

NATION, ETHNICITY, AND THE POST-MANCHUKUO ORDER
IN THE SINO-KOREAN BORDER REGION¹

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Introduction:

Questioning Ethnic Identity and Categorization in Modern China

In June 1946, a young man named Kim Hwarak crossed the Tumen River from Yanbian, China, and entered his ancestral homeland of Korea for the first time in his life.² It was a long-awaited homecoming for Kim. According to a North Korean personnel dossier, he had been born and raised in the North-East (Kr. Tongbuk; Ch. Dongbei), or Chinese Manchuria, and later moved to Tokyo for higher education. Kim's rendering of his birthplace, 'the North-East', was slightly ambiguous, and perhaps intentionally so: Kim avoided the politically charged term 'Manchukuo' and, still, did not indicate Chinese sovereignty over the land, leaving the door open for Manchuria to remain, in the words of Andre Schmid, a 'Korean national space' (Schmid 2000: 219).

Kim's decision to leave the Chinese-occupied Korean Communist enclave in East Manchuria, a key battleground in the Chinese Civil War, was not without broader meaning or consequences. Fluent in Korean and Japanese and proficient in Chinese and Russian, Kim represented the transnational colonial subject who knew no precise homeland. And yet by departing for (North) Korea, he was tacitly supporting arguably the most profound change to be levied upon North-East Asia in the immediate post-war period: the transformation of 'nationality' and 'ethnicity' into fixed, unflinching, and even hegemonic institutions (Watt 2009: 3-4).

Straddling the boundaries of China, Russia, and Korea, Yanbian is an ideal space from which we can explore these post-war transitions and the

¹ The authors wish to thank Daqing Yang and Edward McCord of George Washington University for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter and their overall encouragement of this research.

² All information about Kim Hwarak is drawn from his personal dossier dated April 1947 in National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 242, National Archives Collection of Foreign Records Seized, 1941-, Records Seized by US Military Forces in Korea, Shipping Advice 2005, Item 8/15.

more general repercussions of Japanese colonial rule for people like Kim Hwarak. Firmly entrenched within the broader Chinese polity today, Yanbian was once a frontier region beset by international rivalry and turmoil. In the early twentieth century, China and Japan competed for control over the region and its peoples, while in the 1930s, Yanbian became a frontispiece for the Manchukuo experiment. The national and ethnic identity of Koreans living in the region remained ambiguous and contested during these periods, a situation that persisted after 1945.

Chinese, Korean, and western scholars alike have generally referred to the existence of rigid *ethnic* designations – Han (*Han zu*) and ethnic-Korean – in the mid to late 1940s in Yanbian. But, as we have suggested above, the concepts of these ethnic designations had never been fully or consistently defined by the Republican, warlord, Chinese communist, or Manchukuo regimes. Recent research conducted by the anthropologist Mariko Asano Tamanoi has demonstrated that overall, race and ethnicity were in fact understood very fluidly among state and non-state actors during the Manchukuo era (Tamanoi 2000; see also Shao 2011). In Yanbian specifically, the national identity of Koreans had long been contested, a phenomenon described in English as early as the 1930s by Owen Lattimore (Lattimore 1932: 239–43).

As a result, in the immediate post-war period, Chinese Communist administrators and cadres in Yanbian continued to refer only to the existence of 'Chinese people' (*Zhongguo ren*) and 'Korean people' (*Chaoxian ren* or *Han ren*), much as their Japanese predecessors had. It took considerable time and effort for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to begin to recast the Koreans in Yanbian as ethnic-Koreans of the broader Chinese nation, an achievement which reflected the true beginnings of a post-war and post-Manchukuo order. But by appropriating the modern political terminology of the Chinese state to discuss events which took place in 1945, scholars have come to overlook the processes by which ethnic identity was constructed in post-war Yanbian. Though the Han eventually emerged as the majority ethno-national group in China and ethnic Koreans have grown into one of the most highly educated and successful minority groups in the People's Republic (PRC), the inevitability of these outcomes should not be taken for granted. As Prasenjit Duara has observed, historians – both in the PRC and elsewhere – tend to obscure 'open-ended historical situation[s] by imposing the perspective[s] of subsequent historical developments and nationalist historiography' (Duara 2003: 41). In this way, this work echoes recent research by Thomas Mullaney, who has shown that the construction of a Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) that

included dozens of different minority nationality groups took many years (Mullaney 2011). Though the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region (later renamed Prefecture) emerged in 1952, notions of Han and ethnic-Korean were fluid in the immediate post-war milieu.

