting. Those who returned to the mountains wore clothing in the Qing style, which set them apart from all strangers: “Anyone who enters deep into the mountains needs to wear the Qing costume, . . . otherwise he will be made a victim of the Solon.” The existence of the two different groups was reflected in Chinese use of the terms “refined Solon” [shu Suolun] to describe those who had abandoned hunting or maintained regular friendly contact with outside world, and “rude” [i.e., primitive] Solon” [sheng Suolun] to describe those who lived in the mountains, isolated from the modern world.⁸⁵ To persuade the latter to adopt farming would require prolonged and arduous effort. Because of the Japanese invasion, the process was interrupted. It was finally accomplished after 1949, during the Maoist era.

On the whole, relations between the Solon and Han Chinese settlers were good, but hostilities occasionally flared up due to extortion by Han merchants and abuse of official power. The Gangtong Uprising in 1922-23 was provoked by Han merchants, who had come from as far as Shanxi and Zhili provinces, to sell tobacco, liquor, guns or other commodities in exchange for furs. The merchants sold goods on credit, and those Solon who bought on credit soon became debt-ridden. In addition to being usurers, merchants beat debtors, seized their horses and guns, and took possession of their property. In some

⁸⁵ Zhao Xian, “Suolun jilue,” HSMZ, pp. 470-472.

cases, they enslaved Solon as menial laborers and violated their women. To escape maltreatment, those Solon fled deep into the mountains.⁸⁶ This kind of maltreatment provoked an uprising under Gangtong in 1922 which affected much of the frontier. Although Gangtong's band at most consisted of a hundred hunters, they killed a dozen merchants. These murders shocked the settlers, who were in fear for almost a year until Gangtong himself was killed in an internal struggle.⁸⁷

Remedial policy by the government included a number of palliative measures. Those who participated in the uprising were pardoned, exhorted not to drink or spend extravagantly, and encouraged to farm. The government also forbade itinerant merchants from entering the mountains. To satisfy the Solon demand for manufactured goods, the government granted trade monopolies to "reliable" merchants, who were also warned not to engage in unfair practices.⁸⁸ Throughout the period from 1900 to 1931, the Gangtong uprising was the only instance of armed turmoil among the Solon.

⁸⁶ "Heihe daoyin Song Wenyu zhuanbao zhaofu Wolie he yidai E min qingxing bing qing choubo zhen mi cheng" [Report of Heihe Prefecture Governor Sun Wenyu on Comforting the Elunchun], 1923, HSMZ, p. 268.

⁸⁷ Qiu Pu, gen.ed., *Elunchun Zu* [The Ethnic Elunchun], Beijing: Lishi Wenwu Chubanshe, 1984, p. 20.

⁸⁸ "Heilongjiang Dujunshu weihezun Aihuixian zhishi Tao Zongqi, lujun yingzhang San Zhenyang suoni ancha E min shanhou banfa gei Heihedao xunling" [Directive of Heilongjiang Provincial Governor-General in response to Aihui Magistrate Tao Zongqi and Army Battalion Commander San Zhenyang's Remedial Measures towards the Elunchun], April 14, 1924, HSMZ, pp. 275-280.

III. Russian Influence and Sinification

In the early twentieth century Russian influence was particularly strong on two of the ethnic peoples of North Manchuria, the Solon and the Mongols. The Chinese government countered this threat to its sovereignty over the region by a variety of policies, most important of which was its promotion of sinification, that is, the adoption of the Chinese language and Chinese cultural values by the minority peoples.

(a) The Solon

Geographical proximity gave Russia enormous influence in North Manchuria. Russia steadily encroached on the territory of the Chinese Empire. By the treaties signed in 1858-60 between the two nations Russia gained over one million square kilometers in Siberia and maritime Manchuria. The two former Chinese inland rivers, the Heilong [Amur] and the Ussuri, became the new international boundary. The two rivers, which met at a sharp point in the northeast, were described by the Chinese as “the crescent encirclement.” Some Chinese settlements established earlier on the Russian side still belonged to China according to the treaties, but Russia’s sweep through the region in 1900 wiped out these villages along the Amur.

One of the consequences of the incursion was increased contact between Russians and Solon. This was an important development in North Manchuria, since China in 1900 was too weak to counter Russian influence. Russian annexation of the trans-Amur territories in 1858-1860 had separated the Solon into two groups, one incorporated into

the Russian empire and one remaining under Chinese sovereignty. The Solon on either side sometime risked personal danger to visit relatives by illegally crossing the river. In Russia, the Solon were called the Tungus, with various Russian names for their sub-groups. During the Russian invasion in 1900, some Chinese Solon migrated to the Russian side to escape the hazards of war.⁸⁹ They also helped Russians infiltrate the Solon peoples within Chinese territory.

Russian influence upon Chinese Solon was manifested in various ways. The fur trade proved mutually beneficial for both sides. The Russians supplied the Solon with guns and took their furs for the European market. This exchange benefited Russian traders, and made brought prosperity to some Solon. The trade developed to a high level. Solon hunters near the border dealt directly with Russian merchants and sometimes went across the river to exchange furs for guns and necessities in Russian villages. One report remarked that: “In fall, winter and spring . . . Russian merchants enter the Chinese mountains to trade with the Solon, . . . the Solon headman, an honest person, spoke Russian, wore Russian clothes and behaved exactly as a Russian.”⁹⁰ Another report

⁸⁹ “Heilongjiang xingsheng zongdu Xu Shichang, xunfu Zhou Shumo wei shoufu Mohe Elunchun ren bing fagei qi dawei zhizhao zhaohui” [Approval of Governor-General Xu Shichang and Heilongjiang Governor Zhou Shumo to Grant Privileges in Order to Pacify the Elunchun], December 12, 1908, HSMZ, p. 228.

⁹⁰ “Mohe shezhiyuan Zhao Chunfang weishengfuchaming Mohe ji zhushu shanli Elunchun buluo renshu changzhu didian shenghuo qingzhuan ji peiyi guanzhi geqingcheng” [Report of Mohe Administrator Zhao Chunfang on the Elunchun], June 27, 1914, HSMZ, p. 65.

pointed to the impact of the Russian language: “The Solon have good command of Russian and sell their furs to the Russians or exchange them for guns and ammunition.”⁹¹

Language adoption was sometimes followed by religious conversion. Russian Orthodox missionaries engaged in itinerant preaching among the Solon, and converts multiplied. Some Solon were even given Russian names. Often Solon marriage was presided over by Russian ministers, and funerals were conducted by the Russian church as well.⁹² For many border area Solon, Russian Orthodoxy replaced traditional beliefs such as nature worship, ancestor worship, Buddhism and Shamanism. Religious converts were likely to absorb Russian education. Since the Solon possessed only a spoken language, Russian authorities encouraged Solon children to enter Russian schools, learn the Russian alphabet and eventually to adopt a Russian outlook. For the Solon who sought an education for their children, free or low cost schooling provided by the Russians came as a windfall.⁹³

Direct contact produced a psychological transformation in the Solon. They became “closer to the Russians and more distant from the Chinese.”⁹⁴ To suspicious Chinese

⁹¹ “Heilongjiangsheng xingzheng gongshu wei Huma, Aihui, Nenjiang sanxian she Elunchun xuexiao gei Heihe guanchashi de xunling” [Order of Heilongjiang Governor to Establish Schools for the Elunchun in Huma, Aihui and Nenjiang], December 16, 1913, HSMZ, pp. 179-180.

⁹² “Qigan xianzhishi Li Yuchen jubao diaocha xianjing shanli Elunchun ren hukou ji shoufu shouling fagei zhizhao shicheng” [Report of Qigan Magistrate Li Yuchen on the Elunchun Living in the Mountains within the Boundary of the County], June 19, 1923, HSMZ, p. 114.

⁹³ “Heilongjiangsheng xingzheng gongshu wei Huma, Aihui, Nenjiang sanxian she Elunchun xuexiao gei Heihe guanchashi de xunling,” HSMZ, p. 179.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

administrators the ambiguous concept of citizenship and ethnic loyalty of the Solon might facilitate future Russian annexations of land in North Manchuria. It was feared that those Solon who spoke Russian, wore Russian clothes, and traded with Russians would little by little “lose the notion of their country,” “lack knowledge of China,” and “become ignorant of the existence of their motherland.”⁹⁵ Since the Chinese maintained only sporadic contact with the Russians, they found the closeness of Solon-Russian relations disconcerting. Studies done in the early Republican period produced alarming reports. They showed that some Chinese Solon became Russian citizens, with Russian passports that enabled them to cross the border freely. “Some Solon were won over by petty enticements and became citizens of a foreign country.”⁹⁶ In some areas, “more and more Solon took Russian citizenship.”⁹⁷ This was seen as a serious violation of China’s sovereignty. However, Chinese anger was directed at the Russians rather than the Solon. In the official Chinese view, the Solon were easily deceived and manipulated by “others.”

Worst was the fear that some Solon acted as spies in the interest of Russia.

According to one report, the Russians “took advantage of their simplicity of mind and lured them by various means, so that some became border rogues who willingly yet

⁹⁵ “Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei chouban Elunchun guominjiaoyu gei jiaoyuting xunling” [Order of Heilongjiang Governor to the Department of Education in regard to Establishing Education for the Elunchun], August 26, 1920, HSMZ, pp. 204-206.

⁹⁶ “Longjiang daoyin He Yu weiqingshi Jingxing shezhiju chouni anzhi suolun renmin banfa bingbaohuiju riqi shixiang” [Statement of Prefectural Governor of Longjiang He Yu to Assist Solon Settlement], July 16, 1915, HSMZ, p. 466.

⁹⁷ Guo Kexing, *Heilongjiang xiangtu lu* [A Historiographical Record of Heilongjiang], Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1987, quoted in abridged version in HSMZ, p. 468.

pitifully acted as spies for the neighboring state [Russia].”⁹⁸ The late nineteenth century tsars of Russia aimed to penetrate further into the interior of Manchuria, and to annex territory if possible. It was no accident that Russian intrusions were accompanied by the appearance of Solon sympathizers. Indeed, utilization of ethnic minorities across the border was always a problem in China’s relations with Russia. In this case, the number of Solon collaborators with Russian citizenship was small, and those who served as Russian spies even smaller. Taken as a whole, only those Solon who lived along the Heilong [Amur] River were strongly influenced by Russia. Most Solon hunted far from the border had no chance to trade with Russians, let alone become subject to Russification. Yet the border-dwelling Solon presented China with a serious problem in regard to the maintenance of Chinese sovereignty over the area in which they lived.

The Russian language also made inroads among the border Solon. During the Qing ethnic minorities were allowed to retain their mother tongue, but were encouraged to acquire Manchu or Mandarin for communication with higher officials. Most Solon headmen during the Qing were fluent in Manchu. By the end of the Qing period the Manchus increasingly used Mandarin as their spoken language, and Solon headmen followed suit. However, with the weakening of dynastic control of the region toward the turn of the century, Russian had a chance to move into the linguistic arena. Hence officials of both the Qing and the Republic felt compelled to adopt strong measures to curb the growing Russian linguistic presence. At the beginning of the century, the

⁹⁸ “Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei chouban Elunchun guomin jiaoyu gei jiaoyuting xunling,” HSMZ, p. 204.

governor-general of Manchuria decreed that “our subjects are not allowed to adopt a foreign language within our territory and any violation of this will be severely punished.”⁹⁹ To prohibit the Solon speaking Russian was a priority. “Border areas do not attract many immigrants and tend to be largely empty land with only a few Solon inhabitants. To establish national defense, the first task is to assimilate the Solon, and the first step in this regard is to prohibit them from using the Russian language.”¹⁰⁰

Qing and Republican officialdom placed great reliance on education in assimilating the Solon. State schools were set up in 1906 to teach Solon children to speak and read Chinese.¹⁰¹ In 1913 state funds were specifically earmarked for Solon schooling and for hiring specially trained teachers “in order to spur assimilation.” According to a Chinese report, the Solon “gradually came to understand the benefits of education and were then willing to send their children to school.”¹⁰² Educational efforts were directed towards Solon children of six years and above. Because the Solon had no written language, children were taught by multilingual teachers in Manchu, Mandarin or one of the Solon dialects. The curriculum included ethics, mathematics, physical education, music, arts,

⁹⁹ “Zhongguo diyi lishi dang’anguan” [China Number One Historical Archive], No.543 75-1, Zhao Erxun Dang’an [Zhao Erxun Archive], 543-75-1.

¹⁰⁰ “Humaxian zhishi Zhu Zongheng tiaochen fusui jiaoyu suoshu Xilin Elunchun touerzuo renmin yingxing zhishiyi cheng” [Report on Huma County Magistrate Zhu Zongheng’s Program of Elunchun Education], April 10, 1918, HSMZ, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ “Mo’ergen cheng shixueyuan Liu Zhensheng zunzha shicha Bo’erduo Laha liangzhan xuetang banli qingxing bing” [Mo’ergen City Education Examiner Liu Zhensheng’s Report on Inspection of Two Schools in Bo’erduo and Laha], May 1908, HSMZ, p. 177.

¹⁰² “Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei chouban Elunchun guomin jiaoyu gei jiaoyuting xunling,” HSMZ, p. 205. Schools were set up in Huma, Aihui and Nenjiang counties for Elunchun alone.

handicrafts and Chinese.¹⁰³ Furthermore, teachers supervised students “each day after class in studying agricultural techniques such as seed planting and irrigation, in order to enhance their familiarity with farming.”¹⁰⁴ The schools sought to recruit Solon children through attractive policies including tuition waivers, free textbooks and monthly subsidies.¹⁰⁵ The best students were recommended to high schools or normal schools.

The Solon who received this education developed a Chinese mentality. In the thirty-one years from 1900 to 1931, local administrators worked persistently to integrate the Solon into the Chinese nation and to reverse their Russophile trend. “The best and foremost way to assimilation is through education.”¹⁰⁶ The fluency in Mandarin acquired by the children proved of benefit to their parents, who often had recourse to the language in contacts with Han farmers. Thus many of the older generation learned to speak functional Chinese. The Solon, it was reported in 1924, “have taken the right track and are no longer different from the Han.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ “Jiancha Elunchun xuewuwei yuan Zou Zhaotang wei shicha shengli di'er E xiao qingxing qingjianheshicheng” [Report of Elunchun Education Councilor Zou Zhaotang on No.2 Provincial Elunchun School], October 27, 1920, HSMZ, pp. 212-213.

¹⁰⁴ “Heilongjiang shengzhang gongshu wei chouban Elunchun guomin jiaoyu gei jiaoyuting xunling,” HSMZ, p. 207.

¹⁰⁵ “Heilongjiang shengjiaoyuting tingzhang Zheng Lingao wei baoyoudai Elunchun xuesheng yimou kaitong youliwenhua niding guize gongqingjianhecheng” [Report of Heilongjiang Provincial Education Administrator Zheng Lingao on Preferential Policies in Education towards the Elunchun in Order to Transform their Hunting Culture], February 7, 1931, HSMZ, pp. 219-230.

¹⁰⁶ “Huma Mohe zhishi Tan Shouxi Tao Zongqi guanyu tonghua E zu banfa jieluecheng” [Plans of Magistrate of Tan Shouxi of Huma and Magistrate Tao Zongqi of Mohe for Assimilation of the Elunchun], June 1924, HSMZ, p. 217.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, HSMZ, p. 218.

By the late Qing some Solon had taken Chinese names and surnames. Widespread adoption occurred during the 1910s and the 1920s. The process usually involved matching the first syllable of the longer Solon family name with a monosyllabic Chinese surname. For example, the Chinese surnames of the three leading Solon families in the western part of North Manchuria—Guo, Meng and Ao—were abbreviations of Guobole, Moerdiyin and Aole.¹⁰⁸ In 1913, a Solon official changed his last name from Xilabu into Xu.¹⁰⁹ Other rules might apply. For example, the Solon surname Jingqili was a place name, that of a river (today Russia's Zeya River). It also carried the meaning of “yellow,” the colour. The Jingqili therefore adopted Huang, the Chinese word for “yellow,” as their surname. When Solon could not fix on a Chinese surname, local officials, with the help of educated Solon, might confer a name.¹¹⁰

As contact with Han farmers became more frequent, older Solon social practices and rituals underwent sweeping change. For example, burial customs that required the bodies of the dead to be hung from trees for three years were abandoned. Instead, interment was adopted. The prohibition of marriage between young men and women of the same surname was replaced by the Chinese practice allowing marriage within the same clan, as long as couples did not have the same great-great-grandfather.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Guo Kexing, *op. cit.*, in abridged version in HSMZ, p. 499.

¹⁰⁹ “Kuma'er Elunchun yuanliuji” [The Origin of the Kumaer Elunchun], March 15, 1918, HSMZ, p. 79.

¹¹⁰ “Heilongjiang xun'anshi gongshu zhunzi zhuanfa dujun huituyuan Sun Guodong bingchen shoulong Elunchun banfa yanggeshujijian yifuchi,” HSMZ, p. 247.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247. There is a special term used to describe the transformation of habits and customs: “huasu tongfeng.”

No other move promoted assimilation more effectively than intermarriage between Chinese and members of the smaller ethnic groups such as the Solon. During the Qing, marriage between ethnic groups was officially prohibited. Only at the turn of the century was the ban lifted. Although intermarriage never reached a large scale, it helped accelerate the process of Solon sinification. One romantic story concerns a Han-Solon marriage. In 1917 the newly established Suolun County in southwest Heilongjiang welcomed its first magistrate. Upon taking up his post, he handled Solon affairs cautiously and gained the respect of the local people. "He soon married the daughter of an influential Solon clan. The bride was beautiful, polite, elegant and diligent. The only problem, however, was in communication between them. Occasionally, they needed a third person as translator, which aroused much amusement in the county." This marriage was the beginning of assimilation of the bride's clan. Furthermore, the magistrate made good use of his new social network: "This magistrate was good at business . . . he utilized his new connections to make an annual profit of 30,000 to 40,000 Chinese dollars, and later turned down a promotion which would have taken him out of the district."¹¹²

With the establishment of the Republic, the ideal of harmonious co-existence of the five principal peoples within China along with the many smaller ethnic groups was promoted widely by the government. All ethnic groups were to be regarded as equal, regardless of size, history or any other consideration. A pan-Chinese historical identity was hypothesized, and the Solon too were descendants of the common ancestor Huangdi,

¹¹² Zhao Xian, "Suolun jilue," in HSMZ, p. 477.

the “Yellow Emperor.” “One of the Solon ancestors came from a branch of Huangdi’s family,” it was claimed,¹¹³ Dawo’er scholar Guo Kexing asserted that the Solon were descendants of both Huangdi and Yandi, the latter another common ancestor of the Chinese people. Solon originally belonged to a common Chinese culture, which they had lost. “Living in the north we [Solon] gradually came under the influence of the uncultured natives; thus we abandoned farming for hunting, deserted our houses for caves and relinquished clothes for animal furs. The conversion from Chineseness to barbarism made us nomadic hunters.”¹¹⁴ This pan-Chinese concept was systematically advanced in order to blur the distinction between Han and Solon. The latter were not outsiders, but were an inseparable part of the Chinese nation [Zhonghua minzu], and each individual Solon was one of the four hundred million Chinese people.¹¹⁵ “If they are well guided,” as one observer wrote in the early 1900s, “the Solon surely will be among the strongest and healthiest elements of the Chinese nation.”¹¹⁶

The growing sense of Chinese identity among the Solon was paralleled by a distancing from Russian influences. Russian passports were gradually abandoned, Russian words and phrases dropped from their vocabulary, and Russian education

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 469.

¹¹⁴ Guo Kexing, “Dawo’er jilue” [A Brief Sketch of the Dawo’er], HSMZ, p. 500. Guo Kexing was born in 1892 and became a famous Dawo’er scholar. Later he entered politics under the Republic, and once served as an advisor to the President. He was also a professor at Jiaotong University. See Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 1, 1988, p. 63.

¹¹⁵ “Heilongjiang xun’anshi gongshu zhunzi zhuanfa dujun huituyuan Sun Guodong bingchen shoulong Elunchun banfa yanggeshujijian yifuchi,” HSMZ, p. 247.

¹¹⁶ Zhao Xian, “Suolun jilue,” HSMZ, p. 471.

became a memory. The Russian Revolution of 1917 gave further impetus to Solon assimilation. The turmoil of the Russian Civil War brought great suffering to the Russian side of the river. Yet North Manchuria remained comparatively peaceful, despite warlord south of the Great Wall. A number of Solon in exile in Russia now returned and were welcomed back as Chinese citizens.¹¹⁷ The threat of Solon Russification was now past.

(b) The Mongols

Russian influence upon Mongols within the Qing Empire was pronounced in politics, economics, culture and military affairs. Efforts by the Russians to draw the Mongols into their empire polarized the Mongols in the northern part of the Qing Empire. Outer Mongolia was very much under the tsar's influence, and in 1912 broke away from China to form a separate state, which soon became a Russian dependency. Russian troops were stationed throughout the country. The capital, Kulun [Ulan Bator], was the center of Russian influence. In time the traditional Mongolian written language was replaced by the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. This strong Russian presence in Outer Mongolia brought pressure to bear on the Mongols in North Manchuria.

The Mongols had a much larger population than the other ethnic minority groups in the northern reaches of China. They shared a common language and clearly defined culture, with deep roots in Buddhism. They possess an illustrious history as former rulers of China. This cultural identity, taken with the growing Russian influence, weakened

¹¹⁷ "Heilongjiang daishengzhang Yu Sixing dafu yu Eguo taolai Kuma'er lujienei Elunchunren chuli banfa ji jinzhi simai junhuo shihan" [Response of Heilongjiang Acting Governor Yu Sixing in regard to Handling Elunchun Fleeing Russia and Forbidding Private Sale of Arms], April 12, 1923, HSMZ, p. 264.

Mongol attachment to China. Before 1900, Russian influence was limited to Outer Mongolia. The completion of the Chinese Eastern Railway, however, accelerated Russian penetration into the Mongol community in North Manchuria. The railway became a corridor from which Russia extended its reach into the nearby Mongol bannerlands.

Hoping to create a buffer zone between China and its maritime region, Russia encouraged separatism among the Mongols. Russia directly intervened in Hulunbeier [Barga] area affairs by demanding that any Chinese moving there must report to the Russian authorities beforehand.¹¹⁸ Within Hulunbeier, Russians often bought land from the Mongols without permission from Beijing.¹¹⁹ Russians often harassed Chinese tax officials who tried to collect tax from the Mongols, while themselves posing as protectors.¹²⁰ In 1912, under Russian instigation, Mongols in Hulunbeier unilaterally declared independence and a Mongol army assisted by Russian forces occupied the region. During this military action, the Russians occupied Chinese gold mines, coal mines, and salt production centers. The Russians refused China the use of the railway to send troops to the region.¹²¹ Subsequently China and Russian signed a treaty defining Hulunbeier as a special Chinese administrative zone, but it remained very much under Russian dominance.

¹¹⁸ “Zhong E huiding Hulunbei’er Tiaojian” [Terms of Sino-Russian Treaty of Hulunbei’er], March 1912, HPA, ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 360.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 334.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 352.

Russian economic influence was strong among the North Manchuria Mongol banners. By lending to the princes, the Russians gained economic leverage. Wutai, prince of Zhasaketu, borrowed 200,000 rubles from the Russians in 1904 by illegally mortgaging all the property of the banner. Then in 1906 he borrowed another 90,000 rubles.¹²² With Russian assistance, Wutai, whose banner was on the border between North Manchuria and Hunlunbeier, eventually rebelled. In his announcement of East Mongolian independence in 1912, he openly declared that he had received support, including ammunition, from Kulun [Ulan Bator] and Russia.¹²³ The Wutai rebellion, however, proved the only example of an uprising among the North Manchuria Mongols. Despite growing Russian influence, the Mongols in North Manchuria differed from their kinsmen in Outer Mongolia and Hulunbeier. In fact, the Mongols were polarized into two groups: the Mongols in Outer Mongolia and Hulunbeier who were heavily Russified, and the Mongols in North Manchuria, who accepted Chinese sovereignty, though they too were under Russian influence. From 1900 to 1931 both the Qing and the Republic endeavored to stem Russian influence by promoting the sinification of the North Manchuria Mongols.

Chinese authorities utilized their traditional strategy of appeasement and pacification in dealing with ethnic groups. The central government and local administrations sought to befriend Mongols and win their support. During the Wutai rebellion, Heilongjiang

¹²² Li Shutian, gen.ed., Menghuang anjuan, [Documents on the Mongolian Wilderness], Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 1.

¹²³ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 353.

provincial officials announced to the Mongols that they would protect all who did not participate, help those who participated yet repented, and pardon those who surrendered on the battlefield.¹²⁴ In 1916, following the suppression of the rebellion, the President of China granted its leader amnesty and even restored his noble title when he came to Beijing seeking forgiveness.¹²⁵ Chinese officials seized every chance to praise any “patriotic” Mongol. For example, the government assisted the Mongol Sangbao who found himself stranded in Kulun [Ulan Bator] in Outer Mongolia in 1916. Since Sangbao opposed an independent Mongol state, the Beijing government, seeking to “win Mongol hearts,” provided \$5,000 to help his party in getting back to North Manchuria.¹²⁶ The same year, the governor of Heilongjiang dispatched twenty young men, including “patriotic” Mongols, to persuade the Mongol Babuzhabu to return, promising him safety if he did so.¹²⁷ At the national level, four Mongol representatives had been credited to the National Parliament in Beijing following the establishment of the Republic in 1912. In Heilongjiang the Provincial Assembly included Mongol representatives from local banners.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 354.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 373.

¹²⁶ “Guanyu zizhu Mengren huiqi shixiang” [Issues Concerning Assistance to Mongols Returning to their Banners], HPA, 62-5-142.

¹²⁷ “Heilongjiang xun’anshi gongshi wei zhuanzhu tuishan baofu zhaofu Babuzhabu zhi ren yuan shichi” [Report of Governor of Heilongjiang to Safeguard and Pacify Babuzhabu], February 9, 1916, HSMZ, p. 381.