None of the above is meant to suggest that concrete ethnic categories did not exist in China *in toto* in 1945. The work of Xiaoyuan Liu, among others, has made abundantly clear that elements of the CCP had actually internalized the distinction between Han and 'other' in various regions of China, such as Inner Mongolia, during and prior to the start of the Chinese Civil War (Liu 2004 and 2006). Moreover, other scholarship on ethnicity in China's frontiers has suggested that notions of Han did exist as far back as the Ming and Qing dynasties (Crossley, Siu, and Sutton 2006). The above is meant to suggest, however, that the inconsistent application of these concepts and categories – Han and ethnic-Korean, among others – has been overlooked by scholars, especially in the case of Yanbian.³ That ethnic identity had not been fully articulated in Yanbian by 1945 suggests that the consequences of Japanese colonial rule spread far beyond the military and economic realms and into the social. The construction of modern ethnic identity in North-East China was not completed by 1945, but only began following the demise of the Manchukuo state. In the process, the issue over the ethnic identity of Koreans in China intersected with post-colonial and Cold War projects of 'redefining...identity and borderlines as nations', in the words of Tessa Morris-Suzuki (Morris-Suzuki 2006: 303–16).

A final note on sources to conclude this introduction is worthwhile. This study draws heavily on *neibu wenxian*, or a collection of 'internal documents' produced for circulation among Chinese Communist Party members (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985). While we recognize that these types of collections often present an incomplete picture of the past – one which is, moreover, produced by and for the state – there is much we can still learn from these books, especially given that most archives in China remain subject to limited access. Comparing the language of the documents to contemporary discourse on ethnic identity in China, for example, reveals a world of difference. Still, to account for any shortcomings of the *neibu* collection, the article also incorporates memoirs, captured North Korean documents, publications from the Japanese colonial era, and Soviet records from its occupations of Yanbian

³ There are many examples in Chinese, but for a representative case, see Jin Bingqiao 2006. In English and Korean, see Lee Jong-Seok 2012: 251–67; Cathcart 2010: 25–53; 1) Chong-seok (Lee Jong-seok) 2000: 17–22; Olivier 1993; Chae-Jin Lee 1990: 93–114.

and North Korea. By casting a wide net in terms of our sources, we hope to draw as complete a picture as possible of nation, ethnicity, and the post-Manchukuo order in the Sino-Korean border region of Yanbian.

Colonial Legacies

One of the early harbingers of Japan's rise as a modern world power constructing an informal empire can be traced directly to Yanbian, which was variously known as Jiandao and Kando in the early twentieth century. As Korea became a protectorate of Japan in 1905, Korean rebels, or freedom fighters, began to take refuge in and around Yanbian, much to the chagrin of the Japanese colonial authorities. As Erik Esselstrom writes, 'by 1909, the Jiandao problem had become a major issue in Sino-Japanese relations,' with Japan advocating that it had a legal right to police against these Korean activists in Chinese Manchuria (Esselstrom 2005: 43). In 1909, in order to resolve disputes over the Yanbian region, China and Japan agreed to enter into the Kando Convention (also known as the Jiandao Treaty) which, though recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Yanbian, allowed Japan to open up consulates, all equipped with police forces, in the region and to receive substantial railway concessions. The CCP later reflected back on Japan's manoeuvres in 1909 with great disdain, suggesting that, under the pretext of 'protecting Korean people,' the Japanese sent armed troops into Yanbian in 1907 and soon forced a weakened Qing regime to sign the Kando Convention (*Zhongguo kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo and Jilin shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaocha zu* 1963: 6). Despite the shame which some Chinese later felt as a result of the Kando Convention, at least from a legal perspective, China retained nominal administrative control over the Koreans then living in Yanbian. Japan had yet to push the boundaries of the dispute over Yanbian to a point at which China's claims over the administration and citizenship of the Koreans could be questioned.

This point came in 1910, when the Japanese government formally annexed Korea. One immediate consequence of Japanese imperialism in Korea proper was a rapid influx of Koreans moving into the Manchurian region – first as rebels of the state, later as state-sanctioned rice cultivators (Lee 2001). In the context of Korean migration to Manchuria, however, the turning point of 1909 was soon eclipsed by the events which transpired in 1915. The Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1915, also known as the Twenty-One Demands, carved out special economic rights for Japanese nationals living

in China. Japan immediately began to argue that the Twenty-One Demands therefore obligated the Chinese government to provide the Koreans with various privileges in Yanbian and Manchuria. According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because the annexation of Korea in 1910 had meant that 'the Koreans in China naturally acquired the status of Japanese subjects', the Sino-Japanese Treaty of 1915 'should naturally be applied to Koreans, who are Japanese subjects'. Moreover, the Japanese government began to contend that much of the Kando Convention, particularly as it allowed the Chinese government to administer Koreans in Manchuria, needed to be dismissed (Japan. Gaimushō 1932: 64).

Thus began a long and drawn out contest between the Japanese and Chinese governments over the legal, national, and ethnic status of Koreans in Manchuria generally and Yanbian specifically. Much as Alexis Dudden has argued about Japanese imperial expansion generally, Japan's interests and rights in Yanbian were often framed and argued in international legalistic terms (Dudden 2005). Thus, as more and more disputes emerged between China and Japan over the Koreans in the late 1920s, the Japanese government began producing more and more detailed legal briefs reflecting back on the meaning of the 1915 Treaty (Japan. Gaimushō 1932: 63–6).

One thing is clear: even prior to the establishment of the Manchukuo government in 1931, Japan hoped to use Korean migration to Manchuria as leverage in its dealings with the Chinese. This has been suggested not just by agitated Chinese contemporaries, but by historians who have recently suggested that 'Korean migration [w]as a mechanism in the formation of the Japanese empire and its capitalist expansion' (Park 2005: 20). Annual reports from the Toa-Keizai Chosakyuku (East-Asiatic Economic Investigation Bureau) explain that, by 1927, more than 800,000 Koreans were living in Manchuria and perhaps 400,000 were concentrated in Yanbian alone, 'mostly cultivating rice in paddy fields' (Toa-Keizai Chosakyuku 1932: 461). The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs added that 'the cultivation of rice now carried on so prosperously in Manchuria and Mongolia owes its origin to the labour of Koreans' and that 'the Korean farmers have particularly benefited Manchuria by opening up a vast tract of waste land for the cultivation of rice' (Japan. Gaimushō 1932: 60).

Though praised by the Japanese for successfully advancing the agricultural economy of Yanbian, Korean land ownership and rice cultivation was a particularly contentious issue in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In particular, Japanese praise obscures the fact that Chinese farmers and administrators believed that Chinese land was being illegally seized and redistributed to Koreans. Moreover, Chinese administrators and even

citizens assumed that, as Korean land grabs became more common in Yanbian, Japan would soon move in to take formal jurisdictional control over the area. Nationalistic Chinese authors thus framed the Korean farmers in Manchuria, who were still arriving in Yanbian in massive numbers, as the 'tools of Japanese imperialism directed against China' (*The Puppet State of Manchukuo* 1935: 68). Even Owen Lattimore, an astute observer of North-East Asian affairs, wrote that it was perhaps natural for the 'Chinese farming population [to] dislike Koreans because no agricultural community likes to have neighbours that rival it economically' (Lattimore 1932: 239–43).