¹²⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 2203-2225.

Mongol cultural assimilation began early in the century with the Qing reforms. In 1910, the Ministry of Ethnic Affairs lifted the ban prohibiting Mongols from learning Chinese. The Mongols were now to be encouraged to study Chinese as well as their native language. Mongols were urged to hire Chinese teachers to accelerate their language acquisition. The ministry also encouraged intermarriage between the Han and the Mongols by rewarding such couples.¹²⁹ To promote Mongol familiarity with national affairs, the Qing in 1908 had assisted the publication of a newspaper in Jilin Province entitled “Mongol News” [Menghua Bao]. The newspaper was circulated free of charge to six hundred subscribers.¹³⁰

Education was seen as a primary means of fostering Chinese culture, stimulating Mongol patriotism and preventing foreign cultural “invasion.” Elementary schools were set up in Mongol villages, and the best students were recommended to higher educational institutions, including Beijing University.¹³¹ During the Republican era education was expanded. Elementary schools were to be found in every banner, and middle schools in certain designated locations. In 1930 a Mongol Normal School was established to train bilingual teachers. The curriculum shows that the Chinese language was given more

¹²⁹ “Lifubu guanyu biantong jiuli zhengxing Meng wushi de zouzhe” [Report of Ministry of Ethnic Affairs to the Emperor concerning Reform of the Old System in order to Support the Mongols], August 1909, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, Jilin qiwu, p. 276.

¹³⁰ “Chuangban Menghuabao jianzhang” [The Plan for Initiation of “Mongol News”], in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, Jilin qiwu, p. 248.

¹³¹ “Dongsansheng zongdu Xiliang dai Meng wang zouqing suxing xianfa de zouzhe” [Report of Governor Xiliang of the Three Northeastern Provinces to the Emperor on behalf of Mongol Princes in regard to Accelerating Constitutional Reform], March 1910, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, Jilin qiwu, pp. 261-262.

emphasis than Mongolian. In middle school, twice as many hours were given to Chinese; in some middle schools it was three times as many. History and geography courses emphasized Chinese content and attempted to instill a Chinese outlook.¹³² The Beijing government announced that the Republic would employ in official positions any qualified Mongols with a good command of Chinese.¹³³

Recognition of the Mongols as members of the Chinese family of peoples was integral to government promotion of Mongols sinification. The Republic officially proclaimed that China was comprised of five peoples (or “nations”) along with some fifty smaller ethnic groups. Among the five the Mongols were placed third, after the Han and the Manchus, and before the Chinese Muslims and Tibetans. Officials propagandized the pan-Chinese notion that all Chinese citizens shared the same blood. “Mongols are divided into numerous clans, yet collectively they are descendants of the Huns of the Han dynasty. The ancestors of the Huns were sons of Chunwei, who himself was a son of King Jie of the [early Chinese] Xia dynasty.”¹³⁴ The Zhalaite and Duerbote banners, according to legend, “originally came from Tibet,”¹³⁵ and the Tibetans themselves were but “descendants of Dihongshi and Gaoxinshi, offspring of [the “Yellow Emperor”]

¹³² Several archival documents illustrate Mongol school schedules: for example, HSMZ, pp. 336-380.

¹³³ “Linshi dazongtong ling” [Decree of the Provisional President of China], August 19, 1912, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiwu*, p. 289.

¹³⁴ “Jiangsheng Dalai xian diyu tongzhi ” [General Introduction to Dalai County, Heilongjiang Province], June 26, 1917, HSMZ, p. 23.

¹³⁵ “Tailai shezhiju zhishu” [A General Introduction to the Tailai Administration], November 1916, HSMZ, p. 301.

Huangdi.”¹³⁶ Therefore, all Chinese citizens, whatever their ethnic background, were of the same origin, sharing a common ancestor. This all-encompassing interpretation of the origin of the Chinese nation reflected a certain goodwill on the part of the Han Chinese state, but it was an ideology intended to serve its interest first, not that of the various minority peoples.¹³⁷

Sinification of the North Manchuria Mongols was not intended to deprive them of their native language. On the contrary, bilingualism was upheld. Mongol children were educated in both languages, though enhancement of literacy went virtually hand-in-hand with indoctrination of Chinese patriotism. To increase understanding of Chinese culture, some Mongol princes in the 1920s proposed publishing books on Chinese history and literature in Mongolian, in order to “enlighten Mongol hearts.”¹³⁸

By 1930 many Mongols in North Manchuria had adopted Chinese names and surnames. The practice, like that of the Solon, was to choose a Chinese surname that approximated in sound the first syllable of the polysyllabic Mongolian surname, or to find a Chinese surname whose meaning corresponded to that of the Mongolian surname. For example, the Chinese Qi came from the Mongolian Qipuxinute, Dai from Daipuluo, Wu from Wuzhala, Guan from Gualecha, and Xi from Xiketeli. Some Mongols adopted

¹³⁶ “Jiangsheng Dalai xian diyu tongzhi,” p. 23.

¹³⁷ “Zhelimu mengzhang guanyu gaiqi yingban shiyi ji shiqihuiyi yu Changchun dengshi de chengwen ji piwen” [Report of Head of the Zhelimu League on Banner Affairs and the Ten Banner Conference Held in Changchun], November 24, 1912, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiwu*, pp. 290-291.

¹³⁸ “Zhelimu geqi wanggong huiyi gongtong biaoju baogao shu” [Report of Zhelimu Banner Princes on their Conclave], January 1927, in Pan Jinglong and Zhang Xuanru, *Jilin qiwu*, p. 296.

Chinese last names in such a way that investigators in the early 1930s found it impossible to trace their original Mongolian names. Examples are Hulan County Mongols who had taken the very common Chinese surnames Bai, Fu, He, Hu, Huo, Jin, Wu, Yuan, and Zhao.¹³⁹

Despite the intense pressure of sinification, the Mongols, like the other indigenous people, retained elements of their culture. They continued to speak their native tongue and they kept their traditional written language, while their kinsmen in Outer Mongolia abandoned the latter for the Russian alphabet. They continued to live in their own communities, forming new farming villages. They held fast to Buddhism and worshiped in their temples. Even the old banner system, while modified, remained in place. Hence, Mongol sinification never reached the level that it did among the Solon. However, the degree of sinification reached by the North Manchuria Mongols brought them much closer to the Chinese than was the case with the Mongols of Outer Mongolia, who were subjected to strong pressures of Russification.

Conclusion

The steady sinification of ethnic minorities in North Manchuria progressed despite the vicissitudes besetting China in the first three decades of the century. The persistence of sinification as a Chinese state goal is understandable in light of the *shibian* policy to defend the frontier. As a weak nation at the mercy of imperialist powers, China

¹³⁹ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 520-529.

implemented policies that befriended its North Manchuria ethnic minorities out of fear that the region would fall into Russian hands. These policies sought to direct the ethnic minorities into embracing agriculture, while teaching them the Chinese language and educating them in traditional Chinese culture.

In North Manchuria the years from 1900 to 1931 represented the last page of the co-existence of the two worlds that had shaped China's long history: the agricultural world of the Han Chinese and the nomadic world of the northern ethnic groups. The latter had ruled over northern China and even the whole China at various times, stamping Chinese history with a distinctive mark. One thousand years earlier the ancestors of the Solon ruled all or much of northern China as the Northern Wei and Liao dynasties. The Mongols established the Yuan dynasty and held sway over all China during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The Jurchen controlled the northern half of China in the twelfth century as the Jin dynasty, and their descendants, the Manchus, founded the Qing dynasty, which would be the last epoch of China's imperial history. By the end of each of these dynastic periods, those of the ruling peoples settled in China had become largely sinified and had merged with the Han. Those who remained in their northern homelands had retained their ethnic identity and age-old traditions. It was not until the early twentieth century that the character of these homelands began to change rapidly, as village-based agriculture replaced nomadism and hunting. The contrast between the two worlds was fast coming to an end, as that of the Han settlers displaced that of the indigenous inhabitants.

It would be a mistake to impose the categories of the North American frontier upon ethnic relations in North Manchuria. The latter was something of an intermediate zone where the Chinese state encouraged immigration for national defence, the Russian state endeavoured to expand its influence, and the indigenous inhabitants managed to survive. The indigenous inhabitants here, unlike American Indians, were seen as potential allies, rather than as enemies of the new settlers. While China took the initiative to win them over, the indigenous inhabitants also leaned toward the Han, who were seen as racially close to them. The circumstance of the Russian Revolution accelerated the trend of sinification, as it abruptly removed Russian state power from the region.

This chapter has dealt with the profound transformation of the Manchus, Mongols and Solon. There were other smaller ethnic groups, such as the Hezhe, who made their living as fishermen, and who underwent the same changes in their pattern of life. However, the Hezhe population numbered only several hundred people in the early years of the century, so it is difficult to generalize from their experience. Other groups include the Muslims, who have always been regarded as an ethnic minority, more because of their distinctive religion than because of their ancestral roots in central Asia. In North Manchuria they were few in number, though prominent in business. Like the Han, they had arrived in the region as immigrants. In all but religion the Muslims had long been sinified, and it is this that sets them apart from the North Manchuria ethnic groups treated in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Insecurity and Social Order: Banditry in North Manchuria

In the years from 1900 to 1931, banditry was endemic throughout North Manchuria, greatly affecting frontier life in various ways. According to local gazetteers, almost every county suffered raids. However, bandits in North Manchuria did not gain sufficient momentum to establish a regional power base, as did Zhang Zuolin in South Manchuria. North Manchuria bandits, to the contrary, tended to form relatively small bands of several dozen to a few hundred members, on rare occasions reaching a thousand men. They roamed the land to prey upon settlers, to revenge themselves upon the authorities and even to act, as they claimed, as local agents of rough justice.

Frontier regions, almost by definition, lack strong governance. In the newly settled zones of North Manchuria there existed a vacuum that gave bandits the chance to survive and prosper. In such a society, settlers sought for assistance from the government while at the same time they organized self-defense. Frontier society consisted in fact of three armed camps: bandits acting as predators, government forces acting to maintain order, and civilians acting in self-defense. Whenever the governmental presence was strong, banditry waned. The civilian militia was not insignificant, and many times it successfully fended off bandits without government help. Yet ironically the three forces were interchangeable. Sometimes the government persuaded bandits to join army or local

police unit. Bandits, for their part, recruited both soldiers and members of the civilian militia. Banditry in the frontier region was a distinctive political and social phenomenon, inseparable from the frontier itself.

The purpose of the chapter is threefold. First, it identifies the causes of banditry; in other words, it explains why banditry was so pervasive even when government and civilians took a strong stand against it. Second, it probes the bandit world and its relations with the settler world. In North Manchuria, bandits formed their own society, within their own small domains. Bandits sustained themselves so well that they could be rooted out only when they encountered a strong authority with tenacious determination, which the Communists provided in the late 1940s. Third, it investigates government and civilian actions taken against bandits. During the 1900-31 period, both the declining Qing dynasty and the weak Republic endeavored to deal with banditry, yet since frontier sanctuaries were so abundant and official forces so small, government often had to leave settlers at the mercy of the outlaws. However, whenever the government gained strength, or local settlers organized themselves well, bandits could be temporarily driven out of sight.

An examination of banditry in North Manchuria is, by its very nature, exploratory rather than definitive. Materials relating to the phenomenon are scattered through many files, and up until now no academic works have been published on the topic. This chapter, which is based on official archival documents and local historical records, seeks to illuminate the linkage between the two interrelated worlds of bandits and settlers.

the above mentioned assumptions fail to explain the origins of North Manchurian banditry, even if they explain its presence in North China. What then were the causes?

First of all, North Manchuria's ecological setting was ideal for outlaws. This huge sparsely inhabited land was marked by mountains, rivers, forests and other landforms. The two mountain ranges, the Greater and Lesser Xing'an, with their offshoots and ridges, occupied one-fourth of the total region. They were covered by dense forests and indented with numerous caves. The many rivers and tributaries in the region were dotted with countless islands and isolated headlands. In these natural hideouts bandits congregated, stored weapons, kept loot, held captives, and planned future moves. These locations were hard to find and impossible for small groups of police to deal with. Since such natural landforms covered the region, bandits were dispersed throughout the land. Records show that almost every area contained landforms that at some time harbored outlaws: "Nobody lived there . . . yet it became the abode for bandits . . . and from there the bandits kidnapped travelers and murdered people for their property."² "The mountainous region northeast of Dongxing has been a notorious refuge for bandits."³ Other county registers carry similar accounts of outlaws harassing the nearby vicinities.

² Wu Jisun, "Duban fu Taonan, Xincheng, Qiqiha'er yantu riji" [Diary Written on the Way to Taonan, Xincheng and Qiqihar on Official Business], 1908, in Li Shutian, Menghuang anjuan, (Documents on the Mongolian Wilderness), Changchun: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 6.

³ "Heilongjiang qingzhang jianzhaoken zongju juzhang Du Yintian wei fuyi Dongxingzhen yingshe zhaokenju bingchou nijing feicheng" [Report of Proposed Establishment of a Reclamation Administration in Dongxing by Duyintian, Head of Heilongjiang Provincial Survey and Reclamation Bureau], May 24, 1917, in HPA: HS, p. 405.

Even on the plains, bandits found their domicile near rivers: “In the Quanzi tract, about twenty kilometers from the county seat, . . . bandits were active along the river.”⁴

Crops planted by the settlers became a natural haven for seasonal bandits. In the 1910s and 1920s, sorghum became one of the important crops of the region. The fully grown sorghum was so tall and thick in the summer and early fall that even bandits on horseback inside a field were not visible. A local folksong included the line: “when the green net [of sorghum] rises, the time has come to join the band.”⁵ After the harvest, bandits would return home, their “season” completed.

Regional customs, deeply rooted in the military tradition, also created a social milieu for bandits. For more than two hundred years, banner troops were stationed in North Manchuria. Their training in horsemanship, swordsmanship, use of the dagger, and various forms of kungfu had a subtle influence upon a regional culture which was already militarized in nature. Weapons were an inseparable part of frontier life, producing militant men rather than scholastic literati. Officials often condemned locals in words such as “there were a few good men in Heihe but many more evil-doers.”⁶ In the eastern region, officials observed that “the contamination of bad habits molded their intractable

⁴ “Mingshui shezhiyuan Zhao Quanbi zhuanbaominyi qingqiu genggai xianjie bingqing gai xiancheng” [Report of Mingshui Administrator Zhao Quanbi to Redefine the County Boundary and Establish a County Government on Behalf of Locals], December 22, 1928, in HPA: HS, p. 546.

⁵ Cao Baoming, “Shenmidé Guandong qisu” [The Colorful Customs of the Northeast], Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 1994, p. 58.

⁶ “Heihedao wei yiqingyuanan zhunyu Woximen xian zuojianli susongcheng” [Petition of Heihe Prefecture to Establish a County Administration in Woximen], March 31, 1921, in HPA: HS, p. 892.

militant disposition.”⁷ In Suilan Prefecture, officials complained that “it is hard to control untamed militant persons from whom bandits can suddenly emerge.”⁸ In Baoqing, officials commented on how hard it was to control “militant men living in the wild.”⁹ “Local people are aggressively militant and have become a serious problem.”¹⁰ Any reckless official move could turn militant locals into bandits challenging authority, preying upon other settlers or simply vaunting their strength. Certainly it is an exaggeration to claim, as some did, that almost every family in the region directly or indirectly had relations with bandits, or that local youths typically saw banditry as a way to experience the outside world.¹¹ It is safe to conclude, though, that banditry was a byproduct of the long militant tradition of the region.

The political vacuum in many local areas allowed outlaws to operate. Before 1900 civilian administrations existed in few areas of North Manchuria. The overwhelming majority of county governments were established between 1900 and 1931. When a county government was set up, officials and staff numbered no more than a few dozen.

⁷ “Jilin jiangjun Ming’an zoubiantong Jilin guanzhi zengshe futingzhouxian dagaizhangchengzhe” [Report to the Emperor by Jilin General Min’an concerning the Establishment of New Local Administrations], Sept. 9, 1878, in HPA: HS, p. 1.

⁸ “Suilandaoyin Yusixing weizhuanbao Suleng guihuashezhi qingxingxiang” [Report of Suilan Prefecture Governor Yu Sixing concerning Local Planning], June 5, 1915, in HPA: HS, p. 501.

⁹ “Jilin caizhengting tingzhang Xiong Zhengqi wei zunyi Baoqing gaishexianzhi qingzibuzhuanzouxian” [Report of Jilin Financial Minister Xiong Zhengqi concerning the Establishment of a County Administration in Baoqing], Feb. 21, 1916, HPA: HS, p. 697.

¹⁰ “Neiwu Caizheng liangbu huixiannizhun Baoqing fenzhi difang gaishengxianzhicheng” [Approval of Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Finance for Establishment of a County Government in Baoqing], 1916, HPA: HS, p. 699.

¹¹ Yang Jun, gen.ed., Fangtan Dongbeiren [Random Remarks on the People of the Northeast], Beijing: Zhongguo Shehuikexue Chubanshe, 1995, p. 102.

Even if they commanded a small police force, it was impossible for them to lay a firm hand on the whole territory. County seats might be relatively well fortified, but villages and small towns were highly vulnerable. Boundary areas between counties, where political control was virtually absent, were infested by bandits. Furthermore, the size of a frontier county was far larger than that of a county in China Proper. There a stable society could be achieved through tight control by a powerful political machine, under which bandits could be tamed when government authority was at its zenith. On the frontier, weak governance was characteristic, and bandits seldom felt pressure from political authority. Many areas were deemed to be within nobody's jurisdiction: "the political whip was too short to reach them." Such areas were infested by bandits.¹² Some bandits even targeted weak county administrations. In Fangzheng in 1918 the county seat was occupied while the magistrate and his staff were kidnapped, and in Yilan in 1919 bandits ransacked the county yamen.¹³

The major security contribution to the frontier was made by provincial army units, whose responsibilities were twofold: defense of the national border and suppression of banditry. The army was used more often to safeguard the frontier community than to defend the border. When the civilian administration could not control the local situation, the army was an essential support. The army, however, was trained for short-term

¹² "Mingshui shezhiyuan Zhao Quanbi zhuanbaominyi qingqiu genggai xianjie bingqing gaixiancheng", HPA: HS, p. 546.

¹³ Yang Buchi, *Yilanxianzhi*, [A History of Yilan], Yilan: Xianzhengfu [Yilan County Government], 1921, p. 113; see also Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 391.

punitive actions. It was sent out to strike a blow at the bandits. Furthermore, the number of soldiers was so small that their regional military presence was dwarfed by the size of the territory. For example, in 1923 there were 6,399 soldiers stationed in Heilongjiang. The number in each county was less than 200, in some counties less than 100. Tangyuan, Tonghua and Nenjiang each had only 47 men.¹⁴ Society often suffered negative consequences of military action, even when the army coped successfully with bandits. One observer commented that after bandits looted settlers' homes and crops and killed their cattle, the army then arrived and often punished the settlers for supposedly being collaborators. This inevitably drove settlers into the embrace of the bandits. Like bandits, "soldiers occupied settlers' homes and aggravated their suffering."¹⁵ During the civil wars that wracked North China after 1912, army units were often dispatched to the battlefield, leaving the frontier to the bandits. Whenever soldiers were removed, the frontier suddenly witnessed the reemergence of widespread banditry.

The frontier lacked the mechanism of traditional conventions to regulate social relations. While the prospect of gaining great riches was present, many hired hands in fact had to move from job to job in order to survive. Psychological pressure rather than communal tension, mental stress rather than class struggle, personal envy rather than acute poverty, acted to push settlers into banditry. For them, affluence was within sight but beyond reach. It was easier to gain wealth by seizing it. Zhang Yonggui, a bandit

¹⁴ Zhang Boying, *HZ*, pp. 1243-1247.

¹⁵ Nan Yang, *Ruhe kaifa Dongsansheng* [How to Open Up the Three Northeastern Provinces], in *Manchuria Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan*, March 1930, p. 11.

leader active in North Manchuria, arrived as an immigrant in 1898. He held jobs as a miner, railway worker, silversmith and lumberman, yet none of them brought him fortune; he then turned to banditry.¹⁶ Li Haiqing, a well-known bandit leader along the Sungari River, was an immigrant from Shandong. In 1904, when he was nine, Li's parents settled in Zhaozhou county. Li worked as a herdsman, bricklayer, tile maker and cart driver. To escape his limited, ordinary life he joined a bandit gang and soon became a leader.¹⁷

Government statistics and local records show that bandit recruits were usually very young males. Banditry was partly the result of the sex ratio imbalance in frontier society. This imbalance brought about a "bride famine" in North Manchuria. Female infanticide and abortion were not practiced here: the shortage of women resulted solely from immigration dynamics. Since the majority of immigrants were young men, the frontier was largely a male preserve. In 1930, Zhong Ming estimated that "the sex ratio among all immigrants for the first six months of 1929 is 82.8% male and 17.2% female."¹⁸ Zhong figures are for a specific year, but the ratio he pointed out was not out of line with earlier estimates. In 1910 the governor of Manchuria, Xu Shichang, compiled statistics which showed the sex ratio in the northern frontier region for settlers' children to be roughly

¹⁶ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 4, 1992, pp. 33-34.

¹⁷ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 3, 1990, p. 81.

¹⁸ Zhong Ming, "Wunianlai sansheng jingji fazhan zhi huigu jiqi qiantu" [The Past Five Years of Economic Development in the Three Provinces in Review, and Prospects for the Future], Zhongdong jingji yuekan: Chinese Eastern Railway Economic Monthly, May 1930, p. 67.

balanced, but for adults to be approximately 4 to 3 in favor of the males.¹⁹ In 1919 Yilan county had a population of 95,903: 63,044 males and 32,859 females.²⁰ By the late 1920s, as more and more immigrants poured in, the shortage of women grew worse. Wu Shiyuan wrote in 1930:²¹

There are far fewer females than males. The difference is truly astonishing Males predominate in poor families, less so in rich families. Even in Hulan, which has been long settled, the ratio is still 1,000 to 590. In Hailun, the ratio is 1,000 to 777. According to the Economic Investigation Bureau, the highest ratio of women for any county is 888 to 1,000, while the lowest is 500 to 1,000. On the average, in the whole province [Heilongjiang], the ratio is 750 to 1,000.

The sex imbalance posed a serious problem for frontier society. While polyandry was practiced by some male settlers who shared one woman to produce their offspring, males unable to find wives remained bachelors all their lives.²² Sometimes restless, sexually active young men kidnapped women and held them in the mountain caves as so-called “wives on hold.” Lack of family obligations allowed these unattached males to

¹⁹ Xu Shichang, Dongsansheng zhenglue [A Sketch of Northeastern Politics], Beijing: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1911, pp. 4371-73. Figures for adult males and females in a selection of areas, as of 1910, are as follows: Heishui, 11349: 4833; Zhaozhou, 12651: 7283; Anda, 395: 195; Suihua, 78444: 48632; Yuqing, 37165: 24873; Hulan, 70849: 50767; Bayan, 62898: 49258; Lanxi, 41417: 36605; Mulan, 25163: 14801; Hailun, 98643: 86751; Qinggang, 13091: 11609; Tangyuan, 1044: 672; Heihe, 6858: 6011; Nenjiang, 2875: 2292; Dongxing, 2652: 1863; Tieshanbao: 9207: 6482. Most regions receiving immigrants experienced the same imbalance.

²⁰ Yang Buchi, *Yilan xianzhi*, p. 113; see also Zhang Xiangling, *HSD*, p. 126.

²¹ Wu Shiyuan, “Ji Hei yimin wenti zhi yanjiu” [A Study on Immigration to Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces], in Manchuria Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan, March 1930, p. 32.

²² Cao Baoming, Shenmide Guangdong qisu, p. 30.

venture into outlawry. Records reveal that many executed bandits had never married or else had become bandits only after the death of their wives.²³

Disasters sometimes caused settlers to turn to crime. Settlers were entranced by the fertile soil, yet often failed to realize the long term risks of cultivation. There was no preparation for calamities, such as flood, drought or fire. Settlers were unfamiliar with the ecological system and expected immediately to turn fertile wasteland into rich farms. Dangers could not be foreseen unless one had lived in the region for many years. Floods and drought were infrequent in North Manchuria, but they might suddenly strike, as for example in 1910 when the Sungari inundated large areas of land, or in the 1920s, when drought struck two counties.²⁴ Fires sometimes destroyed whole towns or villages, as happened to Hailun in 1921.²⁵ Such misfortunes were felt especially by new immigrants, who might be unable to meet loans or rent. Banditry provided an escape from such troubles. It even happened that settlers in some villages, confronted with natural disasters, refused to pay rent and turned themselves en masse into brigands.²⁶

²³ For example, in Hailun county Fu Guisheng, leader of a dozen bandits, "had no family"; Li Tianhe "had no wife"; Dai Shan "never married." Li Fu, head of seventeen bandits, became a bandit "after his wife died"; Qu Guancai, a member of nine bandit gangs "did not marry," and his fellow bandit Li De became a bandit "after the death of his wife." HPA: 62-4-8347. The documents from which these references come were mostly written in 1915.

²⁴ In 1910, floods along the Sungari River swallowed more than 3,000,000 mu of land while 200 people died and many became homeless. See Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2768. In 1921, in Qinggang county, floods along Hulan River and Tongken River inundated over 30 kilometers of land along their banks. Drought was infrequent, but occurred in Zhaodong county in 1921 and in Tailai in 1926. See Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 422, p. 424, p. 467.

²⁵ HPA: 62-5-1201.

²⁶ A.R. Lindt, Special Correspondent: With Bandit and General in Manchuria, p. 102.