Land relations dating back to Manchukuo era remained one of the most contentious issues for the CCP after its arrival in Yanbian in 1945 (*Jiefang chuqi de Yanbian* 1999: 97–105). Debates over Japanese agricultural policies in Yanbian formed a major component of perhaps the most important policy document written during the Civil War period, Zhou Baozhong's 'Problem of the Korean Nationality in Yanbian' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 327–60). Born in central Yunnan, Zhou Baozhong (literally 'Zhou Protect the Centre', i.e. China) left his home province in 1926 for the Chinese interior. His provincial travels were short, however, and by 1928, Zhou found himself in Moscow studying Marxist thought. By the time he returned to Chinese soil in 1931, Japan had already carved out North-East China as the Manchukuo state. Galvanized, Zhou then joined the communist-led resistance movement in Manchuria, though he eventually was forced to flee into the Soviet Union along with the namesake of the Korean guerrilla movement, Kim Il Sung, with whom he became good friends (Tanner 2003: 1187; Suh 1988: 16–21). Upon his return to China in 1945 and following the merger of the former Japanese partisans with the CCP's North-East Bureau, Zhou emerged as an important mid-tier player in the Manchurian milieu. Somewhat of a household name among Koreans, he often intervened in Yanbian politics to facilitate exchanges between Chinese and Koreans or otherwise buoy up the CCP's control over the region. As a widely recognized and capable intermediary, we can assume that his 1946 report on the 'Problem of the Korean Nationality in Yanbian' was read carefully by a number of individuals (Zhongyang minzu daxue tushu xinxi yanjiusuo 1998: 315).

According to Zhou, after the September 18 incident which resulted in the creation of Manchukuo, the 'Korean people [*Chaoxian ren*] were given priority status over Chinese people.' As the Manchukuo regime appropriated more and more land from Chinese farmers for Korean cultivation, Koreans were transformed into 'second class citizens [*er deng guomin*],

[while] Chinese people were third class citizens [*san deng guomin*]. Changes in land ownership and cultivation patterns, according to Zhou, had made relations between Koreans and Chinese 'antagonistic and hateful' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 356). Zhou was particularly mindful of these problems not because he was an expert on the colonial period, but because debates over national status and land ownership continued to influence post-war Yanbian.

Problems between Chinese and Koreans, though, began well prior to 1931. Japanese officials claim that 'by 1927, these questions [over the status of Koreans in Yanbian] led the Chinese to pursue a policy of restricting the free residence of Koreans in Manchuria – a policy which the Japanese characterized as one of unjustifiable oppression' (The Department of State 1932: 55). On several occasions, competition over economic resources between Chinese and Koreans boiled over into direct violence, particularly in the case of the Wanpaoshan Incident or Manbosan Incident.⁴ China's alleged persecution of Koreans in Yanbian figured prominently in Japanese legal claims brought against the Chinese government, but it was the efforts of the Chinese to have Koreans take on Chinese citizenship which most alarmed Japan. The Chinese Nationalist government began to argue that Koreans, as foreign nationals, had no legal right to land ownership in Yanbian, but if they were to take on Republic of China citizenship they would have all the same rights as Chinese nationals. Pockets of Koreans did begin to take on Chinese citizenship, though the greater majority of Koreans attempted to maintain the *status quo* (Toa-Keizai Chosakyuku 1932: 461).

If land relations were already contentious, the release of the Tanaka Memorial in 1927 further infuriated the Chinese and aggravated relations between Chinese and Koreans. Though the authenticity of the Tanaka Memorial has often been disputed and it is unclear whether its contents actually reflect the aspirations of then Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi, its consequences were manifold in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Chinese audiences learned that Japanese war planners purportedly believed that 'the Koreans who have become naturalized Chinese are Chinese only in name: they will return to our fold eventually'. Not only were the Koreans duplicitous, but, according to the Tanaka Memorial, Japan hoped to rely

⁴ For contemporary accounts, see *Wanbaoshan shijian ji Chaoxian pai Hua can'an* 1931 and *Dongbei ri zhanqu Wanbaoshan shijian yu Hanren pai Hua cao'an* 2010. The best study of the incident is by Michael Kim 2010: 209–27. The incident has also been described in Clark 2003; Wilson 2002: 18–19; Jordan 2004: 3; Chong-sik Lee 1963: 256.

on them as agents in its colonial expansion. Tanaka is thus remembered to have said 'if we want to make use of the Koreans to develop our new continental empire, our protection and regulation for them must be more carefully worked out' (*The Puppet State of Manchukuo* 1935: 212). Chinese audiences noted with a great deal of alarm that, according to the Tanaka Memorial, 'as not all the Koreans are naturalized Chinese, the world will not be able to tell whether it is the Chinese Koreans or the Japanese Koreans who create the trouble. We can always sell dog's meat with a sheep's head as sign-board' (*The Puppet State of Manchukuo* 1935: 212).