In dealing with the causes of banditry in North Manchuria, a number of questions present themselves. To what degree was it connected with banditry in China Proper, especially in Shandong, the province that had sent the most immigrants to the region? To what extent did bandits relocate themselves from their home provinces to this frontier? Since the fall of the Qing Dynasty, bandit infestation had become a problem throughout China. The national government and the local authorities continually endeavored to eradicate banditry. Under such pressure, some bandits sought new ways of escape. Like other immigrants, bandits joined the great migration, seeking havens in the new land. Some bandit gangs migrated wholesale in response to official pressures, while others migrated in small groups or as individuals. Rural poverty also acted as a stimulus to bandit relocation, because the poor conditions of much of China Proper meant that local banditry yielded little. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that bandits in any way epitomized the great migration. Yet it is undeniable that they constituted a portion of the emigrants. Records show that some bandit leaders captured and executed by the government were of Shandong origin.²⁷ It is also known that militant quasi-bandit bands, such as the Big Sword Society and the Red Gun Society, had moved from Shandong to the frontier in large groups.²⁸

²⁷ HPA: 62-4-8347; see also Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 1, 1988, pp. 81-83; vol. 2, 1990, p. 66; vol. 3, 1990, p. 81; vol. 4, 1992, p. 33.

²⁸ Whether the Big Sword Society was a bandit society is open to debate. They fought other bandit groups. At the same time they were regarded as bandits by the government. See He Nian, *Jiu Zhongguo tufei jiemi* [Bandit Secrets of Old China], vol. 2, Beijing: Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, 1998, p. 707. In 1928, Heilongjiang governor Wu Junsheng commanded forces, including cavalry and infantry, to do battle with the Big Sword Society and killed more than 1,260 of its members. See Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 476.

It is true that some refugees, assisted by government and local organizations, turned themselves into bandits upon arrival. These refugees were disillusioned by the reality of frontier life, which did not offer the haven of ease portrayed in official propaganda. What they had to face was a wilderness and years of hard work. Disillusionment drove some refugees to take to robbery as a way of life. Chen Hansheng noted in the late 1920s that “of the Henan refugees sent to the Xing’an military colonization area by the Famine Relief Commission of Henan . . . a number went over to the bandits.”²⁹

Immigrants from South Manchuria, where the warlord Zhang Zuolin had built a strong regional regime, also included bandits in their midst. As Zhang, who originally was a notorious bandit chieftain, consolidated his power, bandits became his enemies since he now sought to build a stable society. By the 1920s Zhang Zuolin was nominally ruler of the whole of Manchuria, but he did not have firm control of the frontier region. Displaced bands of robbers moved north, where they found relative safety.³⁰ Among these was the notorious female bandit, Tuolong [Camel Dragon]. A native of Liaoning, she built a domain in Shuangcheng, Wuchang and Yushu counties.³¹ Other bandits also had origins in Liaoning or southern Jilin, such as Ma Zhanshan and Deng Wenshan.

²⁹ Chen Han-seng, Notes on Migration of Nan Min [Refugees] to the Northeast, Shanghai: China Council of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1931, Printed by Thomas Chu and Sons, Shanghai. This pamphlet was bound with other articles in one book by Cornell University Library and was entitled Institute of Pacific Relations: Publications on China, 1931, Cornell University Library, 1931, p. 28.

³⁰ Even during the Qing Dynasty defeated bandits tended to move to North Manchuria to seek secure “nests.” See HPA: HTCZ, p. 607.

³¹ He Nian, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

Banditry in North Manchuria was multi-ethnic, though Han Chinese composed the majority of the outlaws. Contemporary official documents frequently use the term “hufei” —ethnic bandits.³² A number of bandits came from local ethnic groups, including the Manchus, Solon and Mongols. Though their motivation was complex, one important factor was that their established life was threatened. They were unable or unwilling to adjust to agricultural life. The Qing and the Republic urged the Manchu banner soldiers, Solon hunters and Mongol nomads to settle as farmers. At the same time Han immigration into the region was encouraged. Solon hunting grounds dwindled and Mongol pasture became farmland. Some Manchus built domains in the mountains and engaged in banditry for decades. There were Solon who “entered the mountains as hunters but emerged as bandits.”³³ Displaced Mongols rode in bands to assail settlers in the farming zones.³⁴ The banditry of these ethnic peoples was partly attributable to their inability to adopt a sedentary agricultural life. They translated their resentment into attacks upon the settled communities.

Incursions by foreign powers also led to rampant banditry in the frontier region. The most prominent examples are the Russian invasion of 1900 and the Japanese conquest of 1931. Both events inflicted harm on the local social structure. Loosened state control

³² As China changed, so did the term. Ever since the late 1940s the neutral expression “tufei” -- local bandits -- has been adopted. The problem was further compounded by Communist ethnic policy which stressed national unity. This meant avoiding singling out ethnic groups. According to this policy, ethnic groups were oppressed under the previous regimes and only the new China saved them from bondage

³³ HPA, *Heilongjiang shaoshu minzu: 1903-1931* [Heilongjiang Ethnic Minorities: 1903-1931], Ha'erbin: HPA, 1985, pp. 111-112.

³⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1447.

gave bandits a golden chance to prosper. In 1900, after the Russians overwhelmed the Qing forces and occupied the region, bandits at once appeared in large number. Qing army remnants also turned themselves into brigands to survive. In Suihua “bandits and routed soldiers roamed about . . . along with evil elements . . . and could not be eliminated.”³⁵ The chaos lasted for several years after the Russian withdrawal. From 1900 to 1906, bands varying from a dozen to several hundred men ranged throughout Qinggang County.³⁶ In Bayan, bandits in large hordes ravaged the county and could not be brought under control by local officials for many years.³⁷ In Zhaozhou, government troops en route from Liaoning, upon hearing that the Russians had already occupied North Manchuria, turned themselves into bandits without fighting the enemy.³⁸ In Hulan, when the Russians occupied the county seat in the summer of 1900, Liu Zhengtang gathered more than 300 followers and pillaged the settlers. Although some Hulan bandits, such as Liangxiang [Two Guns] and Zhanbei [The Northern Lord], targeted Russian soldiers, they inflicted more suffering on local people than they did on the invaders.³⁹ Thus, as a national border, North Manchuria bore the brunt of the conflict with Russia, suffering not only at the hands of foreign invaders but also from bandits who themselves

³⁵HPA: HTCZ, p. 551.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 607.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 769.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 1012.

³⁹ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 1439-1440.

were the product of the invasion.⁴⁰ The brutality of the invaders towards the settlers allowed bandits to exonerate themselves from their own actions. Wang Delin, an immigrant from Shandong in 1895, stands as an example. Witnessing the Russian soldiers' brutality, he organized a band to resist the invaders, but took advantage of the occasion to engage in kidnapping and robbery himself.⁴¹

It was not only foreign invasion that gave rise to banditry on the frontier. Turmoil on the other side of the border also could have damaging consequences. The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war led many White Russians to seek refuge in North Manchuria and among them were bandits. Soon after the revolution, North Manchurian cities along the Chinese Eastern Railway witnessed robbery by Russian bandit gangs. In Harbin, "It is becoming a daily event that Russian bandits waylay passengers and loot them of valuables." "Since the beginning of the Russian Revolution, there has been turmoil in Harbin. Bandits roam and rob in full daylight."⁴² Chinese bandits followed suit, and both rural and urban areas witnessed an increase in local bandit activity.⁴³ In addition, forces under Russian warlord A. G. Semyonov entered North

⁴⁰HPA: HS, 1985, p. 823. Once again, in 1931, when the Japanese invaded the region, "local bandits appeared like bees swarming." The invasion drove desperate settlers into banditry for survival. Occupation by a foreign power meant the security provided by the Chinese authorities was gone from the scene, giving room for bandits to maneuver.

⁴¹ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 1, 1988, p. 81.

⁴² "Jilin dujunshengzhang gongshu wei pai waijiao guwen huitong jiaoshepaidui hushangshi gei Li Hongmo de xunling" [Order of Jilin Military Governor to Li Hongmo in regard to Organizing Defense of Businesses], July 31, 1917, in *Ha'erbin jingji ziliao wenji* [Harbin Economic History Materials], Ha'erbin: Shidang'anguan [Harbin City Archives], vol. 1, 1990, p. 89.

⁴³ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 5, 1994, p. 56.

Manchuria time and again, brutalizing the populace and giving rein to Chinese bandits.⁴⁴ A Hulin county magistrate lamented in 1919 that “the Russian troubles have provoked bestial violence by our own bandits in our county.”⁴⁵

Overall, banditry in North Manchuria existed as an inseparable part of frontier history. From the evidence offered above, the Billingsley hypothesis explaining banditry in North China is inapplicable to the frontier region. This hypothesis is applicable to the established regions of China, but it is not germane to a society taking shape with such rapidity as that of North Manchuria. The region was not only a haven for poor migrants, who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, but also for outlaws, who found ample space to maneuver. Here, banditry was much more a product of unique frontier circumstances than of the conditions which explain its existence in China Proper.

II. Sustainable Outlawry: Banditry as a Way of Frontier Life

Two worlds existed side by side in North Manchuria: the settler world ruled by the government and the bandit world controlled by the outlaws. The two clashed, interacted and absorbed each other to shape this frontier. The bandit world was numerically

⁴⁴ Ataman Grigory Semyonov’s troops were notorious in North Manchuria for robbery and murder. In January 1918, for example, they robbed a number of Harbin businesses and kidnapped seventy clerks. See Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 388.

⁴⁵ “Hulin xianzhishi Xiong Mianzhang wei fengling buque ganji xiachencheng” [Hulin County Magistrate Xiong Mianzhang Expresses Appreciation of President’s Order for his Promotion], May 16, 1919, HPA: HS, p. 737.

insignificant. Its ratio to the settler world was perhaps no more than one to a thousand.⁴⁶ Yet bandits had a strong impact on the settled communities. This dichotomy has led historians to pose questions such as the following. How destructive to frontier society was banditry? How did bandits sustain themselves? What was the nature of the relationship between the bandit domain and settler society?

While the description of bandits being “as thick as fleas” was an exaggeration, official reports sometimes gave that impression. Nevertheless, there is no doubt as to the ruinous effects of banditry on the frontier. Raids were so common that almost every year some place in the region experienced disquiet. Banditry created an obstacle to sustained agricultural cultivation. Because settlers were scattered in small groups, with insufficient protection, they were vulnerable to sudden raids and lived in a constant state of fear. “In reclamation areas, bandits gathered in bands and harassed farmers; they took farmers’ horses, seized their grain and even killed their cattle.”⁴⁷ Worse than this, farmers’ lives were at risk. In Qinggang the Guang family and their hired hands, sixteen people in all, were murdered in one attack. Some bandits, in large bands, “ravaged the land, ruined crops and left not a blade of green grass.”⁴⁸ Agriculture slackened in the bandit-infested areas as settlers moved to new locations. This was especially the case in remote regions which lacked any official presence. For example, in Longzhuagou of Boli County, “as

⁴⁶ Estimates of bandit numbers vary. According to an SMR report, about 20,000 were active in Heilongjiang and Jilin toward the end of the 1900-31 period. See South Manchuria Railway, Third Report on Progress in Manchuria, 1907-1932, Dairen, June 1932, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Nan Yang, Ruhe kaifa Dongsansheng [How to Cultivate the Three Northeastern Provinces], p. 11.

⁴⁸ HPA: HTCZ, 1985, p. 608.

bandits amassed . . . eight or nine of every ten families moved away.” Because of the raids, by 1923 no more than sixty of the original five hundred families remained.⁴⁹ In border areas such as Qigan, “bandits . . . crippled local farming.”⁵⁰

Damage to commerce by bandits was so severe that ruin often resulted. Targets were often individual merchants. Bandits demanded large ransoms and families usually complied by paying immediately. If the business was not bankrupted, its operations were severely affected. Yang Chuanbao and his band ruthlessly pillaged local businesses along the Hulan River for two months in 1918. When Yang distributed the spoils among his followers, each received between \$300 and \$700, which was more than several years’ income of an average farmer.⁵¹ Sometimes bandits concentrated on a specific area in order to secure an immediate quantity of cash and goods. In 1919, a band of three hundred men looted more than fifty firms at Yimianpo, a town on the Chinese Eastern Railway.⁵² Banditry not only seriously hampered normal commercial operations but also affected the settlers, since prices went up after each raid and access to the market was often temporarily interrupted.

⁴⁹ Jilin Shengzhang Gongshu Dang’an [Archive of the Office of the Governor of Jilin]: 11(7-7)-2092; quoted in Yi Baozhong, DNJY, p. 56.

⁵⁰ “Neiwu dengbu huihe Heilongjiangsheng qingyu Qiyahе kalun sheli Qigan shezhiju niqingzhaozhuncheng” [Interior Ministry Approval of Petition by Heilongjiang Province to Establish an Administration in Qigan], 1920, HPA: HS, p. 915.

⁵¹ He Nian, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

⁵² Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 404.

Bandit raids on local government interfered with normal administration. The fragile administrative structure at the county level, with a magistrate, a few officials and a dozen or so policemen, was an attractive target. Since the magistrate and his subordinates received their monthly pay as well as annual allowances in cash from the provincial government, bandits often materialized at payment time. In 1913, bandits pillaged the Hulin county seat and looted the local administration treasury. In 1921, the Lanxi County seat was occupied for three days by the Wu Jun [Five Armies] comprised of 500 bandits. They made off with all the government funds. In 1929, Wei Laoguo and his band of forty raided the county seat of Huma. After three hours' heavy fighting, they forced their way into the city and seized the official treasury. Occasionally, county magistrates were kidnapped. That happened to magistrates in Hulin in 1913, Fujin in 1917 and Fangzheng in 1918.⁵³

Another reason bandits attacked the county government seat was to release imprisoned fellow brigands, as occurred in Nehe in 1921 and Tonghe in 1923. The Nehe case was notorious. Over 800 bandits overwhelmed the local police, burned government offices, released all jailed prisoners and recruited them into their band. The five hour rampage turned much of the city of Nehe into a scorched earth wasteland. Other county seats suffered similar fates, such as Jiamushi in 1914, Huachuan in 1920, and Wangkui in 1923. In Huachuan, bandits occupied the city for over a month.⁵⁴ Bandits sometimes forced the dissolution of local administrative organs, or their relocation to safer locales.

⁵³ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 360, p. 419, p. 490, p. 360, p. 384, p. 391.

⁵⁴ He Nian, *op. cit.*, p.179. See also Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 414, p. 437, p. 414, p. 437.

For instance, in Fengshan the province set up a reclamation bureau as the first step towards installing a county government. Bandit raids proved so frequent that in 1925 the bureau was closed down, and plans for a county government were abandoned.⁵⁵ In the case of the Boli county seat, it was moved to a “safe” site in 1919 due to raids.⁵⁶

It would be erroneous, however, to give the impression that North Manchuria was an entirely chaotic frontier. While the bandit problem continued throughout the three decades from 1900 to 1931, the violence occurred in specific locations at specific times. Moreover, many communities were victimized no more than once. The bandits did not merge into a large regional force to establish a powerful regime dominating the whole frontier. However, the psychological distress suffered by settlers was enormous. Since it was hard to foretell the coming of bandits because of their quasi-guerrilla tactics, the mental pressure upon settlers was such that they felt imperiled whenever they heard reports of a bandit attack, even if it happened far away. In 1906, when bandits roamed the Hailun region for several months before being suppressed, settlers likened their existence to being transported to hell.⁵⁷ From 1918 to 1924, settlers in Wuchang and Shuangcheng counties lived constantly in nightmarish conditions when “Camel Dragon” [Tuolong] and her husband “Big Dragon” [Dalong] led two thousand bandits in an indiscriminate rout of

⁵⁵ “Fengshan shezhuyuan Yu Wenying jusong sheshijihua jieluecheng” [Report of Fengshan Administrator Yu Wenying concerning a Plan of Establishing Local Government], HPA: HS, p. 424.

⁵⁶ Zhang Xiangling, gen. ed., *Heilongjiang shengzhi: diming lu* [A Provincial Record of Heilongjiang: Place Names], Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1998, p. 77.

⁵⁷ “Hailun Zhiliting wei chengbao yishu riqi dengbing” [Report from Hailun Zhili Districts concerning the Date to Move the Seat], July 1, 1906, HPA, HS, p. 497.

plunder and murder.⁵⁸ Although the psychological impact is hard to measure, historical records have left numerous accounts of the settlers' experience of bandit raids. The pressure upon settlers engendered by banditry was an aspect of frontier existence that must be noted.

Perhaps the greatest devastation wreaked upon frontier society came at the hands of soldiers who had turned themselves into bandits. This was a common phenomenon throughout North Manchuria. Poor pay, officer tyranny, the youth of the soldiers, and the affluence of local settlers helped create soldier bandits.⁵⁹ Having acquired some formal military training and having access to arms, soldiers after defection inflicted much damage upon settlements. Sun Xuewu, an army officer, turned himself and his fellow soldiers into bandits in 1912. They robbed, burnt, and kidnapped. One year later, several local bands allied themselves with him, and Sun became leader of an enlarged band of more than a thousand men, organized into five columns, which roamed through Qinggang, Hulan, Anda, Suihua and other counties in the Song-Nen plain. County registers recorded their crimes in phrases such as "no days of peace," "no green grass left," and "no settlers untouched."⁶⁰

Defection of individual soldiers was quite common and the defection of a whole unit was not rare. For example, in 1914 in Qiqihar a battalion of soldiers, over one hundred

⁵⁸ He Nian, *op.cit.*, p. 249. See also Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 450.

⁵⁹ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1456.

⁶⁰ HPA: HTCZ, p. 228, p. 854, p. 607, p. 608.

strong, turned into bandits, pillaging stores and robbing residents. In the same year in Nehe, soldiers under the command of the battalion leader robbed stores and banks. In 1914, a company of soldiers in Yuqing killed their commander and took to banditry. The most serious defection happened in 1922 when a regiment of 1,300 soldiers killed their officers, pillaged settlers and merchants, then fled into the mountains.⁶¹ Although some of these ex-soldier bandits were killed when the government sent out troops, remnants survived and even established their own base in the mountains.

Bandit domains tended to be short-lived on the open plains. As settlers gradually reduced the wilderness and built their villages, the plains offered fewer places for bandit bases. Bandits were also more vulnerable to pursuit by government forces. However, the plains presented targets too tempting to resist, so in some areas bandits set up more long-lasting bases. Northern Anda, for example, was bandit infested at the turn of the century. Immigrants began to arrive, and even named a settlement “Peace Village” in the hope of bringing stability and good fortune upon it.⁶² North Anda continued to suffer from raids, which reached their peak between 1913 and 1918, when many bands ranged through the area.⁶³ The topography of Taikang [Duerbote] was flat, yet because the region was so affluent, due to its proximity to the railway, bandits turned the nearby Fengzidian area

⁶¹ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 228, p. 854, p. 607, p. 608.

⁶² Zhang Xiangling, *Heilongjiang shengzhi: diming lu*, p. 459.

⁶³ HPA: HTCZ, p. 854.

into a den from which they attacked rich merchants and landowners.⁶⁴ Even Hulan, a city located on the plains with a population reaching 300,000 in the late 1920s, was affected by nearby bandit activity. Since Hulan centred one of the most productive agricultural areas, bandits many times targeted grain cargoes on their way to railway stations.

“Bandits may suddenly appear, murder the cart drivers and seize the goods. Local settlers suffered most from these raids.”⁶⁵ In efforts to eradicate banditry in the late 1920s, more than ninety soldiers died in Hulan County, including a number of officers.⁶⁶

If the plains offered bandits easy prey, they also allowed the government greater opportunity for mobilizing army and police. As time passed, security was strengthened on the frontier, and by the 1920s few bandit domains remained on the plains. But the ranges of hills and mountains in the region offered secure hideouts. In northern Suihua, the forested hills had been controlled by bandits for many years. Tieshanbao [Fortified Mountain] was one such place where bandits gathered. In 1915, prefectural officials complained that Tieshanbao “with its huge area and scarcity of settlers has become a place where bandits have multiplied.”⁶⁷ Heishan [Black Mount] on the border of the four counties of Mulan, Tieli, Qing’an and Bayan, was surrounded by mountains, thick with

⁶⁴ “Taikang shezhiju weiqingjiang Xiaohaozi huaguizhilicheng” [Petition of Taikang Administration for Obtaining Xiaohaozi as a Part of the County], 1929, in HPA: HS, p. 819.

⁶⁵ Wu Shiyuan, “Hu Hai tielu zai jingji shang zhi jiazhi” [The Hu-Hai Railway and its Economic Value], in Eastern Province Economy Monthly: Dongsheng jingji yuekan, Feb. 15, 1930, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Hulan County, Hulan wenshi ziliao [Hulan Literary and Historical Materials], Hulan: Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui, vol. 1, 1989, p. 12.

⁶⁷ “Suilan daoyin Yu Sixing luchenyongjiang lianglulinwufenjucaiche, zengshe Tongbei, Shangjichang, Tieli shezhijuxiang” [Statement of Suilan Prefecture Governor Yu Sixing concerning the Rearrangement of Local Government], Feb. 6, 1915, HPA: HS, p. 117-118.

trees and vegetation. The brigands in this notorious base forced the nearby settlers to provide provisions and launched sudden attacks on townspeople and rich settlers. They established strongholds from which they dominated territory as large as a county. In the words of a surveyor, writing in 1917, the area was a “vast ocean of verdant trees against a background of endless ranges of mountains with mist suspended over them.”⁶⁸ In Tonghe County bandits built fortresses in the mountains near Fengshan when government troops were withdrawn from the area in 1923. They demarcated land to the north of the Maling River as their domain. For six years an area as large as a county was controlled by over a thousand bandits. They were sufficiently strong to force the provincial government in 1925 to abandon plans for a preparatory county administration.⁶⁹

The border with Russia often served as an ideal space for bandit bases. The two mountain ranges of the Greater and Lesser Xing’an, paralleling the Heilong River [Amur], offered many hideouts. Bandits also could cross the river to the Russian side to avoid justice. Many bandits, even if operating on the plains several hundred miles away, moved to the border for consolidation or to escape pursuit. Official documents often pointed to criminal elements among the migrant population along the border: “People from all directions gather here, and among them there are more bandits than honest virtuous men.”⁷⁰ Chinese bandits allied themselves with Russian bandits in joint raiding

⁶⁸ “Heilongjiang qingzhangjian zhaokenzongju juzhang Du Yintian wei fuyi Dongxingzhen yingshe zhaokenju bingchou nijingfeicheng,” HPA: HS, pp. 406-410.

⁶⁹ “Fengshan shezhiyuan Yu Wenying jusong sheshijihua jieluecheng,” pp. 424-425.

⁷⁰ “Heihedao weiyiqingyuanan zhunyu Woximen xianzuojianli susongcheng,” HPA: HS, p. 892.

parties. During such operations, the Russians often killed their victims since they could not understand their language. As one source described, “Russian bandits first murder their victims and then loot their property . . . while Chinese bandits seize property and often let their victims go.”⁷¹ Some Russian bandits hid on the Chinese side to escape the Russian police. The area along the river in Xunke County remained a Russian bandit base for many years and was a headache for Chinese administrators.⁷² Small Russian bands sometimes merged with a larger Chinese band. For example, among the four hundred bandits led by Chen Dongshan, more than thirty were Russians. In one operation in Luobei in 1922, Chen’s mixed band seized several hundred cattle and robbed settlers of their grain.⁷³

Coalitions with Russian bandits were rare, however. Most of the bandits in North Manchuria were Chinese nationals. These bandits adapted to their use in a distorted way some traditional cultural elements. Both Confucianism and Buddhism, the two most important components of traditional Chinese culture, were incorporated into outlaw society. Confucian values, despite their stress on social hierarchy, emphasize group solidarity, which was modified by bandits into the notion of fraternity. Recruits swore a number of oaths pledging allegiance to the band and its leader. Recruits also promised to

⁷¹ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1446.

⁷² “Aihui bingbeidao weiqingtianshe Xunhekou kaluncheng” [Petition from Aihui Military Administration to Establish a Military Post at the Xunke River Mouth], March 6, 1910, HPA: HS, p. 570.

⁷³ “Guanyu gufei Chen Dongshan goujie Edang raoluanshixiang” [Bandit Chen Dongshan’s Collaboration with his Russian Partners in Despoiling Border Areas], January 1923, HPA: 62-5-1201-586-7.

display filial piety to parents and to treat the weak with warmhearted sympathy.⁷⁴

Confucian values were complemented by certain Buddhist beliefs. Most North Manchuria bandits worshipped the traditional eighteen Buddhist arhats, among whom was Damo, regarded as the patron of the bandit profession. Damo was founder of the Zen sect and was a master of the martial arts, which may explain why bandits worshiped this deity.⁷⁵ The brotherly co-operation of the eighteen arhats was emulated by bandits. To symbolize this, most North Manchuria bandits wore a small bronze Buddha on their chest.⁷⁶

Most North Manchuria outlaw bands enforced a strict communal life on their members. To join the band, one required referees, sometimes more than twenty bandits. Meanwhile, acolytes had to possess basic skills in the martial arts.⁷⁷ One band whose discipline was especially strict was led by Whitehorse Zhang [Zhang Baima]. Zhang became a bandit around 1900 soon after the fall of the Zheltuga Republic.⁷⁸ He enforced a rigid disciplinary code known as the Thirteen Creeds, which enjoined his followers to

⁷⁴ The well known thirty-six oaths of North Manchuria bandits included basic Confucian values, if in amended version. See: He Nian, *Jiu Zhongguo tufei jiemi*, pp. 80-84. See also Cao Baoming, *Zhongguo Dongbei hangbang* [Guilds and Societies in China's Northeast], Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Chubanshe, 1992, pp. 116-120.

⁷⁵ Cao Baoming, *Shenmide Guandong qisu*, pp. 60-61.

⁷⁶ He Nian, op. cit., p. 107.

⁷⁷ Yang Jun, op. cit., p. 103.

⁷⁸ The Zheltuga Republic (1884-1886) was established jointly by Russians and Chinese in the Mohe mining area. Several thousand miners illegally worked in Mohe and founded a republic with their own laws and political system. It was destroyed by the Qing in 1886. Zhang Baima might have recruited some former miners into his band. See He Nian, op. cit., p. 86.

practise “moral” behavior.⁷⁹ Punishments were especially severe, particularly in the case of traitors and deserters. To leave the band was regarded as tantamount to betrayal, and was allowed only under the most exceptional circumstances.