Even after 1931 and the formal establishment of Manchukuo, Chinese-Japanese disputes over the Koreans in Yanbian continued unabated (Lee 2009). The Japanese were emphatic that Koreans were Japanese peoples possessing all the same rights as those subjects from the home islands, while Chinese authorities argued that Koreans were foreign nationals who could adopt Chinese citizenship. Nowhere was the status of Koreans put in ethnic terms, such as the phrase 'the Korean minority of China' which we find today. The Manchukuo period and the beginning of a full blown war in 1937 concealed many of these debates, but the uncertainties surrounding the status of Koreans in Yanbian would resurface following the end of Japanese rule in North-East Asia.

Liberation

On 15 August 1945, the Concordia of Nationalities came to an abrupt end as the Japanese puppet state Manchukuo sank beneath the horizon of history like a setting sun. *Minzoku kyōwa*, or 'racial harmony', had been a centrepiece of Japanese imperial policy in Manchukuo, though, as the preceding discussion has hinted, Japan could never claim to have fully resolved the 'nationalities problem' in North-East Asia (Duara 2009: 53–5). Instead, the official ideology of *minzoku kyōwa*, or 'racial harmony' and the high ideals of pan-Asianism only served to mask Manchukuo's complex racial relations and hierarchies (Young 1998: 286–91).

The cluster of counties making up Yanbian was liberated by the Soviet Red Army in August 1945. Russian troops staged several quick and successful battles against the Japanese Kwantung Army, and declared the liberation of Hunchun on 12 August, Wangqing on 15 August, Tumen on 17 August, Yanji on 18 August, Longjing and Dunhua on 19 August, and Helong on 20 August. Having taken these counties in rapid succession, a new Jiandao Provisional Government was established on 20 August (*Jiefang chuqi de Yanbian* 1999: 3–10).

Despite the swiftness of their assault upon Japanese positions in Yanbian, the Soviets appear to have taken a largely hands-off approach to governing the region, preferring to cede power to a handful of friendly local stakeholders. Why the Soviets did so is not entirely clear, but as Yanbian was not an urban or industrial centre, they may have simply preferred to allocate resources elsewhere in Manchuria.

The Soviets did occasionally speak of the state of ethnic relations in the region. Specifically, they distinguished Chinese and Koreans in Yanbian along national, not ethnic, lines (Cathcart 2010: 29). For example, in a report on a city-wide celebration held in Yanji on 22 August, Soviet authors spoke only of the 'Chinese people' and 'Korean people', not Hans or ethnic Koreans, living in Yanbian in 1945 ('Report on the Process of Japanese Troops Surrendering' 1945). From the perspective of discourse on Chinese nationalities today, how the Soviets voiced the situation was incorrect, or, at the very least, unsophisticated. But the Soviets were not alone in rendering nations and ethnicities in this fashion.

There is no shortage of descriptions of the antagonism which had historically existed between 'Chinese' and 'Koreans' in the Sino-Korean border region, both during the Manchukuo era and immediately after. The Soviet Red Army, during its land invasion of Yanbian and northern Korea, produced multiple reports about these poor relations in the latter half of 1945. An October 1945 report, for example, included details on the murder of three Overseas Chinese on the outskirts of Chongjin in North Hamgyong Province (Ignat'ev 1945). Reports more specific to Yanbian elaborated on the 'more privileged position' enjoyed by Korean settlers than Chinese in the region. According to Soviet understanding, the Japanese had 'viewed the Korean colonists as their own support among hostile Chinese peasants' and had given them access to better land and forms of subsistence activities than Chinese peasants. This created a situation in which 'the Chinese population undoubtedly felt hatred not only toward the Japanese, but also the Korean population in Manchuria.' With Japan's defeat, the Chinese began to engage in retribution, causing a sudden exodus of Koreans seeking to return to their ancestral homeland. Multiple refugee informants later confirmed to the Soviet Red Army instances of Chinese murdering Korean farmers, stealing coal, and sabotaging Korean agriculture ('The Japanese Population in Korea').