Once bandits consolidated their power in an area, they endeavored to develop a special relationship with the local settlers. Since the political reach of the state was weak or non-existent, they functioned as a “shadow government” and acted as local police to safeguard local communities against other bandits. Lindt observed in North Manchuria that “the bandits defend the plains against the warrior tribes . . . the horse thieves. The bandits protect the peasants from the injustice of the mandarin. The bandits are the friends of the poor, the enemies of the rich. They are the distributors of wealth.”⁸⁰ In the words of a North Manchuria folksong, “When bandits arrived, local settlers provided them with drinks and provisions; when the officials and soldiers came, locals guided them in the wrong direction.”⁸¹ Such assertion may have romanticized the relationship between bandits and settlers. Yet they suggest that some bandits tended to be social bandits rather than hardened criminals. Without arrangements with settlers, it would have been difficult for bandits to sustain local dominance over a long period.

Some social bandits maintained special ties with settlers, even recruiting a number of them into their ranks. In Lindian county, 151 bands were counted during the period

⁷⁹ He Nian, op. cit., p. 86.

⁸⁰ A. R. Lindt, Special Correspondent: With Bandit and General in Manchuria, p. 190.

⁸¹ Yang Jun, op. cit., p. 99.

from 1912 to 1931. Their sheer abundance suggests local recruitment. Banditry here survived even under Japanese colonial rule. Settlers often maintained permanent relationships with bandits. Of the forty families in Tianxijiu village, ten were bandits and another four occasionally joined in bandit actions.⁸² In Suihua, around 1910, “the rich settlers could not resist the brigands and were forced to bow down before the bandits. Some idle, lazy and poor settlers, influenced by what they saw and heard, gradually took to joining the bandits.”⁸³ Numerous documents also reveal collaboration between local elites and bandits. The government held the purge of “collaborators of bandits” [tongfei] to be a vital task. In 1928, Zhao Xianzong, chairman of the Mingshui County Commercial Society, was accused of “colluding with bandits, accumulating his wealth through defrauding locals . . . and conniving with a band . . . to waylay, seize and kidnap.”⁸⁴ Some collaborators were punished, but more eluded prosecution, especially members of the local elite with social and economic influence at their disposal.

Police also co-operated with bandits at times. The frontier was steeped with stories about bandits and their relations with the local police. Frontier heroes and villains were many times the same person, and a policeman and an outlaw were often seen as one and the same. A policeman by day could become a notorious bandit at night. Police often benefited from illicit connections with bandits. For example, Chen Detai, who

⁸² He Nian, *op. cit.*, pp. 794-795.

⁸³ HPA: HTCZ, p. 551.

⁸⁴ “Guanyu renmin tongfei” [Matters Concerning People’s Connections with Bandits], June 1928, HPA: 62-6-6168.

commanded the police in Hailun and Baiquan counties, “assisted bandits, harassed settlers, misused his power and exerted a pernicious influence on the region.”⁸⁵

With tacit police agreement, bandits were at times permitted to extort payments from wealthy families or to levy taxes on goods in transit. A bandit with the name of Sihai [The Four Seas] in 1919 demanded each local elite family contribute at least \$800 within days. In 1921 in Ning’an, Jinlong [Golden Dragon] and his band imposed a tax on several rich families, who were to contribute \$80,000 before the deadline.⁸⁶ These demands not only fell on rich families and merchants, but also on ordinary settlers. Bandits simulated government officials in levying “taxes” in exchange for “protection.” The taxes they imposed were paid in cash, grain, clothes and other necessities.⁸⁷

Some bandits were remembered, however, as local heroes for their good deeds. This was the case with Tian Bianyang in 1913 in the Song-Nen plains. Tian and his band “possessed the chivalrous style of ancient knights . . . they took from the rich and gave their wealth to the poor.”⁸⁸ Some bandits through temporary possession of local political and economic resources acted as “saintly almsgivers.” The dual images of robber and benefactor in remote regions benefited bandits. Their former criminal records were often

⁸⁵ “Hailun gongmin kong youjuiduzhang Chen Detai fuzi tongfei qingchaban yi’an” [A Case concerning the Accusation by Hailun County Citizens against the Guerrilla Chieftain Chen Detai and his Son], HPA: 62-5-1500.

⁸⁶ He Nian, op. cit., p. 210.

⁸⁷ It was quite common for bandits to coerce local farmers into meeting their food needs. See “Heilongjiang qingzhangjian zhaokenzongju juzhang Du Yintian wei fuyi Dongxingzhen yingshe zhaokenju bingchou nijingfeicheng,” HPA: HS, p. 408.

⁸⁸ HPA: HTCZ, p. 607.

ignored and they could take advantage of the situation to maintain their “rule.” Since the government had no means of enforcing its authority in the remote isolated areas, power lay in the hands of whoever could muster the most arms. Bandits filled the void for a short period in many such locales.

Banditry in North Manchuria never took on the character it acquired in South Manchuria, where a former bandit chieftain Zhang Zuolin became ruler of the whole region. In North Manchuria, as ever more new immigrants arrived and as government control was steadily extended, large bands were pushed into isolated areas and their influence reduced. This is not to minimize the ruinous impact of bandit raids on local settlements, agriculture, commerce and administration. Indeed, during the three decades from 1900 to 1931, bandits were to be found on the plains, in the mountains and along the national borders. But with the passage of time bandits were increasingly forced to withdraw into the mountains. Some bands sought to preserve their strength by enforcing strict discipline, and by maintaining a minimally beneficent relationship with the settlers. Yet, to sustain their life they had to continue to rob, extort and kidnap by targeting the rich and even the poor. Even if they occasionally established good relations with some of the local population, they were still seen by the government and by majority of the settlers as the most dangerous threat to social stability on the frontier.

III. The War that Never Ended: The Battle Against Banditry on the North Manchuria Frontier

Bandits were so inescapable a part of North Manchurian frontier life that the war against them went on without break from 1900 to 1931. While the battles took place over a wide territory, very often they were limited to specific locations. Some settlers might be free of direct pressure while living in the “safe” zones. However, bandits could appear at any time. Settlers whose fate hinged on the land were continually preoccupied with this potential danger. To deal with the bandits, both settlers and officials tried a variety of methods: suppressing them by military action, strengthening local security by preventive measures, and reforming them through correctional policies.

Civilian defense measures dominated frontier life. Local officials allowed individual settlers to purchase guns for self-defense, under the condition that guns were licensed and carried registration numbers. In some cases, officials equipped settlers who lived in the mountains with weapons not only for their own self-defense, but also for their assistance to government forces in dealing with nearby bandits.⁸⁹ Rich families and merchants often hired young men as guards, as single families could not fend off even a small group of bandits. Since government assistance was so far away, victims seldom reported their cases: according to one source, only one in ten bandit attacks was reported to officials.⁹⁰ Such conditions led members of the local elite to organize their own

⁸⁹ “Fengshan shezhiyuan Yu Wenying jusong sheshijihua jieluecheng,” *op. cit.*, HPA: HS, pp. 426-427.

⁹⁰ “Binzhouting tongzhi Du Yuheng chenqing Shaoguodian xunjian gaishe xianzhibing” [Petition of Binzhou Prefecture Governor Du Yuheng to Establish a County Government Seat at Shaoguodian (Yanshou)], April 6, 1902; HPA: HS, p. 452.

defense forces. An example was Gao Yutang, who at the beginning of the century recruited men to fight the bandits infesting Hulan County. Gao gradually built up a powerful local militia, which effectively protected his county and the nearby counties.⁹¹

As more newcomers arrived, settlers organized groups such as the village association to serve as a local militia. In Bayan, where bandit infestation was serious and officials could not offer any assistance, local settlers began forming village associations as early as 1901. The settlers within the territory divided the county into four districts and each elected a commander. Below this, every four to seven villages elected a chief. The militia recruited young settlers. “Every family has to contribute a young man. Those who own two hundred forty sang [65.9 acres] of land must contribute a gun. If a village or district is attacked by bandits, the gong will be struck to warn the whole area. Other districts or villages will bring help . . . all expenses are to be equally apportioned according to land ownership and calculated at the end of each year.” Through this military network, settlers became united. “Under bandit attacks, settlers’ comradeship is deepened and their will for unity intensified.” The growth of local militia played an important role in developing local institutions. As a county historian recorded, “settlers willingly contribute what they have to their own defense, without governmental help. The village associations often bear the brunt of battle against bandits.”⁹² Village associations in some counties were seasonal, only active in summer and fall, when crops needed

⁹¹ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 1439-1441.

⁹² HPA: HTCZ, pp. 769-770.

protection from theft and revenge-motivated arson. Throughout the period from 1900 to 1931, village associations and civilian militia played a vital role in furthering local safety.

Members of the local elite were often praised as heroes for protecting property and lives. Militiamen who died in battle were enshrined as martyrs for the example they set of resistance to bandit attacks. Female martyrs who sacrificed their lives gained recognition in local communities for epitomizing settlers' fortitude. Mrs. Xue was such a figure. An immigrant from Sichuan and a settler in Baiquan County, she rose into the elite of Sandao. In 1911, the town was suddenly attacked by bandits. Since her husband was away when her home was besieged, she challenged the bandits by blocking their way into the house. In order to save her family, she committed suicide in front of the bandits, shocking them into flight. For this, she was canonized as a local martyr.⁹³

This suicidal act was regarded as a heroic deed. The Xue model, however, was not meant to urge settlers to die, but rather to encourage them to deal bravely with the outlaws. The example of another heroine testifies to this. Mrs. Ruan, the wife of the county magistrate of Yilan, was the victim of a bandit attack in 1919. Although the bandits burnt the government offices, Ruan pretended to pardon them. She obtained their agreement to preserve lives and property in the town. She then ordered a banquet be prepared and persuaded them to withdraw without taking a single cent from the settlers.⁹⁴ For her bravery, she was rewarded by the government and achieved fame as a heroine.

⁹³ HPA: HTCZ, p. 415; see also Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2507.

⁹⁴ Yang Buchi, *Yilan Xianzhi*, p. 113.

The civilian defense forces were vulnerable, however, since they were not well trained and were often outnumbered by large bands. In these cases, heroic resistance still meant defeat, often with heavy casualties. Civilian defense units could only hold off small numbers of outlaws. The army had to deal with bands of large size. Numbering several thousand men, the frontier army served primarily to suppress banditry.⁹⁵ It was sent out to pursue bandits and engage them in battle, as well as to besiege them in their lairs and in the villages they had occupied. When bandits were pushed into a corner, they fought desperately and heavy fighting took a toll among the soldiers.⁹⁶

So-called extermination campaigns [huijiao], in which the army launched simultaneous attacks on bandit refuges across a wide area, were mounted intermittently. In 1909, one such campaign lasted four months and covered several thousand square kilometers. The army captured many bandit chieftains, killed hundreds of their followers and released over three hundred hostages.⁹⁷ The extermination campaign was intended to entrap bandits, but some bandits managed to escape. Army units were stationed in all

⁹⁵ Number One Historical Archive (Beijing): 543 75-1, No. 175: Zhao Erxun Dang'an (Zhao Erxun Archive), No.142: "Heilongjiang xieling Chengchun deng wei zhengdun Dongsansheng zhi guanzhi, junwu, licai deng fangmian zhi tiaochen" [Report of Heilongjiang Local Military Leader Chengchun concerning Governmental, Military, and Financial Affairs in the Northeast], likely 1900; also No.175: "Jinjiang diaocha Heilongjiang sheng shangwu shiye dagai qingxing bing guanjian ji shanlu gongcheng" [Report concerning My Proposals on the Situation regarding Commerce and Business in Heilongjiang], which is a report by Yuan Keding (Yuan Shikai's elder son) after his trip to the region. around 1900. Yuan Keding suggested that large numbers of soldiers be sent from China Proper to deal with bandits in Heilongjiang.

⁹⁶ The government also sustained serious casualties. The Shandong native Fu Qibiao commanded a battalion which killed several hundred bandits in numerous engagements in Hulan, Bayan and Lanxi, but was himself killed in 1906 in the course of a pursuit. Fu was later canonized as a hero by the Qing court. See Ma Fang, HRZ, pp. 145-146.

⁹⁷ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 336.

counties, but in many the number of soldiers was too small to fight a large band. During the Republican period, the number of direct encounters between army and bandits increased. In 1913, a famous general by the name of Xu Lanzhou besieged a large band in Suihua and in a few hours killed fifty bandits. One day later, the same brigade took on a band of 250 bandits in heavy fighting in Wangkui. High casualties were taken by the bandits and their leader was killed.⁹⁸ Direct engagements with bandits, however, could not guarantee their “extermination.” For example, in 1922 a fierce encounter between an army unit and a band of 180 in Suiling resulted in only twelve killed or wounded and two captured, while the rest escaped.⁹⁹ In 1923, in Baiquan, an army fought a band of 170. Only 30 bandits were slain and 30 hostages released, while the rest fled.¹⁰⁰

The army nevertheless remained the most effective weapon against banditry. Settlers concluded from experience that “in dealing with bandits, the police are stronger than the civilian militia, but the strongest is the army.” Police could only handle small bands and protect local communities, but were sometimes overcome by larger bands. The murder of Qinggang County policemen in 1913 by bandits caused settlers to ask for an army unit to be stationed locally.¹⁰¹ Settlers in remote areas particularly sought the presence of the

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 357.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 432.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 437.

¹⁰¹ HPA: HTCZ, p. 608.

army.¹⁰² In border areas such as Raohe, officials asserted that “even a battalion stationed here could reduce bandit infestation and enhance settlers’ confidence.”¹⁰³ Settlers hoped for disciplined soldiers, as exemplified by the brigade under the command of Ma Zhanshan in Hulan County. These men “never gave trouble to the settlers.” Later a stele praising the brigade was erected. According to it, Ma’s soldiers effectively protected the settlers by their immediate response to bandit raids, their thoroughness in eliminating outlaws, and their well maintained discipline vis-à-vis the local inhabitants. “The settlers in Hulan saw that the bandits had gone, while no wrong had been done to them by the army,” concluded the inscription.¹⁰⁴

Chinese authorities occasionally asked the Russians for help in eliminating bandits. Out of self-interest the Russians often cooperated, since they feared bandits would interfere with the operations of the CER and would cross the border to hide in their territory. Sino-Russian cooperation took place mainly before the Russian Revolution. From time to time, over a wide geographic range, both nations cooperated to suppress banditry. Because the Russians always maintained a military force along the CER and in the Russian quarter of the city of Harbin, local Chinese authorities found it convenient to request their help, either by borrowing weapons or requesting Russian participation in

¹⁰² “Tangwanghe kenwuxingju weiyifushezhihiyi bingbiantonghuangwu zhangcheng dezhe” [Report of Tangwang Administration concerning the Establishment of a County Government for Opening Up Land], 1905. HPA: HS, p. 650.

¹⁰³ “Shu Raohe xianzhishi Zhao Bangze tiaochenzhengjian cheng” [Report of Raohe Governor Zhao Bangze Concerning Local Governance], December 28, 1913, HPA: HS, p. 690.

¹⁰⁴ Lang Daming and Shang Chenglin, *Re tu xiao xiang: Hulan* [Warm Soil and Natural Country: Hulan], Ha’erbin: Ha’erbin Chubanshe, 1998, pp. 33-34.

campaigns. Several times in 1906, for example, the Russians loaned weapons and dispatched soldiers to assist the Chinese, when called upon to do so by the Heilongjiang government and the Hulan district magistrate.¹⁰⁵ On one occasion in 1917, Russia dispatched more than two hundred soldiers to assist the Chinese in fighting off a regional bandit attack.¹⁰⁶ Notes were often exchanged to warn of approaching bandits or to report their capture. After bandits were extradited, witnesses were called from the other side of the border to verify the identities of the bandits and to testify against them.¹⁰⁷ The thousand mile long border was full of gaps, yet Sino-Russian cooperation at least played a small role in property recovery and criminal apprehension.

Military action to combat large bandit groups was often accompanied by property destruction and by heavy casualties on both sides. In most cases, major army operations resulted in victory for the authorities. Civilian losses could be high. In 1913 in Raohe, the army's extermination campaign inflicted a heavy blow on local bandits, but the settlers

¹⁰⁵ On June 17, 1906 the governor-general's office borrowed from the Russians a number of guns and cannon; at the same time the Hulan prefectural government borrowed one hundred guns from them. On July 9, the governor-general's office further borrowed fifty modern guns and three cannon. On August 8, the Russians dispatched four hundred soldiers to Hulan to fight the bandits. On November 4, Hulan requested fifty Russian soldiers for pursuit of bandits. See Zhang Xiangling, HSD, pp. 325-326.

¹⁰⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1450.

¹⁰⁷ In 1907, Russian bandits who raided the Chinese frontier were captured by Russian authorities, who then requested Chinese witnesses to present themselves at the Russian court across the river. See HPA: HSMZ, p. 282. In 1913, the Huma administration demanded the return of property stolen by bandits who fled to the Russian side; see *ibid.*, p.284. In 1915, at the request of the Chinese authorities, the notorious Chinese bandit Li Qingyun was seized by the Russians within Russian territory and repatriated to China. Li Qingyun had led a band in a raid on a gold mine on March 12, and then fled to Russia. On April 9, Li was captured, sent back and soon executed. See "Guanyu zai Ejing jina jufei Li Qingyun shixiang" [Matters concerning the Seizure of Big Bandit Li Qingyun in Russian Territory], HPA: 62-4-5189.

“also suffered heavy losses, and disorder in the area persisted for some time.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, the authorities experimented with peaceful solutions to the bandit problem. This happened especially when they faced a shortage of soldiers, or when officials desired to avoid bloodshed. When bandit leaders indicated a desire to abandon their profession, amnesty was immediately offered and the whole band overnight became a unit of the army or the local police. Sometimes bandit leaders negotiated particularly advantageous conditions from the government, such as conferral of military rank upon themselves, a closing of the book in regard to their past actions, and maintenance of their forces free from direct government control.¹⁰⁹ In 1902, a number of local governments were compelled to adopt this strategy of converting bandits into soldiers, as Qing forces had not recovered from their rout two years earlier during the Boxer Rebellion. Sun Lou’s bandit gang of 200 in Ningguta, Baoshan’s 650 in Bingzhou, and Hao Wenpo’s 130 in Sanxing were all recruited into the army and the leaders endowed with high rank.¹¹⁰ Sometimes settlers pleaded with the government to negotiate with the bandits for a wholesale intake. For example, when a bandit leader was arrested in Yanshou in 1902, his followers threatened to retaliate by killing all settlers in the county. The intimidation

¹⁰⁸ “Shu Raohe xianzhishi Zhao Bangze tiaochenzhengjian cheng,” HPA: HS, p. 689. In 1901 Zhao Dinggong’s whole regiment was overcome by a large number of bandits and Zhao himself died in the engagement. See Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2419.

¹⁰⁹ Yan Ying, Dongbei yiyongjun zhanshi [A Military History of the Northeast Righteous and Brave Army], Hong Kong: Yuzhou Press, 1965, p. 87.

¹¹⁰ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 316.

worked. The settlers begged the government to offer immunity and the solution was integration of the bandits into the army.¹¹¹

There was a tendency, after such a wholesale intake, for the former bandit leaders to enjoy quick promotion. Some became high-ranking officials, or important figures in the local elite. Their previous record was ignored, while their “good deeds” were magnified. After his surrender, Tian Bianyang became a company leader and was described as a “Robin Hood” who “never waylaid passengers or attacked wedding ceremonies and who taxed only the rich while assisting the poor.”¹¹² Ma Zhanshan, a well-known general in North Manchuria, was also a former bandit leader. His band of several thousand was incorporated into the government forces after a middleman’s negotiation. Once Ma became an important figure, his bandit life was romanticized. “He punished the local tyrants and supported the honest; he taxed the rich and distributed their wealth to the poor.”¹¹³ This kind of example encouraged some settlers to join the brigands, because they saw banditry as a channel for promotion to official position. A sardonic couplet mocked the quick social elevation of bandits. “Without being a bandit no man can be an officer, without being a trollop no woman can be a madame of a noble family.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Liu Chengdong, Qingdai Heilongjiang guben fangzhi sizhong [The Four Extant Local Histories of Heilongjiang during the Qing Dynasty], Ha’erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1989, p. 492.

¹¹² HPA: HTCZ, p. 609.

¹¹³ Yan Ying, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Not all bandits were willing to succumb to the offer of official position. To be a “wild emperor” was to be at ease, as a bandit leader claimed. But to officialdom banditry remained nothing but the “barbarity of the wilderness, absolutely incompatible with decency, morality, righteousness and honor.”¹¹⁵ During the Republican period, a new strategy was used in hope of eradicating bandits. This was the pacification campaign [qingxiang], which was concentrated on one or more counties, although it was sometimes provincial in scope. In 1913 and 1914 pacification was conducted in several counties. Settlers were encouraged to anonymously accuse whoever had befriended or sheltered bandits. Those who had collaborated with or abetted bandits were punished. During the campaign, the authorities enforced residence registration in an attempt to identify non-settlers. Those accused of banditry were punished by execution, imprisonment, or forfeit of property. During the 1913 and 1914 campaigns, several hundred cases relating to banditry were settled and the local office boasted that settlers once again lived in peace.¹¹⁶ In late 1915, the provincial government created a special administrative section called the Pacification Department in order to coordinate punitive operations. The following year, a major provincial pacification campaign was launched.¹¹⁷

In 1923, the Pacification Department was raised to the level of a Bureau.¹¹⁸ This administrative promotion shows the importance accorded by the government to

¹¹⁵ HPA: HTCZ, p. 551.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 551-552.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 773.

¹¹⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1230.

pacification as a solution to the bandit problem. However, campaigns cost money and drained manpower, so much so that officials admitted that “pacification cannot be conducted very often.”¹¹⁹ While its temporary effectiveness cannot be denied, the long-term problem remained. Bandits still held out in their mountain domains, and when the time was ripe they would attack settlers as usual. In his report to the president of China in 1915, the governor of Heilongjiang went no further than claiming that “ever since the pacification campaigns, bandits have been under control and the province has reached a state of basic security.”¹²⁰ The term “basic security” [cu’an] did not imply a lasting solution of the problem. On the contrary, sudden catastrophe could strike when new bandits forces formed, or when governmental control loosened, as it did in 1923 when troops on the frontier were withdrawn to China Proper to fight the civil war there.

The objective of the pacification schemes was to eliminate every trace of banditry from the existing communities. However, as North Manchuria was a frontier region, with huge tracks of untamed land continuing to allure settlers, the need for safeguarding the new cultivation areas posed a further problem. Early in 1905, local authorities organized “reclamation defense units” and sent them to designated farming areas. These units, consisting of cavalry and infantry, were funded by the provincial and county governments.¹²¹ Since such forces were often an effective shield from bandit attacks,

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 1964.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 1964.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 1209.

settlers in reclamation areas regularly demanded their presence. These units in fact had a dual purpose: they were to fend off existing bandits and to keep settlers from turning into bandits.¹²² This type of military formation was utilized primarily in the new reclamation areas, and not in the older settled parts of the frontier region.

At the county level, the local administration organized constabulary districts and assigned police to each of them. This was a result of the so-called New Policies [xinzheng] promulgated by the Qing in 1906. In Suihua County, the government divided the territory into five districts, and several hundred policemen were stationed in each district. Police stations were set up and detectives trained to investigate cases.¹²³ When the Boli County government was established in 1917, the authorities divided the territory into several districts, each with an administrative town to control an area of roughly twenty square kilometers. “When peaceful conditions prevail, the police patrol their own district, but when bandits attack, the police undertake joint operations to guard the county.”¹²⁴ In some counties, magistrates themselves took charge of the police force in order to ensure local security. Ma Liuzhou was an example. As magistrate of the two counties of Mulan and Bayan from 1908 to 1915, Ma became popular for enforcing bandit suppression measures. A terror to the bandits, he was a hero to local settlers.¹²⁵ In

¹²² “Tangwanghe kenwuxingju weiyifushezshisiyi bingbiantonghuangwu zhangcheng dezhe,” HPA: HS, p. 650.

¹²³ HPA: HTCZ, pp. 547-548.

¹²⁴ “Boli xian chengli baogaoshu zaibugao bajian” [Eight Announcements in the Report concerning the Establishment of the Boli County Government], 1917, HPA: HS, p. 632.

¹²⁵ Ma Liuzhou trained the local police and endeavored to exterminate local bandits. He retired in 1915. In 1917, on his way to Bayan, he was kidnapped by bandits. Since he refused to cooperate with them, he was

1921 in Binjiang County, close to Harbin, magistrate Mo Dehui divided the county into five defense districts, which were coterminous with the normal constabulary districts, and recruited men into the police force to defend the county.¹²⁶ Some counties set up police schools to train young men from the area. Six months of intensive training with six classes per day was given to the trainees.¹²⁷ The maintenance of a police force imposed a financial burden on the settlers, in the form of taxes and a special surtax. The surtax was increased as the police force grew.¹²⁸ However, since the police force was not unduly large, and the settlers were its beneficiaries, it is not surprising that there is no evidence of opposition to the surtax.

One preventive measure taken against bandit activity was the selection and reselection of county seats. Since most county governments were established between 1900 and 1931, when banditry was an endemic problem, officials took pains in choosing the location of new government towns. Authorities knew that a safe county seat would not only protect regular administration, commerce and trade, but would also attract more immigrants. For reasons of security, the seat sometimes had to be moved to another location. In Boli, the first county seat was recognized as an easy target for attack.

thrown into a river and drowned. His fate remained unknown until 1925, when his son discovered the circumstances of his death through a private detective. See Ma Fang, HRZ, pp. 74-75. See also Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2172.

¹²⁶ Ma Fang, HRZ, vol. 5, 1994, p. 56.

¹²⁷ HPA: HTCZ, pp. 549-550.