Despite these antagonisms, and as was mentioned above, the Soviet Red Army still permitted local leaders to take on administrative responsibility for the region. Initially, power was put in the hands of a small circle of local Koreans who had taken the initiative to form a 'welcoming

committee' for the Soviet Red Army in Longjing. When Soviet troops arrived on 19 August, the committee had organized a parade of allegedly some 10,000 persons. While a seemingly insignificant event, the parade allowed the organizers of the committee to meet and familiarize themselves with Soviet leaders (*Jiefang chuqi de Yanbian* 1999: 11–14). Perhaps as a result of these interactions, one of the organizers, Kang Tongju, was given more formal control in the immediate post-liberation period by the Red Army.

Although Kang's name surfaces in the Chinese, Korean, and Japanese literature on Yanbian – both under Japanese occupation and during the immediate liberation period – very little is known about his activities in Yanbian from August through October, when higher ranking cadres arrived from outside of the region (Kang and Sung 1996: 8–9). The main source from which we can learn about Kang's activities and, more significantly, his understanding of national relations in Yanbian, is a retrospective report which he produced for the CCP in December 1945 (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 1–6).

Written for newly arrived cadres of the Chinese Communist Party from Yan'an, Kang's report appears to contain a great deal of underlying self-criticism. He reported that, in his work organizing the welcoming parade for the Soviet Red Army in Longjing, he relied on the following slogans: 'Long live the Korean republic!' (*Chaoxian gongheguo wansui!*), 'Hurray for the liberation of the Korean nation!' (*Chaoxian minzu jiefang wansui!*), 'Hurray for the liberation of the Chinese nation!' (*Zhongguo minzu jiefang wansui!*), and 'Hurray for the liberation of the Korean proletariat!' (*Chaoxian wuchan jieji jiefang wansui!*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 1). Kang's slogans did not refer to the existence of Han peoples or ethnic Koreans, nor did he express that Koreans were or could be a part of the Chinese nation. Kang furthermore did not indicate whether or not Yanbian itself was a part of China – he left the territoriality of the region ambiguous. On these issues, Kang had apparently been criticized by his new colleagues from the CCP, but in terms quite different than Chinese scholarship or memoirs might suggest. While he did not speak of contradictions between 'Hans' and 'ethnic Koreans', Kang did admit that he and other Korean officials in August 1945 had possessed 'a narrow national bias' (*Xia'ai de minzu pianxiang*), focusing their work primarily on 'the Korean nation' (*Chaoxian minzu*) and 'Korean masses' (*Chaoxian qunzhong*). Kang said that he had associated the 'Chinese people' (*Zhongguo ren*) with the Guomindang, and therefore did not understand the imperative of 'uniting the Chinese and Korea nations' (*Zhong Chao*

minzu) because, at this stage, the Guomindang was relying on Chinese landlords to revive colonial-era 'contradictions between the Chinese and Korean nations' (*Zhong Chao minzu de maodun*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 3).

Kang's reported 'nationalities bias' continued to influence his decision-making into September 1945. He noted for example that at a meeting of 'Worker, Peasant, and Youth Representatives', there was no discussion of the lack of 'unity between the Chinese and Korean nations'. According to the CCP, this failure to adequately address the unity of the Chinese and Korean peoples implicitly mimicked colonial practices and provided an opening for alleged Guomindang operatives in Yanbian, to 'create frictions between the Chinese and Korean nations' (*zaocheng Zhong Chao minzu de moca*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 4).

On 19 September, only one month after Yanbian's historic liberation, a group of Korean returnees from the Soviet Far East arrived in Yanji. Led by Kang Sint'ae, the delegation was composed of soldiers who had served in the Soviet organized 88th Brigade outside Khabarovsk (Jang 2007). Kang, who was conversant in Korean, Russian, and Chinese, had served side-by-side with Zhou Baozhong as well as Kim Il Sung, Ch'oe Yonggön, and Kim Chaek – the future kernel of the North Korean state – in the Soviet Union (Armstrong 2003: 38).