¹²⁸ The police surtax was sometimes levied on market commodities, theatre and brothel earnings, though it was usually apportioned as part of the land tax. HPA: HS, p. 426, p. 693, p. 408.

Therefore, it was moved to a new location and surrounded with a moat.¹²⁹ In Fengshan, the local officials noted that the old seat “was at the corner of two mountain peaks and was surrounded by a river. It was susceptible to bandit attacks, being confined in such a small and narrow placeThe new seat is in an open area north of the river and offers ready fortification against bandit raids.”¹³⁰ Not all placements were defensive in intent, however. Some county seats were chosen for offensive purposes. In choosing Dongxing, close to bandit lairs in the mountains, officials stated that it was “a passageway for bandits to come and go. The establishment in this location of the county government, supported by a military force, will sever the bandits from their food supply.”¹³¹

The government also sought through persuasive policies to transform bandits into law-abiding citizens. Bandits were told, for example, that past wrongdoing would be forgiven provided they were willing to “make a fresh start.”¹³² Since discipline among bandits was tight, an individual member could not abandon his band unless his leader made the decision to accept the government’s offer. Bandits subjected to judicial punishment might be given basic farming and handicraft training, and lectured on proper

¹²⁹ “Daili Bolixian zhishi Zhang Baoshu zeqiqianshucheng” [Report of the Acting Governor of Boli concerning the Date of the County Seat Move], October 30, 1919, HPA: HS, p. 646.

¹³⁰ “Heilongjiang Shengzhengfu weihuikan Fengshan shezhiju jiezhi gei caizhengting de xunling” [Order of Heilongjiang Provincial Government to Ministry of Finance concerning Survey of a Site for the Fengshan Administration], May 15, 1929, in HPA: HS, p. 422. See also “Heilongjiang sheng minzhengting jubao Fengshan Shezhiju jiexian huafencheng” [Report of Ministry of Civil Affairs, Heilongjiang Provincial Government, in regard to the Boundary of the Fengshan Administration], 1929, HPA: HS, p. 430.

¹³¹ “Heilongjiang caizhengtingzhang Zhang Xinggui, Suilandao daoyin Song Wenyu yifu Dongxingzhen yiyushezhiheng” [Report of Heilongjiang Finance Minister Zhang Xinggui and Suilan Prefecture Governor Song Wenyu in regard to Establishment of a County Seat at Dongxing], December 29, 1926, HPA: HS, p. 411.

¹³² “Fengshan shezhiyuan Yu Wenying jusong sheshijihua jieluecheng,” HPA: HS, p. 425.

social norms.¹³³ Such activities were carried out mainly in local prisons, which were established concurrent with the new county administration. Prisons initially were no more than simple shelters, or clusters of thatched buildings, both highly unsanitary.¹³⁴ However, it was in them that a certain number of former bandits underwent a process of rectification, discipline and adjustment. The penitentiaries were known by several names, such as reform prisons [gailiang jianyu] or inmate learning centers [zuifan xiyisuo].¹³⁵ It is hard to measure the effectiveness of this program, but as a new approach to banditry, it illustrates the continuing government effort to overcome this stubborn social problem.

During the struggle against bandits, abuse of power by officials occurred, and innocent settlers might find themselves victimized. The police and the army in effect had ultimate authority to enforce capital sentences on outlaws or potential bandits. This could result in gross miscarriages of justice. “When soldiers arrived to punish bandits, they often settled accounts with settlers suspected of collaboration. Settlers’ houses were burned . . . and sometimes settlers were killed.”¹³⁶ In 1904, when a Russian officer and his staff were killed by “bandits” in a village, the local authority immediately executed

¹³³ HPA: HTCZ, p. 619.

¹³⁴ “Binzhouting tongzhiluchen Mayanhe gaisheng xianzhicheng” [Report of Binzhou Prefectural Governor in regard to Establishment of a County Government at Mayanhe], HPA: HS, p. 461. See also “Datong xian weibao qianyi xianshu riqicheng” [Report of Datong County concerning the Date of County Seat Move], HPA: HS, p. 420; and HPA: HTCZ, p. 619, p. 317.

¹³⁵ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 2128.

¹³⁶ Nan Yang, Ruhe kaifa Dongsansheng [How to Open Up the Three Northeastern Provinces], in Manchuria Economic Monthly: Zhongdong jingji yuekan, March 1930, p. 11.

fourteen villagers and arrested more than thirty in order to please the Russians.¹³⁷

Normally the execution of captured bandits required local officers to obtain provincial approval, but often county governments would order executions beforehand. In Tanghe, the local administration in 1905 issued a decree: “execute on the spot and then report to the provincial government.”¹³⁸

Conclusion

It may be said that banditry was a frontier subculture in North Manchuria, since it was endemic in the region from 1900 to 1931. In responding to the bandit crisis, both civilians and the government employed a variety of methods. Civilians relied on their own efforts to construct a defensive network for protection of lives and property. The government adopted a number of measures to secure settlers' lives. The punitive approach was basically military action to exterminate bandits; if necessary, it was done through joint operation with neighboring counties. The diversionary approach was to convert bandits into the rank and file of governmental forces. The preventive approach included policies such as training more police and organizing reclamation protection forces. The correctional approach was intended to transform bandits to a normal social

¹³⁷ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 321.

¹³⁸ The officer stated that Tanghe was too far from the provincial capital and that the fastest return mail usually required over a month, during which time they feared the bandits might escape. “Tangwanghe kenwuxingju weiyifushezhihiyi bingbiantonghuangwu zhangcheng dezhe,” HPA: HS, p. 650.

life through persuasion, tutelage and guidance. Each of the above approaches played a role in the endless battle against banditry.

During the three decades from 1900 to 1931, both the Qing and the Republic employed the above approaches in different degrees at different times, but government never acquired a firm grip on the whole of North Manchuria. This is not to deny the contribution that government made to safeguard the frontier; rather, it is to pose the question of why banditry continued to be so prevalent. It is true that each campaign launched by the government achieved a temporary peace, but many bandits remained untouched in their domains, avoiding capture and punishment. It seems that in this huge land government anti-bandit forces were far too few to deal with bandits who could utilize the terrain as protection. Even though the settler world was expanding rapidly and the domain of the bandits was shrinking, bandits still could maneuver under the eyes of the government. As an author reported in 1928, “when a village in Hulan County encountered bandits three years ago, the army was asked in It has been safe ever since in this village. However, bandits still roam outside the village and walk openly along the roadways. Villages five or ten kilometers away frequently suffer from bandit raids, and cases of kidnapping occur time and again.”¹³⁹ As long as the frontier was in the stage of development, as it was in North Manchuria, banditry would continue to be an inseparable yet undesired companion to the settled communities.

¹³⁹ DTJD: BMN, p. 256.

Chapter Five: Russian Influence and Chinese Countermeasures in North Manchuria

Russian influence played a major part in the history of the North Manchurian frontier during the first two decades of the century. Few areas in the region were unaffected or untouched by it. The Russians occupied North Manchuria for six years between 1900 and 1906. They built a railway through it in 1903, established municipal governments along the line without Chinese consent, maintained a sizable military force in the railway zone until 1918, and dominated the region's international trade into the 1920s. Nevertheless, despite the powerful Russian presence, the image of a Russian dominated Manchuria was never accurate. Sovereignty was not at issue, since all the major powers, including Russia, recognized the region as part of China. By the early 1920s, China had regained full political control and economic management of all of North Manchuria but the railway zone.

Little has been written on Russian influence in the region. The literature has either focused on the Russian presence from a Chinese nationalistic viewpoint, or has centred on high-level diplomacy.¹ Few scholars have studied the Russian influence and the local Chinese reaction to it from the perspective of frontier history.

¹ A number of works have been published in Chinese in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan on the Russian influence in Manchuria. After the 1960s Sino-Soviet split, mainland scholars focused on the topic in order

This chapter will focus on lower-level contacts, especially the Chinese response to the Russian presence. It will offer an analysis of Chinese resistance, as well as Chinese accommodation to their powerful neighbour. No other Chinese frontier region experienced foreign penetration to the extent experienced by North Manchuria. However, the Russian presence also had a positive side to it. Regional development was spurred by the Russians. Without the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, it is hard to imagine how hundreds of thousands of immigrants could be transported to their frontier homes and how tens of millions of tonnes of soybeans could be delivered to the international market. It might be argued that China eventually would have built such a line, yet it was the Russians who took the initiative. The Russian presence shaped the frontier more than any other exterior force.

I. The Russian Incursion of 1900

From 1900 until the 1917 Revolution, the Russians maintained a permanent armed force in North Manchuria. The Russian military presence posed one of the central problems for local Chinese administrators seeking to defend national sovereignty. Russian troops also presented danger to the settlers, who feared victimization, and they

to reveal the “true face” of Soviets as successors to the czars. Representative of the nationalist approach is Peter S. H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911-1931* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1959). Study of the Russian communities in Northeast China has recently begun. David Wolff's *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) is an example. A number of scholars are currently conducting research on this topic. Their projects, however, do not appear to address Russian influence on Chinese frontier society, nor the Chinese reaction to it.

were a headache for the central government, which repeatedly requested their evacuation. They served to further Russian imperialist ambitions, but it would be an exaggeration to see the Russian military presence as a colonial authority. Chinese administration still functioned down to the district level. Russian troops entered the region first and foremost to guard Russian interests.

In 1900 Russia moved more than 177,000 troops through Manchuria as part of the Eight-nation Army organized to quell the Boxer disturbances in north China. Four of the five Russian armies entered via North Manchuria. Fierce Chinese resistance occurred along the Aihui-Qiqihar route, resulting in high civilian casualties for the settlers, who were often targets of Russian reprisals. The Russian incursion of 1900 saw the destruction of whole towns and villages. Heihe, a town of five to six thousand residents, was burnt to the ground. Most of the villages along the Heilong [Amur] river near Heihe were burned. According to a Russian traveller, all that was left were the flames blazing on the site.² In Aihui, the most important city on the border, “Russian soldiers set on fire to all quarters, smoke flying high in the sky. Fowl cried out and dogs barked. Several thousand houses were suddenly reduced to ruins.”³ Villages along the Songhua River from Fujin to Yilan [Sanxing] were mostly burnt down. Those who stayed behind were killed.⁴ Russian soldiers burnt the whole of Dongxing to the ground in 1901.⁵

² CASS: SEQHS, p. 259.

³ Sun Rongtu, *Aihui xianzhi* [Annals of Aihui County], printed in 1920 and reprinted by Chengwen Press, Taipei, Taiwan, 1974, p. 325.

⁴ Cao Tingjie, *Cao Tingjie ji* [Collected Works of Cao Tingjie], Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1985, p. 270.

The destruction which accompanied the Russian incursion turned a large number of settlers into refugees. The provincial capital of Qiqihar was crowded with 40,000 people who had fled the Aihui area. These refugees sought to return home but were without means for resettlement.⁶ Some settlers, after their homes were destroyed, sought refuge in the mountains.⁷ It took many years for locals to regain their earlier prosperity. In Tonghe, for example, villages remained in ruin long after the events of 1900.⁸

The Russian invasion seriously affected the 1900 harvest. One source states that because the locals fled “crops did not get timely care, and when the local people returned they found their crops and property severely damaged.” According to one estimate, the areas ravaged by the invaders only yielded 10-20% of a normal year’s harvest.⁹ Damage to farmers in some areas, such as in Aihui, was long term. For six years, the Russians stationed there forbade settlers to return. Only upon the Russian departure in 1906 did settlers start rebuilding their farms.¹⁰

⁵ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1352. See also HPA: HS, p. 406.

⁶ Heilongjiang Jiangjun [Heilongjiang Military Commander], Guangxu cao Heilongjiang jiangjun zougao [Reports of Heilongjiang Military Commander to the Guangxu Emperor], Beijing: Xinhua Shudian, 1993, p. 723.

⁷ “Aihui bingdao wei jiang Bila’er luyashu yijian Chelu difang” [Report of Aihui Military Administration in regard to Moving Bila’er Local Office Headquarters to Chelu], April 5, 1910, HPA: HS, p. 572.

⁸ “Datong xian zhixian Zhang Xiweibingbao qiyong guangfang riqixiang” [Report of Datong Magistrate Zhang Xi in regard to Border Defence], July 1906, HPA: HS, p. 416.

⁹ Heilongjiang Jiangjun, Guangxu cao Heilongjiang jiangjun zougao, p. 663.

¹⁰ “Heilongjiang jiangjun yamen zouwei Aihui shanhou shiyi dangli weichoukuanpian” [Report of Heilongjiang Military Commander’s Office in regard to Measures to Deal with Aftermath Problems], HPA: HS, p. 558.

Looting accompanied the Russian incursion. Personal ornaments, jewellery and clothes were targets. State property was despoiled by the Russian army, though some commanders sought to shift blame onto the Cossacks.¹¹ Guns, ammunition and other military goods were seized. Books from official libraries and documents from government archives were taken.¹² Among the latter were state documents from 1683 to 1900 belonging to the Archive of the Military Commander's Office. The czar dispatched Russian Sinologists to Qiqihar to review these files. They were then put into several train carriages and transported to Russia. Though the Russians did not offer an explanation for this move, the Chinese interpreted it as an attempt to eliminate historical records of Chinese governance in the region. They remained in Russian hands for half a century until the Soviet Union returned them to China in 1956.¹³

Besides burning, killing, and looting, undisciplined soldiers wantonly victimised frontier women. Records contain much information about sexual assault. Gang rape was common.¹⁴ News of Russian atrocities terrorised many women to commit suicide rather than be victimised; this was especially true when Russian soldiers attacked a town or

¹¹ CASS: SEQHS, p. 273.

¹² Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 1350-1351.

¹³ The decision of the USSR in 1955 to return the Archive of the Heilongjiang Military Commander's Office was intended as a gesture of socialist friendship with China. On September 18, 1956 the two countries signed the transfer agreement, and the archive arrived in Beijing two months later. The archive is a vital source for studying pre-1900 Heilongjiang history. See Han Fulin and Zhang Shuyuan, Heishui shisan pian [Thirteen Topics in Heilongjiang History], Shanghai: Shanghai Shuju, 1994, pp. 82-83.

¹⁴ CASS: SEQHS, p. 268 and p. 272. See also HPA: ZT, vol.1, 1986, pp. 61-62.

city.¹⁵ Sexual brutalisation of the local peoples was not officially mandated, but in the absence of strict discipline the common soldiers of the Russian army acquired a poor reputation.¹⁶

The Russians seized mines run by the Chinese government. Mines opened in the gold rush of the late nineteenth century were particularly targeted. For the miners, this was a catastrophe. More than half of the 40,000 to 50,000 gold miners who fled to the nearby mountains perished from starvation.¹⁷ Some survivors turned to banditry. The mines remained under Russian control for more than six years. While the seizure of the mines caused financial problems for the Chinese government, the main effect visited upon the local population was the insecurity it entailed.

The longest standing Chinese grievance resulting from the 1900 incursion was the loss of the “Sixty-four Villages” to the east of Blagoveshchensk. The villages on the Russian side of the Amur had been defined as Chinese territory in 1858 by the treaty of Aigun [Aihui]. The number of Chinese settlers was estimated at 20,000 to 30,000.¹⁸ According to witnesses, on July 17, 1900, Russian troops were dispatched to remove the

¹⁵ Li Shu'en, Binzhou Fu Zhengshu [A Political Handbook for Binzhou Prefecture], Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1910, p. 214. The book was reprinted by the Binxian County History Research Office in 1984.

¹⁶ “Mulan xian wei E bing jianbi minfu gei shengcheng jiaosheju de yi” [A Report of Hulan County to the Provincial Government in regard to Russian Soldiers’ Raping and Killing Local Women], HPA, HZ, vol. 1, 1986, pp. 200-203.

¹⁷ Cao Tingjie, Cao Tingjie ji, p. 416.

¹⁸ Wang Guanglong, Di E qin Hua dizhi [A History of the Russian Invasion of China], Taipei: Zhongyang Wenwushe, 1954. Also see CASS: SEQHS, p. 248. The Russian estimate of the residents was 20,000, which might not include migrant workers.

Chinese population. Many villagers were locked into their houses, which were then set on fire. At least seven thousand people died.¹⁹ Six thousand are known to have escaped. This massacre was called by an American observer the most notorious event in recent history.²⁰

The seizure of the Sixty-four Villages, although an isolated act, left a deep imprint on the refugees who were resettled on the Chinese side of the river. They did not relinquish the memory of their land. In 1912, they erected a monument to commemorate the victims.²¹ Under their leader Chen Lianyue, they repeatedly petitioned the Chinese government to retrieve their lost homes. In 1921 Chen wrote that “the Russians have occupied the land for more than twenty years and have taken it as their own, while leaving thousands of us as refugees.” Chen declared that the villagers had the legal right to their former settlement in the enclave.²² The Russians rejected the demand, which further contributed to the growth of frontier nationalism among the Chinese.

Although the Russians justified their occupation of North Manchuria as necessary to suppress the Boxers, the actual number of Boxers in the region was very few and they were soon suppressed. When the other Eight-nation Army troops withdrew from China,

¹⁹ CASS: SEQHS, p. 251.

²⁰ Albert Jeremiah Beveridge, The Russian Advance, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1904, p. 242.

²¹ HPA: ZT, p. 20.

²² Academia Sinica: Modern History Institute, Zhong E Guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang, 1921, [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: Defense of the Northeast Border, 1921]. Guo Tingyi and Wang Yujun, general editors; Li Jianmin, Chen Kui and Jin Dexi, editors. Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1975, pp. 18-19.

the Russians remained in Manchuria. This prompted the Japanese to initiate a war in 1904 order to remove them. During the Russo-Japanese war, more than 250,000 Russian soldiers were sent to the region. They withdrew in 1906, one year after the Treaty of Portsmouth ended the war in which Japan had gained a hard-fought victory.²³

The exercise of Russian power within North Manchuria was limited. International recognition of Manchuria as an integral part of China prevented Russia from imposing a colonial pattern of rule on the frontier. Nor did the Russians attempt to install a puppet government. However, this is not to downplay the Russian role. The Russian military unmistakably personified Russian power and influence in the region. Local officials experienced the intimidation of a foreign army. In a report to the emperor, the Heilongjiang military commander stated that “before 1900, Russian soldiers were never seen outside the railway zone.” Even within the zone itself “the number of Russian soldiers numbered no more than several hundred.” However, in the aftermath of 1900, Russian soldiers swamped the railway line and “even beyond the line, Russians maintain troops in numerous locations, from which they spread out everywhere and come into contact with our civilian population and bannermen, . . . becoming presumptuous guests usurping the role of the host.”²⁴

²³ Peter S. H. Tang, Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, p. 97.

²⁴ “Shujiangjun Sabao juzou E ren chouban tielu qingxing zhepian” [Report of Heilongjiang General Sabao about Russian Railway-Building Plans], HPA: ZT, vol. 1: 1986, pp. 58-59. Also see Heilongjiang Jiangjun, Guangxu cao Heilongjiang jiangjun zougao [Reports of the Heilongjiang Military Commander to the Guangxu Emperor], p. 657.

Settlers frequently reported incidents involving Russians to local officials and sought their assistance. Such appeals indicate that the Chinese administration was still operating. For their part, local administrators, with the permission of the central government, set up a Negotiation Bureau [jiaosheju] to deal with the Russians. Though no explicit definition of its function was provided, the Bureau was intended to deal directly with Russian commanders to resolve problems. During the occupation years, the Bureau played an important role in safeguarding settlers' lives and property, and in checking the behaviour of Russian troops.²⁵

In order to defend its interests, the provincial government began training Russian interpreters. As Heilongjiang General Sabao remarked: "Ever since the Russians entered our provincial capital, the situation has become difficult. It seems that doomsday has come. Russians know nothing of the Chinese language. Lack of proper communication makes conditions worse: Russians blame everything on us, even the pettiest problem."²⁶ Wherever a good interpreter was to be found, settlers found themselves much less threatened.²⁷ In 1903, Heilongjiang province, with the emperor's approval, established a Russian language school.²⁸

²⁵ Li Shu'en, op. cit., p. 211. See also Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1604. See also Heilongjiang Jiangjun, Guangxu cao Heilongjiang jiangjun zougao, p. 657.

²⁶ Heilongjiang Jiangjun,, Guangxu cao Heilongjiang jiangjun zougao, p. 705.

²⁷ In one area called Tract Six the situation was relatively calm, largely due to an interpreter named Zhu Yaozuo, who effectively communicated with local Russian commanders. See *ibid.*, p. 657.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 712.

Local administrators applied the traditional notions of host and guest to the problem of the Russian presence. The host was to be as concerned and gracious as possible in appeasing the guests, while never losing sight of his own role as host. The Russians were at best uninvited “guests”. Hence the hosts, the masters of the land, needed to accommodate them and not anger them. A kind of low-level diplomacy ensued. The Chinese provincial governor often communicated with Russian commanders. In response to Chinese requests, the Russian commander in Qiqihar enforced strict discipline on his men, which, in the words of the Chinese report, “has reduced harassment of settlers, and brought relative peace to the city for the past year.” Some Russian commanders worked hard to redress wrongdoings committed by their troops and offered assistance to Chinese officials, especially in bandit suppression. Often the Chinese acted to reward their “guests.” Provincial governors recommended that Russian commanders receive special medals of honour from the Chinese emperor.²⁹ In Qiqihar, awards were bestowed on Russian military doctors who, during their two years in the area, treated Chinese patients and often provided free medicine. The awards, as a local official put it, “were to encourage other Russians to follow suit.”³⁰

Although the level of destruction of the 1900 invasion was not repeated, Russian soldiers frequently imposed themselves upon the settlers. Chinese authorities issued

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 702.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 713.

decrees forbidding Russian soldiers from searching and looting local villages.³¹ Many notes written by Chinese authorities were couched in strong language. There were reports of property seizures, forcible acquisition of food and fodder, occupation of civilian homes, and even of physical harassment.³² Settlers especially hated the Cossacks whose brutality was notorious.³³ Whenever such incidents happened, settlers approached the Chinese authorities who protested to the Russian commanders. Often the latter cooperated and punished the guilty parties.³⁴

The Russo-Japanese War brought new miseries to North Manchuria, though the battlefields lay to the south. During the war, the Russians used the north as a logistical base. Most soldiers passed through the region on their way to the front. This placed further burdens on the settlers. Russian soldiers forced them to accept military coupons in exchange for food, fodder and supplies. Many of these coupons became valueless paper after the war.³⁵ Chinese who were mistaken as Japanese spies were immediately executed and many were imprisoned. In the southern part of North Manchuria, forced labour was common during the war. One Russian commander, for example, compelled 2,000 settlers

³¹ “Sabao, Cheng Dequan weizai tielu liangpang paibing xuncha gei Kuomisa’er de fuzhao” [Diplomatic Note from Sabao and Cheng Dequan to Kuomisa’er concerning Patrols along the Railway], HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, pp. 130-131.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194.

³³ Cao Tingjie, *Cao Tingjie ji*, p. 465.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 464-466. For example, some Russian soldiers who destroyed a civilian’s crops were reported through official channels and were subsequently reprimanded. Russian commanders also paid compensation for the death of settlers killed by Russian soldiers.

³⁵ Chang Cheng, gen. ed. *Dongbei jinxindai shigang* [A History of the Modern Northeast], Changchun: Dongbeishida Chubanshe, 1987, p. 187, p. 59. See also CASS: SEQHS, p. 501.

in Nong'an to build a fort to protect his 500-man contingent against possible Japanese attack.³⁶ Russian soldiers often seized cattle and horses for military use or for food.³⁷ One source refers to a band of Russian soldiers forcibly taking 200 oxen at 10% of the local price.³⁸ Official Chinese protests went to no avail.

The stationing of a quarter million troops in North Manchuria placed a burden on the settlers, yet it did serve to stimulate the local economy. Even if the Russians bought at low price, the high quantities of grain purchased increased demand, as the following table shows.

Table 4.1

Sources of Russian Military Consumption of Agricultural Products
during the Russo-Japanese War (tons)

Category	Supplies from North Manchuria	Percentage of the total	Transported from Russia	Percentage of the Total
Rice	112.51	85	---	---
Wheat flour	216.72	85	55.82	15
Milled grain	45.62	84	8.47	16
Cereals	311.22	88	42.74	12
Hay	163.80	100	---	---
	849.87	89	107.03	11

³⁶ "Nong'an xianzhang guanyu Ebing zhangminfang xiuyaoe de baogao" [Report of the Nong'an Magistrate concerning Russian Soldiers' Seizure of Civilian Houses and Forcing Civilians to Build Military Forts], May 21, 1905, "Jilinsheng zhengfu dang'an" [Jilin Provincial Government Archive], as quoted in Wang Kuixi, gen.ed., *Jindai Dongbei shi* [A History of the Northeast], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, p. 292.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

³⁸ "Dagui, Cheng Dequan wei E bing qiangengniushi zhaohui" [Diplomatic Note concerning Cattle Seizures by Russian Soldiers], HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 141.

(Source: Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Harbin shilue, [An Outline History of Harbin], Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1994, p. 74.)

The impact on production was felt particularly along the Chinese Eastern Railway and in the vicinity of Harbin.³⁹ As the economy grew, demand for labour brought in more immigrants. Their numbers reinforced the Chinese presence in the region and thus worked to defend the cause of national sovereignty.

The Russians did not withdraw all of their troops in 1906, following the end of the war. While the military occupation formally ended that year, the Russians still maintained a sizable military force in North Manchuria. The Treaty of Portsmouth, signed by Japan and Russia without the participation of China, allowed the Russians to continue stationing troops along the Chinese Eastern Railway. In 1907, Russians had fifty-four squadrons of infantry, forty-two squadrons of cavalry and four squadrons of artillery in the region.⁴⁰ According to one estimate, the total number of troops in 1911 was about 70,000, of whom 30,000 were in Harbin.⁴¹ Another source states that at the outbreak of World War One, there were 60,000 troops along the railway and 30,000 in Harbin. Though most of the soldiers were dispatched to the battlefields in Europe once the war broke out, some 7,000 to 10,000 remained in North Manchuria until the Revolution in 1917.⁴²

³⁹ Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ Wang Kuixi, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁴¹ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1353.

⁴² Sun Jiyi, Zhong E jiaoshe lun, 1929-1930 [Negotiations between China and Russia, 1929-1930], Shanghai: Dadong Shuju, 1931, p. 123.

This sizable military force enabled the Russians gradually to turn the railway zone into a semi-colony. Russian soldiers were not strictly confined to the railway zone. From time to time, they ranged beyond it to ransack stores, seize property and extort payments from the settlers.⁴³ Russian soldiers sometimes launched punitive expeditions into nearby villages to “hunt” bandits. More often than not, settlers suffered while the bandits made off. Such actions were taken without receiving Chinese permission. Russian and Chinese soldiers sometimes clashed. An instance of this was when Russians hampered Chinese efforts to arrest a number of opium traders.⁴⁴ On another occasion, Chinese and Russian soldiers exchanged fire in a village, resulting in five Chinese and three Russian deaths.⁴⁵

The Russian military made other demands on the Chinese. For example, in 1912 the Russians unilaterally decided to carry out exercises in civilian territory in the Fula’erji region. More than 4,000 mu of cultivated land was encroached upon. Chinese settlers had to risk life to farm, and complained to the authorities.⁴⁶ The latter had to tread carefully, for fear that a military confrontation between Chinese forces and the Russians

⁴³ “Song Xiaolian wei E bing jiaofei ru Hua jing zha” [Report of Song Xiaolian in regard to the Entrance of Russian Soldiers into Chinese Territory], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 10.

⁴⁴ “Jiangsheng xingzheng gongshu wei E bing lanluqiefan deng qingling” [Report of Heilongjiang Provincial Administration in regard to Russian Soldiers’ Waylaying People], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁵ B. Awaln [B. Avalin], *Diguozhuyi zai Manzhou*, [Imperialism in Manchuria], Beijing: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1980, p. 189. The book was originally published in Russian in Moscow in 1934.

⁴⁶ “Jiangsheng jiaosheju weiqing E ling zhuangxing zhu Fuzhan bingdui ling cai caochang shi zhaohu” [Diplomatic Note concerning Russian Soldiers’ Wrongdoings in Disturbing Local Farmers Near Fula’erji Station], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 9.

might be provoked.⁴⁷ The Russians also demanded that the Chinese report the number of troops they had in North Manchuria, which indicates Russian fears that a strong Chinese military presence might enable China to reassert itself in the region. The Chinese replied that they had the right to send in any number of troops in case of emergency. The Russians accepted this, but again demanded notification of the dispatch of reinforcements. In the Russian view, China “needed only to maintain a military police to deal with bandits.”⁴⁸

The existence of the Russian military force in North Manchuria provoked the rise of nationalist sentiment on the part of Chinese frontier settlers. Though the Chinese had to acquiesce to the Russian military presence along the railway, they were quite sensitive to further military expansion.⁴⁹ Chinese soldiers were prepared to challenge Russian forces if they encountered them beyond the zone. In 1912, a Russian gunboat entered one of the interior rivers. Despite a warning, it continued. A certain captain Zhang led a unit of horsemen to shadow the gunboat. After twenty-five kilometres they succeeded in stopping the boat. Zhang went on board and demanded the Russians withdraw, which

⁴⁷ “Zongban Li Hongmo weiquanzu Ebing shanru Lanxi shigonghan” [Report of Zongban Li Hongmo in regard to his Efforts to Stop Russian Soldiers from Entering Lanxi], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 38-39.

⁴⁸ “Waijiaobu dianbao” [Foreign Minister’s Telegram], April 25, 1914; see “Guoji guanxi wenjian” [Document concerning International Relations], Series No. 3, Vol. 2, Document No. 290; as quoted in CASS: SEQHS, p. 865.

⁴⁹ Lang Daming and Shang Chenglin, Re tu xiao xiang: Hulan [Warm Soil and Natural Country: Hulan], Ha’erbin: Ha’erbin Chubanshe, 1998, p. 26.

they were forced to do. Chinese authorities later referred to the incident in warning Russian commanders not to enter the frontier region without permission.⁵⁰

Even the presence of a few Russian soldiers outside the zone was to be prevented. In 1914, the Russians placed guards along the Songhua river transport routes in the six counties of Sanxing [Yilan], Fangzheng, Huanchuan, Fujin, Binxian and Tongjiang. The number of guards was minuscule. Five soldiers were stationed in Huachuan, twenty in Xindian and five in Wu'erhe.⁵¹ Since settlers refused to rent houses to them, the Russians erected tents along the river. The Russians intended to withdraw for the winter months and to return in the spring.⁵² The reaction of the frontier settlers was that "this arrangement was not to be borne, since it would cause endless trouble for our existence as a sovereign nation."⁵³ The Chinese immediately lodged a protest and ordered the

⁵⁰ "Dalaiting wei zuzhi E lun beiwang bingqing jiaoshe shecheng" [Report of Dailai Prefecture in regard to Stopping Russian Gunboats and Related Negotiations], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 16-19.

⁵¹ "Yilando gongshu wei E bing shanzhu Jiamusi jiang'an shizi" [Report of Yilan Prefecture concerning the Illegal Stationing of Russian Soldiers on the Riverbank near Jiamusi], September 6, 1914, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 50-51. "Jilin jiaosheshu weiyanchi Ebing chechu Fujin dengxian zi" [Report of Jilin Negotiation Bureau in regard to Ordering Russian Soldiers to Withdraw], September 17, 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 51-52. "Jilin jiaosheshu wei E jici paibing fenzhuneidi jiaoshe qingxingxiang" [Report of Jilin Negotiation Bureau in regard to Negotiations concerning Dispatch of Russian Troops into Chinese Territory], November 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 54-55. See also Li Shu'en, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁵² "Jilin jiaosheshu wei E dui zhuzha Fujin jiang'an qingsu jiaoshe" [Petition of Jilin Negotiation Bureau to Negotiate Immediately with Russia concerning Stationing of Russian Troops on the Bank of the River near Fujin], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 63.

⁵³ "Jilin jiaosheshu wei E jici paibing fenzhuneidi jiaoshe qingxingxiang," HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 54.

Russians to leave, vowing to block their return in the spring while stating they themselves would guard the transportation lines in Chinese territory.⁵⁴

The revolutions of 1917 brought an end to the Russian informal empire in North Manchuria. Already the Russian military presence had been drastically reduced because of the European war. The Chinese sent troops in 1917 to the railway zone to replace Russian soldiers as “guards.” Early the next year, the Chinese escorted most of the remaining Russian soldiers out of North Manchuria.⁵⁵ The Chinese provincial government implemented a policy to disarm Russians in the area. By 1920 the Russian military presence had ceased to be of any significance in North Manchuria.

Russian soldiers did return to the region. In the course of a short-lived border conflict in 1929 Soviet forces occupied several border towns. This military action arose out of a dispute over management of the Chinese Eastern Railway. It differed from the earlier czarist incursion into the region in that it was limited to the maintenance of Soviet administrative and economic privilege in the railway zone. For many decades, Chinese communist historians, in an effort to maintain socialist solidarity, underplayed the intervention, defending the Soviet Union and blaming the warlords for provoking the conflict. However, recent publications in China have stressed the damage inflicted by Soviet troops on the frontier. Fierce fighting occurred at a number of points along the

⁵⁴ “Jilin Jiaosheshu wei Ebing zhuzha yanjiang gexian zaiqing jiaoshe zi” [Second Petition of Jilin Negotiation Bureau in regard to Negotiations with Russia concerning Stationing of Russian Troops in Several Counties along the River], April 20, 1915, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Sun Jiyi, *Zhong E jiaoshe lun, 1929-1930*, p. 123.

border. The Russians employed aeroplanes, tanks and heavy artillery. As a result, more than a thousand Chinese soldiers lost their lives and some border towns suffered extensive damage. In Fujin, Russians burned down government buildings, destroyed communication lines, and seized military supplies.⁵⁶ Merchants suffered heavy losses, and many of them sought to relocate. In Huma, merchants moved to Nenjiang, a hundred miles in the south.⁵⁷ The war lasted only a few weeks, but nevertheless left much damage in its wake.

II. Russian Dominance of the Railway Zone and its Impact upon the Region

The construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway from 1897 to 1903 through North Manchuria greatly shaped the region's history. The railway cut deep into the frontier and linked it to the outside world. The Chinese Eastern Railway was built to serve Russian imperial interests. It was not intended to benefit China. Although the function of the railway was in the first instance commercial, the railway also was also of great strategic value to Russia, as it provided a convenient route between Siberia and the maritime province, with its port at Vladivostok. To a large degree the Russians became masters of

⁵⁶ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, pp. 496-497.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 499.

the zone, exercising political power, utilizing its resources and creating “a kingdom within a kingdom.”⁵⁸

Well before the completion of the railway, the Chinese had been concerned about future Russian dominance in the region.⁵⁹ The agreement which granted the Russian government railway construction rights had been signed in 1896 by Chinese chief negotiator Li Hongzhang, who has been charged with receiving Russian bribes for his efforts. Subsequently the Qing government argued that because it had contributed five million silver taels of capital to the company, the railway was a Sino-Russian joint venture.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Chinese supplied land, local materials, and labour. Indeed, over a thousand Chinese labourers died during the construction of the railway.⁶¹ The Russians meanwhile asserted that they too had invested heavily in the project, as well as providing the engineering. The military occupation of North Manchuria from 1900 to 1906 inevitably helped the Russians gain the upper hand in the railway zone.

⁵⁸ This term is often used in China to indicate Russian usurpation of Chinese sovereignty within the zone. See CASS: SEQHS, p. 589.

⁵⁹ The Guangxu emperor exclaimed that “the whole land of our ancestors is sold to Russia” after he read the treaty that allowed Russia to build the Chinese Eastern Railway. See Chang Cheng, *op. cit.*, p. 33. A few months later, Liu Shutang, the governor of Henan, complained to the emperor that “if we allow Russians to build this railway through our two provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang . . . where is China’s right to rule in the region?” See also Wu Xiangxiang, *Di E qinlue Zhongguo shi* [A History of Imperial Russian Aggression in China], Taipei: Zhengzhong Shuju, 1954, p. 145.

⁶⁰ Young, C. Walter, *The International Relations of Manchuria: A Digest and Analysis of Treaties, and Negotiations Concerning the Three Eastern Provinces of China*, Prepared for the 1929 Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Kyoto, Japan; Published for the American Council Institute of Pacific Relations, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1929, p. 218.

⁶¹ In 1899, more than 1,400 Chinese coolies died during the construction of the railway; hence, the Chinese claimed that the Chinese Eastern Railway was built from Chinese blood. “Apart from the steel and the technology that were imported, everything else was the product of Chinese workers.” “Without Chinese

In 1907, the Russians moved to establish municipal governments in the major towns and cities along the railway. This changed the railway from being a strictly commercial enterprise. The mayor of each municipality was now to be a Russian and the working language Russian as well. The municipal council was to control realty, commerce, communication, city planning, education and public health. The councils were empowered to levy a variety of taxes on land, goods, transportation, land transfers and entertainment. Anyone who refused to pay was liable to fine or imprisonment. The Chinese were indignant. One official noted that “all power has been taken by the Russians . . . their intention is to expel Chinese administration so that they can act with a free hand. This is to interfere in our government, seize our territory, and infringe upon our sovereignty.”⁶² Chinese merchants did not accept the newly installed councils and refused to pay taxes. In late 1908, Russian soldiers sealed up Chinese stores and warned merchants that they would be expelled from the zone if they did not pay.⁶³

Construction of the railway affected settlers, since choice land under cultivation was expropriated from them at low value. The Heilongjiang military commander reported to

hard labour, suffering and death, there would not have been such a railway.” See Chang Cheng, op. cit., p. 36.

⁶² Xu Shichang, Dongsansheng zhenglue [The Politics of the Three Northeastern Provinces], Beijing: Wenhai Chubanshe, 1911, vol. 3, p. 12. See also CASS: SEQHS, p. 582.

⁶³ Zhang Boying, HZ, pp. 1658-1659. The Russian move also angered many foreigners. For example, U.S. consul Fisher declared that he respected Chinese territorial sovereignty and would not go through the Russian council to establish the U.S. consulate in Harbin. He assumed his post in Harbin in 1907, but reiterated the U.S. stance that “political authority cannot be derived from the grant to the Railway Company.” See C. Walter Young, Japanese Jurisdiction in the South Manchuria Railway Years: Japan’s Jurisdiction and International Legal Position in Manchuria, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, and London: Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, 1931, pp. 50-52.

the Chinese emperor that “the Russians have resorted to unreasonable measures to forcibly purchase settlers’ land. This contradicts the agreement made in regard to the railway.”⁶⁴ Settlers not only had to give up property, but also were forced to move their residence to new locations. And while they received compensation, it tended to be one-third or more below the market value of their land.⁶⁵ To ensure that railway construction proceeded on schedule, recalcitrant settlers were removed by force. Displays of resistance, invariably futile, occurred in many parts of Heilongjiang. Mention is made of an instance when “thousands of settlers gathered refusing to give up their land, and even the women and children held farming tools in hand to challenge the intruders [Russians].”

⁶⁶ But a more common occurrence was the following: “Russian soldiers entered the village and went into every home They tied up thirty-eight people, including the aged and the young, put them into three carts and drove them away. During this operation, three settlers died.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “Jiangjun yamen wei Eren goumai jiangbei dimu shizi zha” [Report of Heilongjiang Military Commander’s Office in regard to Russian Purchase of Land on the Northern Bank], June 13, 1904, HPA: ZT, vol.1, p. 143.

⁶⁵ Kong Jingwei, Dongbei jingji shi [An Economic History of the Northeast], Chengdu: Sichuan Remin Chubanshe, 1986, p. 107.

⁶⁶ Zhongwai ribao [China and World Daily], Shanghai, October 16, 1898. See also Wang Kuixi, op. cit., p. 210.

⁶⁷ Li Shutang, Dong jian ji xing [Travel to Eastern Lands], 1899, p. 9, as quoted in Yang Peixin, Hua E Daosheng Yinhang he Ou Ya dalu di yi qiao: wei touluguo de sha E qin hua neimu, [The Russo-Chinese Bank and the First Eurasian Bridge: the Unrevealed Secrets of the Russian Invasion of China], Beijing: Zhongguo Jinrong Chubanshe, 1992, p. 48.

The Chinese Eastern Railway zone in North Manchuria extended 1721.2 kilometres. Its width ranged from 75 to 300 meters.⁶⁸ The stations and railyards took up additional land. According to one figure, the land expropriated for its ninety-four railway stations totalled 126,000 sang [765,027 acres].⁶⁹ The bigger the station, the more land. For example, Harbin, the largest station, occupied 11,199 acres in 1907 and was later enlarged. Most other stations were also enlarged, some reaching more than 7,000 acres in area.⁷⁰ Once again Chinese settlers were the victims of forced purchases, low prices and compulsory relocation of their villages. For example, in 1904, Zhang Yonglu refused to sell his land, but “the Russians harassed his family by knocking down his walls and setting up survey rods.”⁷¹ Then his family was driven to a new location five kilometres away while his crops were destroyed.⁷² In 1906, the land of sixty-seven families in Hulan was partially or wholly seized, and “all the settlers driven away.”⁷³ In 1908, an official

⁶⁸ Yang Yulian et al, Qingdai Dongbeishi [A History of the Northeast during the Qing Dynasty], Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1991, p. 424; Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1622.

⁶⁹ MacMurray, John V.A., Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919, 2 vols., New York: Oxford University Press, 1921, p. 667.

⁷⁰ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 733.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 734.

⁷² “Shujiangjun Cheng Dequan wei Ebing jiangzhan dichan fangwu zhaohui” [A Diplomatic Note by Heilongjiang General Cheng Dequan in regard to Russian Troops’ Seizure of Land and Houses], October 24, 1905, HPA: ZT, vol. 1: 1986, pp. 178-179.

⁷³ “Hulan xieling weicha Eren qinzhan dimu zhaoce jiajiecheng” [Report of Hulan Commander in regard to Russian Seizure of Land], November 2, 1906, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, p. 199.

report listed another 117 families in Hulan who lost land totalling 2,635 acres [16,000 mu].⁷⁴

The Russians laid out demarcation lines around the stations. Some of them enclosed an extensive area. For example, near Du'erbote, the railway zone was 110 kilometres long by five wide.⁷⁵ In some places, ditches were dug to separate the Russian area [E jie] from the Chinese area, so that "future problems might be avoided." At Angangxi, a ditch five kilometres in length was dug three kilometres beyond the station.⁷⁶

Settlers who lived near the railway zone were much affected by the Russian presence. In 1902 the Russians prohibited the planting of sorghum and corn immediately adjacent to the zone in order to "prevent banditry and unexpected raids." Punishment befell those who violated the order.⁷⁷ In 1904 the prohibited area was extended to more than one kilometer, with a further warning that violators be punished and their crops destroyed.⁷⁸ Since sorghum and corn were the staple foods of North Manchuria, the prohibition severely affected settlers living alongside the railway zone. Settlers could not

⁷⁴ "Huang Weihang weiqing xiezuhecha guanjie dianmin bei tielu suo zhandimushicheng" [Report of Huang Weihang concerning Tenants' Land Being Seized within the Railway Zone], February 1908, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, pp. 272-278.

⁷⁵ "Jiaoshe zongju wei Du'erboteqi suoyao tielu zhandi kuanshicheng" [Report of General Negotiation Bureau in regard to Land Seized by the Railway within Du'erbote Banner], July 11, 1907, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, p. 220.

⁷⁶ "Heishuiting chengbao Eren zai Ang'angxizhan waihao shiyi" [Report of Heishui Prefecture in regard to Russians Excavating Trenches around Ang'angxi Station], June 14, 1906, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, p. 185.

⁷⁷ "Kuomisa'er guanyu tielu liangce sibaibunei jinzhong gaoliang yumi de zhaohui" [Kuomisa'er's Diplomatic Note in regard to the Prohibition of Planting Sorghum and Maize within Four Hundred Paces of the Railway], January 27, 1901, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 319.

cross the railway line freely, which made life even more troublesome for those whose land abutted the line. The Russians warned settlers that anyone who tried to cross the railway would be shot and that Russian soldiers would not be responsible for the consequences.⁷⁹

Chinese required permission to enter the railway zone, otherwise they would be expelled. During the Russo-Japanese war, the Russians declared that Chinese carrying weapons were not to be allowed in. Later, when the zone was widened to fifteen kilometres on each side of the railway, the Russians informed the provincial government that Chinese could not bear arms within the new zone.⁸⁰ The Chinese national government had to obtain Russian permission in order to use the railway to mobilize troops during emergency.⁸¹ Russians might expel any Chinese they chose to; for example, in 1911 they removed 3,000 Chinese from Harbin to Hulan on the pretext of preventing an epidemic. Seeing that Chinese officials could offer them no protection, the angry evacuees burnt the Hulan county government office.⁸² Chinese beggars were often driven out of the railway zone. In June 1906, the Russians collected 600 unemployed Chinese

⁷⁹ “Jiangsheng tielu jiaoshe zongju weishen jintieluguidao renyi xingzou de fuzhao” [Reply of Heilongjiang Railway Negotiation Bureau in regard to the Prohibition against Crossing the Railway Tracks], March 26, 1904, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, p. 128.

⁸⁰ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 319.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 349.

⁸² Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang Zonggonghui, [Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang General Workers' Associations], Dongbei Gongren Yundong Dashiji [A Chronicle of the Workers' Movement in the Northeast], Shenyang: Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang Zonggonghui, 1988, p. 28. See also Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 342.

from the streets of Harbin, loaded them onto a freight train, and shipped them to Changchun. The following month, more than 130 Chinese paupers were sent to Changchun in similar manner.⁸³

The principal Chinese Eastern Railway line was completed in 1903, but the construction of feeder lines near cities and towns, and branch lines leading to timber concessions, mining areas and ferries continued to absorb land. Settlers had brought under cultivation land near the railway because of proximity to the market, but the new feeder lines dispossessed many of them of their property. Each kilometre of rail, whether trunk or feeder line, meant 108 sang [655 acres] of land taken from the settlers.⁸⁴ Urban expansion due to economic growth also took a toll on settlers' land. Harbin and Fulaerji were the most notable examples. Harbin underwent several expansions, consuming much fertile land worked by the Chinese settlers.⁸⁵ A city dominated by Russian architecture, language and culture, it was in fact was more Russian than Chinese, despite standing on Chinese soil.⁸⁶

The Russians acquired more land than just what they took for railway-related purposes. They engaged heavily in land speculation. From June to November 1901, the Chinese Eastern Railway sold off its newly acquired land, making 1.72 million rubles in

⁸³ Yuandong Bao [Far Eastern News], June 10, 1916; July 6, 1916; as quoted in Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Ha'erbin shilue, p. 79.

⁸⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1622.

⁸⁵ Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Ha'erbin shilue, p. 81.

⁸⁶ Many travellers had the same impression that early twentieth century Harbin was more a Russian city. See C. Walter Young, Japanese Jurisdiction in the South Manchuria Railway Years, p. 40.

these transactions.⁸⁷ Early in 1904, the railway established a Land Bureau [Dimuchu]. With the CER now fully in operation, and more Russians moving into the zone, land sales and rentals offered a large return on investment. According to one estimate, the Bureau made at least 3,27 million rubles during its first five years.⁸⁸ In 1917 alone, income from Land Bureau property sales and rentals earned the CER more than 7.66 million rubles.⁸⁹

In a report to the Emperor, the Heilongjiang Military Commander put the matter this way:⁹⁰ “The Chinese Eastern Railway has steadily occupied land in Jilin and Heilongjiang. Large stations occupy ten thousand mu and smaller ones several thousand. The railway did not need all of this land; the land was occupied in the name of railway but in fact was intended for rent to gain profit.” According to a Russian estimate of the early 1920s, railway buildings and other appurtenances covered only 34.1% of the total land acquired by the CER. Land rented out constituted 22.2%. The remaining 43.7% was unused land held for speculation.⁹¹ This last amount kept land values so high that people

⁸⁷ Yang Yulian, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 426.

⁸⁹ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, *HKS*, p. 735.

⁹⁰ Fudan Daxue Lishixi [Fudan University, Department of History], *Sha E qin Hua shi*, [The Russian Invasion of China], Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1975, p. 436. See also Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, *Ha'erbin shilue*, p. 83.

⁹¹ Yang Peixin, *Hua E Daosheng Yinhang he Ou Ya dalu di yi qiao*, p. 47. See also Chinese Eastern Railroad Printing House, *North Manchuria and the Chinese Eastern Railway*, Harbin, China, 1924; reprinted as a book in *A Garland Series: China during the Interregnum, 1911-1949 The Economy and Society*, edited by Ramon H. Myers, Hoover Institution, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London, 1982.

in Harbin complained that “the price of land equals the price of gold”.⁹² The Land Bureau itself admitted that its “duty is to generate income for the Chinese Eastern Railway by land development, land management and land improvement. The Land Bureau . . . can use its particular position to further acquire land for future profit.”⁹³

Within the railway zone, the Russians obtained a favourable reduction of Chinese customs duties. By the treaty of 1907, Russians enjoyed a one-third reduction of rates. Since the Russians largely controlled the import and export trade, this was highly advantageous to them. The treaty also stipulated that the reduction would apply to business conducted beyond the stations themselves, according to size. The Harbin reduction area extended to all points within a radius of five kilometres. For medium size stations the reduction area was two and half kilometres, and for smaller stations one and half kilometres.⁹⁴

Apart from stationing troops in the railway zone to guard their interests, the Russians set up their own police force. Seven police bureaus were established in 1903 and consolidated into four the next year. Police numbers steadily increased. In 1908, a detective department was added and in 1909 a police school was set up to train Russians

⁹² Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Ha'erbin shilue, p. 83.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁹⁴ MacMurray, John V.A., Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919, pp. 648-649. Also see Kong Jingwei, Dongbei Jingji Shi, p. 15.

in police work. Despite Chinese protests, the Russians gradually replaced the Chinese police and removed them from the zone.⁹⁵

Chinese tax collectors were ordered to leave the zone and a new tax system was imposed upon local residents. Chinese officials continued to send tax collectors into the zone, but this only incurred Russian wrath. For example, in Duiqingshan, Chinese tax officials were driven out and three officials were arrested and sent to Chinese Eastern Railway headquarters in Harbin.⁹⁶ In Tianchaogang, the Russians prevented local Chinese officials from establishing a tax office and refused entry into the zone to Chinese tax collectors.⁹⁷ In the words of one Chinese magistrate, “The illegal arrest of our tax officials by the Russians constitutes an infringement of Chinese sovereignty and a violation of international law.”⁹⁸

The Chinese were put under the Russian judicial system. Within the railway zone, all cases, whether Russian or Chinese, were to be judged by the Russians.⁹⁹ By treaty, the Chinese authorities should have had a role in the courts, but the Russians usually ignored them and handed down judgements according to Russian law. Consequently, Chinese

⁹⁵ CASS: SEQHS, pp. 573-574.

⁹⁶ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 339.

⁹⁷ “Xiliang, Zhou Shumo wei Tiancaogang she shuiwu shizha” [Report of Xiliang, Zhou Shumo in regard to the Establishment of Tax Administration at Tiancaogang], December 15, 1909, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 300.

⁹⁸ “Huang Weihai wei Eren jiang Duiqingshan shuikashuchai kousong Habu shicheng” [Report of Huang Weihai in regard to Russian Detention of Tax Officials at Duiqingshan], December 22, 1909, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 303.

⁹⁹ Yang Peixin, Hua E Daosheng Yinhang he Ou Ya dalu di yi qiao, p. 51.

residents in the zone were often maltreated. A Russian observer noted that “within the railway zone, only Russian laws and Russian courts apply . . . The Russians treat the Chinese preemptorily and considered them inferior people. Since the judges are Russian, Russians would not be punished even if they insult Chinese.”¹⁰⁰ Under this judicial system, Chinese became “foreigners” in their own land.