Like the Kang Tongju period, the Kang Sint'ae interim in Yanbian is also notable for a shortage of surviving primary sources. Kang himself was killed leading troops of the North Korean army during the Korean War and left behind no memoirs or diaries, even of the hagiographic variety so commonly published out of P'yöngyang. We know that he was born in 1918 to a poor peasant family in southern Korea and, after crossing over the boundary into what was then called Manchukuo, fought in North-East China. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Kang rose quickly through the ranks of exiled Korean guerrillas. While initially paired up with the North-East Anti-Japanese United Army in Manchuria, Kang, like Kim Il Sung, was forced to retreat to the Soviet Far East in 1940 and was subsequently recruited into the Red Army's 88th Brigade headed by Zhou Baozhong. Zhou famously emerged as a mentor and friend to Kim Il Sung, but he was perhaps just as close to Kang and many of the other Korean soldiers, including Ch'oe Yonggön and Kim Chaek. Six years Kim Il Sung's junior, Kang was very well connected; a person for whom Soviet sponsorship during the war was important. Kang was made a brigade leader in 1942, holding a position on par with Kim Il Sung before 1945 (Armstrong 2003: 38).

Upon his arrival in Yanbian, Kang Sint'ae apparently wrested control from Kang Tongju rather quickly. The nature of the transition from Kang Tongju to Kang Sint'ae is not clear, but it should be noted that the latter was a deeply experienced and respected military leader with important ties to both the Soviets and the Chinese (*Jiefang chuqi de Yanbian* 1999: 216–30). Kang Tongju possessed neither of these attributes, having remained a provincial organizer in North-East China for much of his life. Moreover, with Zhou Baozhong's homecoming to North-East China in 1945, the name Kang Sint'ae spread quickly among the CCP's North-East Bureau ('Report on the Composition and Distribution of the Personnel of the 88th Brigade' 1945).

Kang moved swiftly to consolidate his power in Yanbian, forming a governing body composed almost entirely of Koreans and establishing a Korean military in the region. The military demands after Japan's nominal defeat in the region should not be underestimated – there were significant clusters of hold-out forces all over the region, including a complex mix of formerly pro-Japanese collaborationist troops, armed landlords with private militia, and groups of pure 'bandits' which tended to proliferate in the North-East (Tang 2000: 21).

In October, Kang set up a rudimentary Chinese Communist Party organization with himself at the helm, but it was not long before cadres from Yan'an arrived in Yanji and took control of the local administration (Yun 2006: 32). When the first CCP cadre arrived in November 1945, they found Kang Sint'ae buttressed with various titles. Most notably, in October 1945, Kang had promoted himself to become Secretary of the Yanbian Committee (Zhonggong Yanbian Weiyuanhui). But with the CCP's arrival, Kang's committee was soon abolished and replaced: first by the CCP Yanbian Local Committee (Zhonggong Yanbian Defang Weiyuanhui) in November, and later by the East Jilin Sub-Provincial Party Committee (Jidong Fenshengwei) in January 1946 (Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhi bu 2000: 916, 941–943). With each administrative restructuring, local CCP personnel tightened the North-East Bureau's control over the region. Kang's autonomy was in jeopardy almost immediately after he had installed himself in Yanbian.

Kang Tongju, eager to ingratiate himself with Yan'an, was just as critical of Kang Sint'ae as he had been of himself. He reported that Kang Sint'ae's military endeavours in post-war Yanbian were marked by a 'serious nationality bias' (*yanzhong de minzu pianxiang*) in which he had privileged Koreans over Chinese (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 6). In November, Kang was removed as the local secretary and

replaced by Yong Wentao. He was not completely cast out, however; Kang switched into military garb to head the Yanji Military Sub-District. By all indications he was comfortable with his responsibilities and set his sights on a rather ambitious set of interrelated goals: the elimination of 'bandits' from the region and, in the process, the creation of an environment suitable for the development of the local economy. By February 1946, Kang had become commander of the enlarged Ji-Dong [East Jilin] Military District, and in the process had marshalled six platoons, or eleven-thousand Korean soldiers (Zhonggong zhongyang zuzhi bu 2000: 924–5).