The Russian authorities encouraged Russian immigration into the railway zone. The railway facilitated the inflow. For example, by 1903, when the CER was completed, the number of Russians in Harbin stood at 20,000. The next year, during the war with Japan, Russians flooded in and the figure jumped to 100,000. After the Russian defeat, some returned to Russia, but a substantial number remained. A 1912 census shows 43,091 Russians in Harbin. They represented 63.7% of the city’s population of 68,549. Following the Bolshevik Revolution many Russian refugees made their way to Harbin. The number of Russians peaked at 155,402 in 1922, almost half the city’s population.¹⁰¹

As more Russians moved into the railway zone, a Russian educational system was established. The creation of schools indicates Russian plans for long-term control of the railway zone. The first primary school was set up in Harbin in 1898, and the first university in 1920. In the intervening years the Russians built more than twenty professional schools, specializing in business, management, industry, police, law and nursing. The curriculum was purely Russian. Harbin was also seen as a base for Russian

¹⁰⁰ CASS: SEQHS, p. 577.

¹⁰¹ Rao Lianglun, “1917-1931 nian qijian lu Ha Eqiao gaikuang” [A General Sketch of Russians Living in Harbin, 1917-1931], *Beifang Wenwu* [Northern History Forum], No. 1, 2000, p. 81.

culture. Between 1903 and 1927 at least 127 different newspapers were established there, though some were quite short-lived.¹⁰²

Some Russians searched for Asian roots to justify their presence in China. One writer argued: “The Russian people are descendants of the Din Lings, a Mongol tribe, originally settled along the Yellow River. . . . Russia borrowed her religion and culture from Byzantium and Greece, and her political culture from the Mongols. . . . The Mongols governed Russia as long as the Romanovs, for a period of three hundred years. . . . Our exile life abroad brought us in close contact with the Westerners, but showed us how different we are from them.”¹⁰³ Living on Chinese soil thus was portrayed as a return to their ancestral land.

The railway zone in fact had become a part of the Russian Empire within Chinese territory.¹⁰⁴ Russian political authority, economic might, legal power, military force and cultural influence permeated every corner of it. Although Chinese were the overwhelming majority of the population, they remained secondary citizens. Chinese officials angrily remarked: “They [Russians] appropriate our land for colonial rule. We in our own country retain only a hollow title; while they hold absolute power and

¹⁰² Li Shiliang, Shi Fang and Gao Ling, Ha'erbin shilue, p. 104.

¹⁰³ Tsao, Lien-En, Chinese Migration to the Three Eastern Provinces, Shanghai: The Bureau of Industrial and Commercial Information, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor, National Government of the Republic of China, Series No.15, 1929, p. 68.

¹⁰⁴ Harry Schwartz, Tsar, Mandarins, Commissars: A History of Chinese Russian Relations, New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1964, p. 83.

privilege.”¹⁰⁵ In the eyes of the Chinese, the railway zone was but a Russian “colony,”¹⁰⁶ or “a country within a country.”¹⁰⁷

Since a weak China could not effectively counteract Russian power, many Chinese seemed to give tacit consent to the status quo. They adopted a passive resistance, but when the opportunity presented itself they sought to reassert Chinese sovereignty. For example, the provincial government set up the Negotiation Bureau to solve disputes between Chinese settlers with the zone and to speak to their affairs in general. The presence of such an office was seen as championing Chinese sovereignty within the zone.

¹⁰⁸ Sometimes the victory was symbolically important. Although the Chinese failed to block the establishment of Russian municipal governments in 1907, pressure from the Chinese government and the other foreign powers compelled the Russians to concede in the first clause of the municipal charters that “within the railway zone, China’s sovereignty would be respected.”¹⁰⁹

The Chinese endeavoured to confine the Russians within the railway zone and intensified such efforts after the Russians established their municipal governments. The

¹⁰⁵ B. Awaln [B. Avalin], *op. cit.*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁰⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1664.

¹⁰⁷ Some Russian scholars also called it “a nation within a nation”; see CASS: SEQHS, p. 589.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1610. See also see “Dongsansheng zongdu Xu Shichang wei Zhongguo jiaoshe zongli tielujieni Huamin cisong shizi” [Governor General of the Three Northeastern Provinces Xu Shichang in regard to Lawsuits Involving Chinese Citizens within the Railway Zone], July 22, 1907, HPA: ZT, vol. 1: 1986, p. 240.

¹⁰⁹ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1661.

Chinese intention was to safeguard the frontier and to prevent further encroachment. While Russian factories were allowed in the zone, the Chinese persistently refused Russian requests to build factories or erect warehouses outside the zone.¹¹⁰ Some Russian merchants, through private arrangement, purchased land from local Chinese. If discovered, Chinese officials declared the transaction null and void. Meanwhile, they warned settlers that such deals would bring “endless troubles,” because they violated China’s rights. The Russians were also cautioned not to make any incursions beyond the zone through private purchase.¹¹¹ Unauthorized surveys were also prohibited outside the railway zone. When the Russians conducted surveys without permission in Hulan and Suihua counties in 1913, the Chinese settlers appealed to the national government to lodge a diplomatic protest on their behalf.¹¹²

The Chinese dream of restoring sovereignty was finally realized when the revolution broke out in Russia. In 1917, the Chinese for the first time sent troops into the zone. In 1920, Russia reaffirmed China’s status as an equal shareholder in the Chinese Eastern Railway and allowed China to appoint board members. In the same year both China and Russia defined the railway as solely a commercial enterprise. In 1922, China turned the

¹¹⁰ “Xiliang, Zhou Shumo wei jinzu Eshang zai Zhazhan luwai shejiuchang shizha” [Report of Xiliang and Zhou Shumo concerning Prohibiting Establishment of a Brewery by Russian Merchants outside the Railway Zone], September 6, 1909, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 294.

¹¹¹ “Shu Ha’erbin Guandao Tu [Xueying] wei jinzhi yangren sixiang Huanmin gouzudi shicheng” [Report of Customs Officer Tu Xueying in regard to Prohibiting Illegal Land Transactions between Chinese Civilians and Foreigners], September 1, 1906, HPA: ZT, p. 196.

¹¹² “Shujiangjun Cheng Dequan wei yangren sixiang Huanmin gouzudimushi gei Waiwubu zicheng” [Report of General Cheng Dequan in regard to Illegal Land Transactions between Chinese Civilians and Foreigners], September 1906, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 197.

railway zone into a special administrative district, with Chinese officials holding all senior administrative posts. In 1923, Chinese officials took back all unused land that had been controlled by the Russians. In 1926, Chinese municipal governments replaced the already moribund Russian councils. The Soviet Union still had a share in the railway, which in 1924 became a joint economic operation, but the days of the old czarist imperialism were now well past.

III. Russian Influence beyond the Railway Zone

Given the Russian impact on North Manchuria during the military occupation from 1900 to 1906 and the Russian mastery of the railway zone up to the Revolution, one would expect that the Russians had great influence upon the whole frontier region. A common impression has been that the whole area belonged to a Russian “sphere of influence.” However, the region never became a Russian sub-colony. Without doubt, the Russians had a great impact upon the land, but it is clear that the Chinese remained in control of North Manchuria outside the railway zone, and that frontier society was essentially Chinese in character.

The strongest Russian influence on settlers’ lives was economic: the circulation throughout the frontier region of the ruble. With the construction of the railway in the late 1890s, the ruble began to penetrate the region. Among other things, railway transport required payment in rubles. By 1911 the ruble had become common currency in North Manchuria. “Prices for most commodities were tagged in rubles, both along the railway

and in the remote areas.”¹¹³ In counties along the railway the ruble was master: in Zhaodong “the ruble was the principal currency,” in Anda, “the ruble was superior to all Chinese currencies,” and in Wangkui the ruble was the “common currency.”¹¹⁴ In counties along the border, such as Wuyun and Aihui, trade with the Russians was conducted in the ruble. Following the 1911 Revolution the ruble gained further acceptance. A confusing number of currencies now circulated in China, more than a dozen serving as legal tender in North Manchuria. The stability of the ruble strengthened its penetration of the region.

Chinese officials even preferred to collect taxes in rubles. In some counties, “the government specified that taxes could be paid either in [Chinese] silver or the ruble.”¹¹⁵ In Heihe, Aihui, Mohe, Kuma and Luobei officials required payment in rubles for a number of assessments, among them the stamp tax, passport tax, and land tax.¹¹⁶ According to one scholar, “in North Manchuria, especially along the railway zone, . . . the ruble is the medium of exchange in government business and private dealings, for both large and small transactions.”¹¹⁷ According to one observer, “the settlers would

¹¹³ Tang Erhe, trans. “Eguo shili jianjinyu Ha’erbin” [Russian Power Enters Harbin], in Ha’erbin Shidang’anguan [Harbin City Archives], Ha’erbin jingji ziliao wenji [Harbin Economic History Materials], Ha’erbin: Ha’erbin Shidang’anguan, vol. 1, 1990, p. 317.

¹¹⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1023, p. 1037, p. 1028, p. 1016 and p. 1022.

¹¹⁵ Yang Peixin, Hua E Daosheng Yinhang he Ou Ya dalu di yi qiao, p. 64.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹⁷ Hou Shutong, Dongsansheng Jinrong Gaikuang [A Survey of Finance in the Three Northeastern Provinces], Shanghai Taipingyang Guojixuehui [Shanghai Pacific International Society], 1931, p. 10 and p. 320; as quoted in Yang Peixin, Hua E Daosheng Yinhang he Ou Ya dalu di yi qiao, p. 67

rather stockpile the ruble than any other metal or paper money.”¹¹⁸ Ruble holdings gave Russian financiers an advantage in the local economy. In the autumn, at harvest season, Russian bankers loaned out rubles in great quality, enabling merchants to buy soybeans and other local products for export to Europe. The quantity of rubles circulating in North Manchuria soon reached an astonishing level. According to one estimate, the 100 million rubles in circulation in the region in 1914 represented 1/16 of the world total.¹¹⁹

The 1917 Revolution had a catastrophic effect on the role of the ruble on the frontier. The Romanov note became worthless paper. The issue of new rubles by various claimants to power, for example Kerensky, Kolchak, Seymenov and Horvat, only made the situation worse. In 1919 there were 400 million rubles circulating in North Manchuria, half of them in Harbin.¹²⁰ Prices skyrocketed and businesses went bankrupt. Some holders of rubles committed suicide.¹²¹ According to a study done by the Heihe Commercial Society in 1920, townspeople in the county held the following quantities of Russian currency: the Romanov ruble, 2.01 million; the Kerensky ruble, 7.58 million; and the Kolchak ruble, 44.87 million. These figures did not include rubles in the hands of farmers.¹²² Rubles held by settlers in the six counties of Keshan, Zhaodong, Baiquan,

¹¹⁸ Manzhou Zazhi [Manchurian Monitor], No. 3-4, 1925, p. 86; see also Yang Peixin, op. cit., p. 67.

¹¹⁹ Hou Shutong, op. cit., p. 108, as quoted in Yang Peixin, op. cit., p. 66.

¹²⁰ Yang Peixin, op. cit., p. 66.

¹²¹ “Heilongjiang Shengzhang Gongshu dang” [Archive of the Heilongjiang Governor’s Office], vol. 4063, No. 1, as quoted in Yang Peixin, op. cit., p. 79.

¹²² “Heihe daoyin chengwen” [Report of Heihe Prefecture Governor], in “Heilongjiang Shangzhang Gongshu dang,” vol. 4065, No. 1; as quoted by Yang Peixin, op. cit., p. 80.

Zhaozhou, Hulan and Longzhen in 1920 totalled 45.49 million.¹²³ By 1920, the ruble had ceased to function as the dominant currency in North Manchuria. The swift transformation of a once stable currency into nearly worthless paper not only undermined savings and businesses, but also expressed starkly the demise of Russian power in the region.

Russian influence in North Manchuria was expressed not only through the ruble, but also through control of natural resources. The timber concession was a leading example. During the construction of the railway, the Chinese permitted the Russians to utilize the forests along the railway for construction purposes. The timber concessions flanked the railway line, but were steadily pushed into the frontier region beyond. The six-year military occupation gave the Russians the chance to cut trees freely. Afterwards, the Chinese Eastern Railway Company demanded recognition of its de facto possession of choice timberlands. By treaties signed in 1904 and 1907, the Russians secured huge forests. The treaties also stipulated that the Russians had the right to fell trees beyond the concessions, which in effect meant that all forests were open to them. Though subsequent agreements reduced the forest concessions, the Russians held over twenty of them, ranging from several hundred to several thousand square kilometres in size.¹²⁴

¹²³ Yang Peixin, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹²⁴ “Bingjiang Guoshuizhengshouju Wu Pannian juzhang wei Huan E mushang suoling linchang shisheng” [Report of Bingjiang Tax Bureau Administrator Wu Pannian in regard to Forests Obtained by Chinese and Russian Merchants], March 4, 1914, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 35-36.

Although the Chinese Eastern Railway was the original contractor of forest lands, it soon assigned the concessions to Russian merchants for management. For the Chinese settlers, “Russian merchants trod the land, and the clangorous sound of cutting is heard year round.”¹²⁵ The annual timber yield was stipulated in the treaties. In Heilongjiang, it was 300,000 railway ties, 100,000 planks of timber, and 100,000 bundles of firewood.¹²⁶ In Jilin, the eastern region of North Manchuria, the numbers were 800,000 railway ties, 200,000 planks of timber, and 200,000 bundles of firewood.¹²⁷ These quotas were specified for the railway, but they were regularly exceeded. The surplus was shipped to Russia, China Proper, or overseas for sale. Russian timber merchants became the nouveaux riches of the region. It took a dealer by the name of Sherchenko only a few years to become a man of great wealth.¹²⁸ Another by the name of Skidelsky obtained huge profits from his timber concessions: “At first he only invested a small amount of money to fell trees, yet by time he died in 1916, he was able to leave ten million rubles in cash to his heirs, and this did not include immovable property.”¹²⁹

Russian control of the forests affected settlers who made their livelihood in lumbering or those who needed forest products for their own business or domestic use. In some areas, “Chinese must obtain permission from the foreigners [Russians] before they

¹²⁵ Shen Yunlong, gen. ed. *Zuijin shinian Zhong E zhi jiaoshe* [Sino-Russian Negotiations over the Past Ten years], Ha'erbin: Yuandong Waijiao Yanjiuhui, 1923, p. 6. The book was reprinted in Taiwan, 1986.

¹²⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1633.

¹²⁷ Yang Yulian, op. cit., p. 432.

¹²⁸ Kong Jingwei, *Dongbei Jingji shi*, p. 212.

¹²⁹ B. Awalın [B. Avalin], *Diguo zhuyi zai Manzhou*, p. 192.

can fell a single tree.”¹³⁰ More often than not, the vague boundary of the concessions sparked lawsuits. For example, in 1914 in Yanshou [Tongbin] a Chinese settler, Zhuang Zhilin, managed two tree-cutting concessions under license from the Chinese government. One day his operation was suddenly closed down and his workmen beaten by a party of Russians sent by one Kovalsky, who claimed that Zhuang’s farms were within his concession. Zhuang brought the case to the local Chinese authority.¹³¹ Sometimes Russians became involved in lawsuits among themselves, either because their concessions were separated by ill-defined boundaries, or because they tried to escape paying taxes.¹³²

The Chinese maintained the right to levy a tax on all wood transported outside the concessions. The tax was to be paid by vendors, the Russians, usually at the rate of 10% of value.¹³³ Chinese officials continued to insist that at least 90% of timber workers be Chinese, in order to create jobs for the local people.¹³⁴ Chinese authorities established a timber administration [muzhi gongsi], “with the charge of monitoring and limiting

¹³⁰ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1044.

¹³¹ “Dongsansheng linwuju juzhang Chen Xunchang wei Eshang Gewalisi zuzhi Zhuang Zhilin jingying ziling linchang shizi” [Report of Chen Xunchang, Head of the Three Northeastern Provinces’ Forest Bureau, in regard to Russian Merchant Gewalisi’s Preventing Zhuang Zhilin’s Business Operations in his Own Forest Property], HPA: ZT, vol. 2: 1987, pp. 56-58.

¹³² “Bingjiang Guoshuizhengshouju Wu Pannian juzhang wei Huan E mushang suoling linchang shisheng”, op. cit., HPA: ZT, vol. 2, p. 32.

¹³³ “Dagui, Cheng Dequan wei zhengshou mushuishi zhaohui” [Diplomatic Note from Dagui and Cheng Dequan in regard to the Timber Tax], June 13, 1904; HPA: ZT, vol. 1: 1986, p. 142.

¹³⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1637.

Russian timber operations.”¹³⁵ At any sign of Russian weakness, Chinese officials extended their control. Chinese troops were frequently sent into the timber concessions to suppress bandits. Chinese settlers also entered the concession to dig for ginseng and herbs, and to hunt game. Chinese authorities also reserved the right to relocate the concessions.¹³⁶ In 1918, when the ruble was depreciating, Chinese officials ordered that the timber tax be paid in Chinese dollars.¹³⁷ In 1922, Shevchenko’s title to the Zamian concession was nullified. The concession was turned into a Chinese, Russian and Japanese joint venture.¹³⁸ In 1925, the Russians were ousted, leaving the Chinese and Japanese in charge.¹³⁹ Perhaps the most important long-term effect of the timber concessions was to clear forest cover and open up the land for new Chinese settlements.¹⁴⁰

Through agreements signed with local Chinese officials in 1901-02, the Russians gained mining rights in specified areas to coal and a number of metals. Yet Russians encroached illegally upon non-specified areas. For example, by 1905 some 365 gold

¹³⁵ “Waijiaobu Jilin jiaosheshu wei qingchaming jinnian Eshang caifamuzhi qingxing gonghan” [Report of Jilin Negotiation Bureau, Foreign Ministry, in regard to Timber Exploitation by Russian Merchants in Recent Years], January 9, 1914, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 28.

¹³⁶ “Zengding Zhongdongtielu Gongsu kanbei yingyong muzhi hetong” [Additional Clauses to Timber Contract for the Chinese Eastern Railway Company], July 11, 1912, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, pp. 12-13.

¹³⁷ “Li Jia’ao wei fengling tongzhi mushishuifei gaishou dayang shizhaohui” [Diplomatic Note from Li Jia’ao concerning Change to Payment of Timber and Quarry Taxes only in Chinese Dollars], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 404.

¹³⁸ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1058.

¹³⁹ Kong Jingwei, Dongbei Jingji shi, p. 323

¹⁴⁰ C. Walter Young, The International Relations of Manchuria: A Digest and Analysis of Treaties, and Negotiations Concerning the Three Eastern Provinces of China, p. 99.

mines had been established along the Lalin River without Chinese permission.¹⁴¹ According to the agreement of 1902, Russians enjoyed the right to extract coal within thirty kilometres on either side of the railway. Chinese wishing to do the same had to consult the Russians. Within a few years, Russian coal mines were operating along the railway, the most important at Zhalainuo'er, Chahanaola, Taiping Mountain, Wujimu, Falabie, and Yimianpo. By 1908, annual coal production at Zhalainuo'er alone reached 200 million tons.¹⁴² The coal was mainly for local Russian use, but some went to Siberia.¹⁴³ Russians made full use of local sand and stone. In Binxian, for example, they extracted both. The stone quarry produced about 2,200 tons per year from 1906 to 1909. During the high tide of railway construction, the annual production of stone in the region was about 1,400,000 tons.¹⁴⁴ The sand pits at Xiaochengzi produced a total of 158,000 tons of sand from 1904 to 1909.¹⁴⁵

Local Chinese officials endeavoured to preserve Chinese sovereignty over the mines. Taxation was one form of achieving this. For example, for every 500 kilograms of coal produced, the Russians had to pay 0.12 Chinese silver dollars every three months.¹⁴⁶ The Russians were also asked to pay taxes in arrears that had accumulated during their

¹⁴¹ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 742.

¹⁴² Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1077.

¹⁴³ Shen Yunlong, Zuijin shinian Zhong E zhi jiaoshe, p. 7.

¹⁴⁴ Li Shu'en, Binzhou Fu Zhengshu, p. 385.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

¹⁴⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1642.

military occupation of Zhalainuo'er.¹⁴⁷ Late Qing efforts to regain ownership of mines met with success in a number of instances. The gold mines at Sanxing, Dulu River, Guangyin Mountain and Mohe were repatriated in the years after 1906. The Taiping Coal Works near Qiqihar returned to Chinese control in 1911.¹⁴⁸ A number of other mines became Sino-Russian joint ventures.

Russian control of the Heilong [Amur], Ussuri and Songhua [Sungari] waterways was also a feature of frontier life. In the late nineteenth century, the Russians organized two commercial navigation companies. During the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Russians established a department of navigation to manage water transport on the Songhua. Modern transportation increasingly linked the region to the international market. Deliveries to the Russian Far Eastern provinces were of great importance. Between 1907 and 1909, grain carried on the Songhua River to Russia totaled 1,922,000 dan [1 dan = 50kg]. More than twenty ships and fifty barges were anchored in Harbin waiting for spring to transport grain to the Blagoveschensk flour mills.¹⁴⁹ By 1915, the Russians had more than 262 steamers, 289 freighters and eighty small motorcraft navigating the three rivers. The Chinese commanded only eighteen of the latter.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ HPA, 28-1-39, (1907); quoted in Xin Peiling, *op. cit.*, p. 746.

¹⁴⁸ Yang Yulian, Qingdai Dongbeishi, p. 432.

¹⁴⁹ Yi Baozhong, Dongbei nongye jindaihua yanjiu [A Study of Agricultural Modernization in the Northeast], Jilin: Jilin Wenshi Chubanshe, 1990, p. 217.

¹⁵⁰ Kong Jingwei, Dongbei Jingji shi, p. 211. Another source says that China had only five steamers: Sun Rongtu, Aihui xianzhi [Annals of Aihui County], printed in 1920 and reprinted by Chengwen Press, Taipei, 1974, p. 646.

Russians made great profits from passenger traffic on the rivers, especially on the Songhua, where the immigration flow was heaviest. According to figures compiled in Binxian for the year 1909, passengers travelling in that district on Russian ships numbered 12,510, in comparison to 484 travelling on Chinese craft.¹⁵¹ Vigorous Russian competition meant that in many areas traditional ferry services run by settlers were driven out of business. According to the official report concerning the case of ferryboat owner Ma Liye, who held a government license for his operation, the Ma family “always assisted people without delay. They paid their taxes and supported themselves. . . . Suddenly a Russian who owned a steamer and two sailing boats came and ruined his business.”¹⁵² By 1911, according to one source, passengers taking Russian ships each year along the Songhua and Heilong [Amur] rivers numbered more than 610,000.¹⁵³

The Russians stretched their navigation privileges to the extent that they tried to prevent Chinese vessels from sailing on Chinese waters. When the Chinese ships appeared on the Songhua in 1907, the Russians demanded that Chinese craft receive their permission before proceeding further.¹⁵⁴ The Russians refused to share their privileges on the river with other powers. During secret negotiations in 1907, the Russians bluntly

¹⁵¹ Li Shu'en, *Binzhou Fu Zhengshu* [A Political Handbook for Binzhou Prefecture], Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1910; reprinted by the Binxian County History Research Office, 1984, p. 406

¹⁵² “Dianmin Ma Liye wei Eren Yilinfu hengba chuankou shisheng” [Petition of Tenant Ma Liye in regard to Russian Yilinfu’s Seizure of his Ferry Business], HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, p. 163.

¹⁵³ Heilongjiang Hangyunshi Bianshenweiyuanhui, *Heilongjiang hangyunshi* [A History of Navigation in Heilongjiang], Beijing: Renmin Jiaotong Chubanshe, p. 80. See also Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 438.

¹⁵⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1675.

refused Japan's request for navigation rights on the Songhua. In 1909, the Chinese proposal to open the Songhua to all the powers led to a strong protest from the Russians, who forced Beijing to sign a new treaty reaffirming Russian privileges. Hence the Chinese move was stillborn.¹⁵⁵ On the two border rivers, the Heilong [Amur] and Ussuri, Russians obstructed Chinese rights of navigation. When a Chinese ship-owner first attempted navigation of the Amur in 1914, the Russians detained the ship and demanded payment of fees for the beacons they had built. Ensuing negotiations resulted in China's agreement to pay. It was not until 1918 that China was able to reassert full navigation rights on the rivers, following Russia's descent into civil war.¹⁵⁶

The fact that most settlers travelled on Russian ships does not imply popular acceptance of Russian dominance over Chinese rivers. In its weakened state China could not offer resistance or competition. However, local officials did what they could to counteract the Russian position in North Manchuria. The first Chinese ship sailed on the Songhua in 1907, and two years later the government established a shipping bureau [hangyunju]. Its five ships and two barges engaged in passenger transport, mail delivery and freight carriage on the Songhua.¹⁵⁷ Compared to the Russian fleet, Chinese frontier shipping was far from a match, but it was a beginning. Meanwhile, local officials endeavoured to limit Russian activities. Huang Weihang, the magistrate of Hulan,

¹⁵⁵ CASS: SEQHS, p. 565.

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 1729. Yet conflict occasionally occurred: see Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E Guanxi shiliao: Dongbei Bianfang, 1921*, [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: Border Defence of the Northeast, 1921], Guo Tingyi and Wang Yujun, gen ed.; Li Jianmin, Chen Kui and Jin Dexi, editors; Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1975, pp. 122-123.

denounced Russian infiltration of the tributaries of the Songhua. Russia, he stated, had no legal right to enter any branch rivers. He also argued that Russians had no right to sail on the Songhua, since it was a Chinese inland river. Huang called on settlers to challenge the Russians in order to defend Chinese sovereignty. He himself set an example in 1909 by rejecting the entry of Russian ships into the Hulan River and ordered one ship to unload 828 bags of wheat stacked on it. "Since then, they [Russians] have not come back."¹⁵⁸

After 1914, Chinese frontier navigation developed rapidly. The shipping bureau was operating twenty-six ships and nine barges in 1917. The following year it purchased twenty-nine ships and twenty barges from the Russians. In 1924 the Chinese government prohibited Russian ships on the Songhua, thus ending the Russian presence on this Chinese inland river. By 1931, the Chinese had more than 230 ships sailing on the Songhua.¹⁵⁹

In 1916 an interesting episode illustrated how the Russians sought to impose their values upon Chinese frontier society. That year the Russians decided to prohibit the manufacture and sale of alcohol. In North Manchuria they signed an agreement with the Chinese authorities to suppress the liquor traffic there.¹⁶⁰ While the Chinese agreed to

¹⁵⁷ Xin Peiling, Zhang Fengmin and Gao Xiaoyan, HKS, p. 438.

¹⁵⁸ Huang Weihai, *Hulan fuzhi* [Annals of Hulan Prefecture], written in 1910 and printed in 1915 in Hulan. It was reprinted by Chengwen Press in Taipei, pp. 854-858.

¹⁵⁹ Xin Peilin, et al., HKS, p. 381. See also Ri Man Hui [Japan Manchuria Historical Society], *Manzhou kaifa sishinian* (Forty Years' Development in Manchuria), Shenyang: RiManhui, 1980, p. 381.

¹⁶⁰ "Zhong E Beiman ruogan diqu jinmai jiujiang huiyi yi'an" [The Sino-Russian Proposal to Prohibit Alcohol in Certain Areas of North Manchuria], March-April 1916, HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 130.

cooperate in banning the export of alcoholic products into Russian territory, they argued over measures to be taken on Chinese soil to prevent smuggling. Eventually the two parties agreed upon a fifty kilometre zone along the border and a fifty kilometre zone on each side of the railway. Within these areas, the Chinese were to ban alcohol manufacture. At Chinese insistence, however, settlers were permitted to produce shamshoo, a locally made liquor, “which was not for entertainment but for medical purposes and fending off the long winter cold.”¹⁶¹ The number of shamshoo manufacturers was not to be increased.

The ban had great impact on the frontier. Zhang Shouzeng, a frontier official of Heihe County, stated that local officers “did an excellent job, sealing up the liquor stores with the power of a thunderbolt and the speed of lightning.” However, the ban prevented only Chinese merchants from selling liquor and had no legal force over foreign dealers. Prohibition thus gave the latter the opportunity to boost their business on the frontier. With the policy in effect, the Chinese government lost annual revenue of several hundred thousand dollars.¹⁶² Zhang therefore called on the Heilongjiang authorities to repeal the ban in order to safeguard the financial and commercial interests of the province.¹⁶³ The Chinese continued to apply the ban until the outbreak of the civil war in Russia ended Russian enforcement of the policy.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 131. The Chinese also argued that Chinese miners could not work without drinking shamshoo and hunters had to drink it in order to hunt and fish in the winter. See also “Zhong E Dongsheng tielu yanqu hujin yanjiu huiyi jilu” [Record of the Sino-Russian CER Conference to Prohibit Alcohol and Opium in the Border Areas], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, p. 111.

¹⁶² Sun Rongtu, *Aihui xianzhi*, p. 221, p. 225.

The image of Russia as an imperialist power, greedy for territory, remained fixed in settlers' minds.¹⁶⁴ The Russians did take advantage of China in the nineteenth century to annex land by unequal treaties, negotiated when the government of China was weakened from foreign aggression and internal rebellion.¹⁶⁵ However, once the boundary was fixed, the Russians adopted piecemeal acquisition of Chinese territory as their new tactic. "The Russians were determined to gain land by crossing the boundary. Where there were no settlers, they would squat and claim the land as their own."¹⁶⁶ Frontier settlers accused the Russians of illegally moving boundary markers, such as the one at the Xingkai Lake [Ozero Khanka], which extended Russian territory by more than fifty li [25 km].¹⁶⁷ At the confluence of the Heilong [Amur] and Ussuri Rivers, the Russians moved the boundary markers four times and laid claim to the whole island of Heixiazi, despite the fact that it had a long history of intermittent Chinese cultivation. The island was forty kilometres long and three kilometres wide. During the flood season, most parts of the island were submerged. Since the main course of the two rivers flowed on the Russian side, China had legal right of ownership. The loss of the island created a major problem for the settlers, since the Russians blocked merchants' boats and made communication between

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁶⁴ Song Xiaolian, Bei jiao ji you [A Tour of the Northern Land], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ Cao Tingjie, Cao Tingjie ji, p. 390.

¹⁶⁶ Zhao Chunfang, "Heilongjiang sheng Zhong E bianjie jiufen shuomingshu" [An Explanation of the Problems concerning the Border Dispute between China and Russia in Heilongjiang], 1921, in Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang, 1921 [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: Border Defense of the Northeast, 1921]. Guo Tingyi and Wang Yujun, gen.ed.; Li Jianmin, Chen Kui and Jin Dexi, editors; Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1975, pp. 275-286.

the three counties of Suiyuan, Raohe and Hulin almost impossible.¹⁶⁸ The Russians used military force to occupy the island in the 1910s and again in the 1920s. The loss of the island incited anger among the Chinese populace and stirred up strong anti-Russian sentiment.

Chinese officials did whatever possible to assert Chinese sovereignty in North Manchuria. The provincial government prohibited foreigners “from residing or doing business outside the treaty port cities.”¹⁶⁹ Foreign merchants were to have their passports specially stamped by Chinese officials at the port city, and were to travel on a through ticket to the frontier region in order to do business there. Tourists had to hold valid passports. “Improper activities beyond business or travel are completely forbidden.”¹⁷⁰ Violators would be punished by fine or other penalties. In 1912 a Russian merchant in Qinggan was caught holding an expired passport and not having a through ticket. The case was brought to the attention of the Russian consulate, with a warning that in future no such violations would be excused.¹⁷¹ Settlers had the duty to report the presence of any foreigners, and local officials were charged with monitoring the movements of

¹⁶⁷ “Jilin Shengzhang gonghan” [Official Files of the Jilin Governor’s Office], p. 9.

¹⁶⁸ Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdong Tielu, 1920*, [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: General Negotiations, 1920]. Guo Tingyi and Wang Yujun, gen.eds.; Tao Yinghui and Li Jianmin, editors; Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1968, pp. 29-31.

¹⁶⁹ Zhang Xiangling, *HSD*, p. 363.

¹⁷⁰ Huang Weihai, *Hulan fuzhi*, p. 478.

¹⁷¹ “Heilongjiang Shengdufu wei qing Eshang zhaozhang bujiao liangkuanshi zhaohui” [Diplomatic Note of Heilongjiang Provincial Government in regard to Russian Merchants’ Paying Overdue Taxes], HPA: ZT, vol. 2, 1987, p. 4.

foreigners carefully. Evidence of their diligence appears in county annals recording the number of foreign, that is Russian, travellers.¹⁷² Local officials reported to the provincial government, which in turn reported the figures to Beijing.¹⁷³

Chinese officials strictly prohibited Russian land transactions on the frontier. Land could be purchased by Chinese citizens only. After the war broke out in Europe, Russians purchased grain from the frontier region, offering a cash guarantee of 40% in advance. Later they turned to a scheme whereby the cash guarantee was linked to the opening up of uncultivated land in Baiquan and Qinggang counties. The Russians agreed to commit 60% of their money to settlers' land purchase costs. This process put Chinese farmers in debt to Russian grain merchants, and inevitably led to a number of Russians acquiring land. Hence, frontier officials ordered the practice stopped, "in order to prevent any loss of sovereignty."¹⁷⁴

Russian inroads into the salt trade represented another threat to both local and national Chinese interests. For two millennia the salt monopoly had provided Chinese governments with a highly dependable source of revenue. In North Manchuria, as more and more settlers moved in, salt consumption steadily increased. The Russians produced large quantities of salt in Vladivostok, and this entered the Chinese market both legally and illegally. Thus in 1908 the Heilongjiang government established a provincial salt

¹⁷² Li Shu'en, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

¹⁷³ Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdong Tielu, 1920*, [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: General Negotiations, 1920], p. 330.

¹⁷⁴ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 379.

administration, which was intended to “resist foreign salt and protect state revenue.”¹⁷⁵ The government assumed authority over the trade, selling retail rights to local merchants. Widespread smuggling ensued, which the Chinese authorities made strenuous efforts to eradicate. They approached the Russians with plans for halting the traffic.¹⁷⁶ Punishments for illegal Chinese dealers included fines, confiscation of property, and even imprisonment. Anyone smuggling 1,500 kilograms of salt would be jailed for one year.¹⁷⁷ The involvement of frontier authorities in the salt monopoly had a long administrative pedigree. In North Manchuria it was zealously enforced to safeguard Chinese national interests from Russian aggrandizement.

Chinese officials in North Manchuria were much concerned about the construction of new railway lines and repeatedly refused Russian initiatives. All new lines were to be built by Chinese companies. In a telegram to Beijing in 1914, the governor of Heilongjiang rued that “the loss of the Chinese Eastern Railway has half paralysed the province . . . the loss of the railway in fact means the loss of territory.” He proposed that new lines be built, so that “the province might at least maintain the status quo.” He strongly opposed any Russian involvement in new projects.¹⁷⁸ The first Chinese-built railway in the region was the Qi-Ang line, linking Qiqihar and Angangxi. Although only

¹⁷⁵ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 956.

¹⁷⁶ “Heilongjiang jiaoshezongju weijinzhǐ Eshang fanyun siyan zhaohui” [Diplomatic Note from Heilongjiang General Negotiation Bureau to Prohibit Illegal Salt Transactions by Russian Merchants], September 1910, HPA: ZT, vol. 1, 1986, pp. 428-429.

¹⁷⁷ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 967.

¹⁷⁸ Zhang Xiangling, HSD, p. 363.

twenty-nine kilometres long, it signalled the Chinese intention to establish a railway presence in North Manchuria. During the Republican period the Chinese built several new lines: Taonan-Angangxi (224 km), Hulan-Hailun (221 km), and Qiqihar-Keshan (129 km). All of the new lines played an important part in regional development, and were built over Russian objections.¹⁷⁹

The Bolshevik Revolution brought an end to direct Russian influence in North Manchuria. For the next few years, the Russian impact upon the frontier took the form of the many refugees driven there by the Revolution. They flooded in from all directions, by cart or railway, or by foot. In the space of a few days in March 1918, thousands of Russians streamed into Heihe, throwing the small city into turmoil.¹⁸⁰ In 1920, thousands more arrived in Aihui. Most refugees eventually went to Harbin and other communities along the Chinese Eastern Railway. Yet many remained in frontier towns. “They lived in terrible difficulties, lacking food and clothing.” Chinese authorities permitted refugees to stay. Local Chinese organized Russian Relief Societies. Officials in Aihui provided travel expenses if the refugees wanted to move to other locations.¹⁸¹ In Heihe, local people established a relief fund and supported the Russians on a monthly base. In the meantime, they assisted them in looking for jobs.¹⁸² Refugees swarmed to Jilin in large numbers

¹⁷⁹ Han Fulin and Zhang Shuyuan, *Heishui shisan pian*, p. 33. See also Xin Peilin, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-427.

¹⁸⁰ Sun Rongtu, *Aihui xianzhi*, p. 220.

¹⁸¹ Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E Guanxi shiliao: Zhongdong Tielu, 1920*, p. 284.

¹⁸² Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdong Tielu, 1921*, [Historical Materials concerning Sino-Russian Relations: General Negotiations, 1921]. Wang Yujun and Tao Yinghui, general editors; Li Jianmin, Chen Kui and Jin Dexi, editors, Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1973, p. 577.

along the railway. For humanitarian reasons and local security, the Jilin provincial government provided up to 50,000 Chinese dollars a month in relief payments.¹⁸³

Many of the refugees stayed in China and some later became Chinese citizens. Local records indicate the presence of Russian immigrants in many counties, especially those along the border and the railway.¹⁸⁴ It is difficult to determine the exact number of refugees, but one estimate claims that more than 50,000 Russians settled in Harbin between 1918 and 1920.¹⁸⁵ The Chinese attitude towards them, in the words of Zhang Zuolin in 1921, was that “as long as they obey Chinese laws, they are free to live in the region.”¹⁸⁶ The acceptance of refugees was not in contradiction to the Chinese policy of limiting and ultimately removing the Russian presence. By the early 1920s, the Chinese were in a position of strength. The Bolshevik Revolution and the ensuing civil war removed Russia as a threat. The Chinese could demand that refugees obey Chinese laws, refrain from challenging Chinese values, and remain neutral in the political affairs of the region.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 324.

¹⁸⁴ Zhang Boying, HZ, p. 557. See also HPA: HS, p. 589, p. 916.

¹⁸⁵ Rao Lianglun, op. cit., p. 81.

¹⁸⁶ Zhang Zuolin, “Shou Dongsansheng Xunyueshi Zhang Zuolin Dian” [Telegram from Governor Zhang Zuolin of the Three Northeastern Provinces], July 19, 1921, in Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Yiban Jiaoshe, 1921*, p. 407.

¹⁸⁷ Sun Liechen, “Shou Heilongjiang Dujun Sun Liechen Dian” [Telegram from Heilongjiang Military Governor Sun Liechen], February 20, 1921, in Academia Sinica, Modern History Institute, *Zhong E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdong tielu, E zhengbian, 1921*, p. 38.

Conclusion

No country exerted a more powerful influence upon North Manchuria than did Russia. Geographical proximity enabled the Russians to intervene, stake out interests, and even seize territory. Within the railway zone the Russians had an armed force at their disposal to safeguard their position and underpin further imperialist acquisitions. They infringed upon Chinese sovereignty by establishing their own municipal governments, taking control of revenue collection and the judicial system, and by constantly pushing the borders of the zone further into Chinese territory. The railway zone in fact became a special extension of the Russian Empire. Beyond the zone, the Russians exerted influence on the economy of the frontier region by gaining special logging and mining concessions. In addition, the Russians controlled water transportation on the major rivers.

However, Russian influence should not be overstated. Russian moves beyond the railway zone provoked assorted strategies of resistance from local officials and settlers. Chinese nationalism was stimulated. While fulfilling their role as local administrators, Chinese officials concurrently sought to expand Chinese sovereignty within the region. For the people of the frontier, the Russians were uninvited “guests” who should observe the rules of the “hosts.” The Chinese emphasized that they did not intend to surrender sovereignty over North Manchuria. The Russians admitted to Chinese sovereignty when they began setting up their own municipal governments in 1908. This minimum yet significant gesture contributed towards the eventual recovery of full Chinese sovereignty in the region. The Chinese tried to confine the Russians within the zone and to monitor

their activities beyond it. They prevented the Russians from becoming involved in the construction of new railway lines. The struggle to recover full Chinese sovereignty was a constant theme in the history of North Manchuria.

The Bolshevik Revolution was the turning point in Sino-Russian relations. The collapse of the ruble foretold the waning of Russian influence. Soon after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, the Chinese sent troops into the railway zone and step by step recovered national rights within the zone. Though some of the scars left by Russian imperialism remained, the old Russia had disappeared from the historical stage. The relationship of the new Soviet Russia to China as joint manager of the Chinese Eastern Railway took the form of a commercial partnership. Even though a brief border conflict took place in 1929 over issues arising out of the railway, the dispute was soon settled. Russia never recovered the influence it held over North Manchuria prior to 1917.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twentieth century, North Manchuria was one of the last remaining frontiers in the world. The fact that China was one of the oldest cultures in the East meant that the existence of such a frontier was atypical. Thus, people who visited the region were shocked at the extent of its wilderness. Alexander Hosie, the British consul at Niuzhuang [Yingkou], exclaimed in 1901 that North Manchuria was a Chinese Tasmania where criminals were exiled, soldiers stationed and illegal Han immigrants held in serfdom. “Game abounds in the mountains and on the steppes,” while “agriculture is at present confined for the most parts to the small river valleys.” However, he also noted how Chinese immigrants “are gradually pushing their way northwards and settling down on the virgin soil.”¹

The distinctiveness of North Manchuria does not mean that the history of the region should be truncated from that of modern China. As a matter of fact, the frontier epitomized the evolution of modern Chinese history. The population movement to the region was a national phenomenon that took place within national frontiers. This region was peripheral yet integral to China. This dissertation is not intended to separate the

¹ Alexander Hosie, Manchuria: Its People, Resources and Recent History, London: Methuen & Co., 1901, p. 144, p. 146.

region from the nation; on the contrary, it sees the region as an integral part of China, but one which possessed its own peculiar features.

The historical period from 1900 to 1931 was a distinct era in the development of North Manchuria. Though the region was partially opened to Han settlers in the late nineteenth century, it was the overall opening in 1904 that initiated large-scale migration and settlement. This opening was a direct consequence of the Russian military action of 1900, which prompted the Qing dynasty to lift its ban on Chinese immigration into the region. Chinese settlers continued to arrive until the flow was curtailed by the Japanese invasion in 1931. Over three decades four million Chinese settlers poured in and created a new society. To its good fortune, the frontier region was not affected negatively by events happening in China Proper, such as the change from empire to republic and the ensuing civil wars. The development of the region proceeded largely uninterrupted. Even when major events like the 1911 Revolution in China and the 1917 Revolutions in Russia cast their influence on the region, they worked to facilitate rather than retard growth.

The picture the land presented in 1931 was completely different from what Hosie saw thirty years earlier. The arrival of four million settlers and the creation of a sedentary society had transformed the landscape. The new image was that of a dynamic region based on an agrarian economy. The installation of administrative machinery, especially at the county level, provided a degree of governance never before experienced. Land was sold and partitioned into small tracts that gave settlers the chance to build farms. Land tenure underwent dramatic change from public to private ownership. Han Chinese

immigrants penetrated virtually every corner of the region. The society was Chinese, with particular features. A Chinese scholar commented in 1930 that “it is undeniable fact that North Manchuria was built on immigration.”²

When the Japanese sent troops into Manchuria after the Mukden Incident in 1931, they seldom met resistance in South Manchuria, but North Manchuria proved more intractable. People mobilized to defend the land and combat the invaders. The battle of Jiangqiao, which lasted for weeks and inflicted many casualties upon Japanese imperial army, was hailed as a heroic and patriotic event. Historians today praise it as China’s Lexington, which raised the curtain on almost fifteen years of national resistance to Japan.³

Japanese occupation of the provincial capital of Qiqihar at the end of 1931 meant the fall of the region, though resistance continued in outlying areas. The Japanese deprived China of sovereignty over a land that the Russians earlier had failed to dominate. However, the imposition of harsh colonial rule could not change the Chinese nature of the region. A Japanese historian wrote: “The Chinese farmers possessed the talent to survive. As their hoes fell upon the ground, the wilderness turned into fertile land. . . .

² Wu Shiyuan, “Hu-Hai tielu zai jingji shang zhi jiazhi”, Dongsheng Jingji Yuekan, February 15, 1930, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 9.

³ Zhang Xiangling, Shisuo Heilongjiang, p. 79.

The Japanese and the Russians who endeavored to control the region by the swords and by the railway eventually had to concede that the land belonged to China.”⁴

North Manchuria was a distinctive frontier, differing from those of the settlement colonies of the New World—Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. First, the North Manchuria frontier was a special product of Chinese history. Unlike other frontiers that were in a stateless condition prior to settlement, North Manchuria had been long within the reach of Chinese state administration. The new state policy promulgated at the beginning of the twentieth century initiated the rapid development of the frontier. Second, the North Manchuria frontier was a vital part of China’s national defense. By 1900 the dominant theme in China was national crisis. Under the pressure of imperialist aggression, the rulers of China encouraged immigration and settlement to implement the so-called border fortification policy. Hence, the history of North Manchuria frontier is in part the history of the defense of Chinese sovereignty. Settlement was intended to maintain the empire, not expand it. Third, North Manchuria was a shrinking frontier rather than an expanding frontier, unlike the experience of the New World, where frontiers extended until reaching a geographical barrier. In North Manchuria the boundary was fixed from the outset and settlements were confined within that national boundary. There was no place for the frontier to expand; rather, the process was one of filling up a finite amount of space. Fourth, ethnic groups in North Manchuria were not exactly as those in the New World. They were to be won over. There were no genocidal

⁴ RiManHui [Manchuria History Society of Japan], Manzhou kaifa sishi nian [Forty Years’ Development of Manchuria], translated into Chinese and published in Shenyang as Internal Reference, 1988, p. 36.

massacres. Paternalism and the use of force on the part of Chinese authorities were not absent, but persistent ethnic conflict was not a characteristic of the region.

By comparing North Manchuria in 1931 with other New World frontiers, a number of common characteristics can be identified. First, a new society was created by the endless stream of immigrants, who completely overwhelmed the indigenous population. Second, the fate of the native inhabitants tended to be assimilation. Since their numbers were too few to challenge the newcomers, their future would be a step-by-step absorption into the mainstream, though they might retain some of their own traits. Third, the system of land tenure rapidly became one of private ownership, which fully transformed all previous forms of either publicly or commonly owned land. State policy, speculation and the land hunger of the settlers all played their roles in the process of privatization. Fourth, the new economic model completely revolutionized the livelihood of settlers and natives alike. It was commercially driven and more or less linked to national and international markets, which in turn expedited the growth of the frontier. Fifth, the frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner argued, served as a safety valve to help mainstream society deal with surplus population and excess labour. The uninterrupted Chinese emigration to North Manchuria, similar to American and Canadian migration to their West, was significant in shaping modern China by delivering surplus population from the north of China Proper and by strengthening national defense of the frontier region. Sixth, all frontier societies shared the same problem in regard to law and order. Banditry was a universal phenomenon of the frontier. Despite continuing efforts to root out banditry in North Manchuria prior to 1931, this proved impossible to achieve.

The Japanese renamed the region Manchukuo [Manzhouguo] following their military seizure in 1931-32. Japan exercised colonial rule through a puppet regime which answered to the locally based Kwantung Army. In the fourteen years they ruled the region, the Japanese turned the frontier into a logistical base for military action. Japanese immigration was encouraged, but the Chineseness of the region was hardly touched. Compared with the Chinese population of over ten million, Japanese immigrants only numbered 122,845 at the end of 1943, about one percent of the total.⁵ The Japanese never solved the bandit problem. On the contrary, bandits joined the anti-Japanese movement. To cope with the labour shortage, Japan allowed Chinese immigrants to enter North Manchuria in the late 1930s, which renewed the traditional pattern of Chinese migration. The pattern of land ownership was somewhat altered by the Japanese due to forced purchase from Chinese settlers, but in general it remained unchanged. The only dramatic change in the region was the disappearance of Russian influence after the Japanese buyout of the Chinese Eastern Railway in 1935.

The frontier stage of North Manchuria's history came to an end soon after the Communists gained control of the region following the Japanese surrender. As a matter of fact, North Manchuria was a crucial base for the final victory of the Chinese Communist Revolution. It was here that the Communists first built a postwar stronghold that enabled them to launch their war against the Nationalists. The Communists consolidated this base through a number of policies. Bandits were targeted, and in the war

⁵ Xin Peiling, HKS, p. 485, p. 775. Most of the Japanese immigrants were either recruited into the Imperial Japanese Army or were repatriated to Japan after the war. More than 70,000 died in the course of the war.

against them from 1947 to 1949 the communists lost 1,731 soldiers. This persistent social problem was at last solved. Communist land reform brought to an end the traditional kinds of land tenure. Landlordism was eliminated and an egalitarian system implemented under which peasants received more or less equal amounts of land. The Communists installed a new educational system that placed Chinese culture back at the center after fourteen years of colonial rule. Most importantly the Communists encouraged and supported immigration into the region. Even the Three River Plains, which drew few immigrants in the previous decades, were now settled. After the Korean War, some 100,000 veterans were placed here in military settlements designed to open up the area.⁶ Industrial growth took off, stimulated by the first of a series of five-year plans. Daqing became the national oil production center and Harbin a major industrial base. These new trends caused the frontier to lose many of its former characteristic features.

It is not possible in a dissertation of this scope to examine every feature of frontier development. Certain areas worthy of further study were set aside either due to paucity of sources or because they were not related directly to the theme of frontier history. One topic omitted due to insufficient primary sources is ecological change in North Manchuria. It is true that environmental change prompted ethnic peoples to embrace agriculture, and that deforestation occurred from year-round tree-cutting in the timber concessions and clearance of so much of the wilderness for farmland. There is much

⁶ Wang Guilin, gen. ed., Huanxing chenshui de tudi: Shiwan dajun kaifa Beidafang [Awakening the Sleeping Land: One Hundred Thousand Soldiers Cultivate the Great North Wilderness], Ha'erbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, p. 1.

room, however, for further investigation of this. Another issue not treated here, due to its somewhat peripheral nature to the frontier theme, is urban growth. Most of the cities that emerged during the period were located in or near the railway zone. Urban growth was in part a by-product of rural economic development. Since the delivery of local products to the international market required trading centers, the railway stations rapidly grew into cities, most notably Harbin. Though urban growth is a topic apart from the development of frontier society, careful study of the cities would cast some further light on the frontier.

The settlement of the North Manchuria frontier was a unique episode in the evolution of modern China. It shows that modern Chinese history is not monolithic; rather, it displays regional diversities and provincial particularities. Though all regions were Chinese, local societies varied, and regional economies were distinctive. The problem is that students of modern China often focus on national history by studying broad topics such as political movements, peasant rebellions, the downfall of the Qing Dynasty, the warlord period, the rise of the Communists and suchlike. There is no doubt of the significance of these primarily political topics, but such a focus overlooks social history, neglects economic change, and takes no notice of frontier development. However, the research presented here suggests that study of the frontier by no means deprives us of an understanding China, but rather assists our understanding of the historical evolution of the nation as a whole.

This dissertation is based primarily on Chinese sources, especially archival materials. The research and analysis are pioneering and much room is left for future

exploration. Further comparison of the region with frontiers in the New World and elsewhere remains open. China's history will be more fully understood as it is put increasingly into a global context. This study seeks to be a contribution toward that process.

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