With Kang sidelined by military affairs, the new Party leadership in Yanbian began an important campaign to confirm, both rhetorically and legally, that Yanbian was in fact Chinese territory. Dong Kunyi, the Deputy Commissioner in late 1945, began to encourage Koreans (*Hanren*) to adopt Chinese citizenship and announced that 'the Korean nationality could become a minority of the Chinese nation' (*Chaozu keyi chengywei Zhonghua minzu zhong de yige shaoshu minzu*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 7–8). In January 1946, the Guizhou-native Yong Wentao spoke similarly of easing the divides between Han Chinese and Koreans through assimilation. Yong complained that even the pro-communist military forces in the region were divided along national lines, which he designated as Koreans, or *Hanguo ren*, and Chinese, or *Zhongguo ren*. The southerner, wielding the top Party post in the region, proclaimed that the people of Yanbian should no longer label certain individuals as 'outsiders' (*wairen*), while privileging others as 'one's own people' (*ziji ren*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 9–26). Although the available Chinese sources do not indicate it explicitly, Yong's comments may have functioned as a critique of some of Kang Sint'ae's policies, as Kang had focused primarily on recruiting Korean soldiers and did not appear to be interested in promoting Chinese-tinged nationalism among his troops. Indeed, Kang paid little heed to the integration of Chinese and Korean forces.

Kang Sint'ae eventually reversed course and began to speak of the need to unite Chinese and Koreans, for fear of replicating Chinese-Korean relations experienced under Japan. In one of the only – perhaps the only – report produced by Kang which has survived and been reproduced in Chinese, Kang commented that 'the great majority of Chinese people [*Zhongguo ren*] are kind hearted' and that there was no need for mutual antagonism between Chinese and Koreans. Kang announced that 'the Koreans [*Chaoxian ren*] in the army are not just serving Koreans, but they are serving all of Yanbian. The Chinese people [*Zhongguo ren*] are

the same' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 318–22).

Recasting Ethnic Identity

Kang later departed for North Korea in June 1946, where he helped to establish the Korean People's Army. In his absence, the CCP continued to work frantically to reframe the national and ethnic status of Koreans in Yanbian. One CCP administrator, Bai Dongcun, was stricken by the fact that 'the old contradictions among the Chinese and Korean masses' were 'being reflected amongst the Chinese and Korean cadres' in Yanbian. According to Bai, the Koreans and Chinese, though working together under the auspices of the CCP, had come to 'despise one other' (*huxiang kanbuqi*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 47).

These same concerns were echoed by Yong Wentao, a CCP administrator who compiled a comprehensive report on land ownership in Yanbian in late 1946 entitled 'The Problem of Public Lands in the Liberated Area of Jilin' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 99–129). According to Yong, public lands (*gongdi*) made up a significant portion of total arable land in all counties in and around Yanbian. In the past, the public lands had mostly been used by 'Korean people' (*Chaoxian ren*), a fact which infuriated the 'Chinese masses' (*Zhongguo qunzhong*). The statistical majority of Koreans *vis-à-vis* Chinese in Yanbian, however, did not explain the roots of this problem alone. Yong continued that Koreans used more public lands than Chinese not simply because they were more numerous, but because of Japanese colonial policies. Yong argued that Koreans were given 'cultivation rights' (*gengzhong quan*) over public lands to strengthen Japanese control over Yanbian (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 101).

Yong's description of past practices is significant, but what is most interesting is the terminology he uses to describe the residents of Yanbian. Yong described the Koreans as *Chaoxian ren* and the Japanese as *Riben ren*, while the Chinese were variously described as *Zhongguo ren* and *Neiguoren*, or 'domestic people' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 101–102). Nowhere did the suffix *zu* appear which would connote an ethnic identity rather than a national identity. This omission was not noticed by Yong, who could not realize he was still operating within a colonial lexicon. His only concern was that the public lands issue be resolved in order to avoid a repeat of the problem whereby third parties, such as Japan, used agricultural to 'sow discord within national relations

between Chinese and Koreans' (*tiaobo Zhong Chao minzu guanxi*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 101, 124).

Numerous reports produced by the CCP continued to show a remarkable reluctance or inability to abandon the old nationalities' vocabulary. In a January 1947 report on land ownership, for example, CCP cadre Kong Yuan spoke of 'Koreans' (*Chaoxian ren*) and 'domestic people' (*neiguoren*), or 'Chinese people' (*Zhongguo ren*), living in Yanbian (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 133). Reports from mid-1947 revealed intensified efforts to 'correctly resolve the nationalities problem' (*minzu wenti*), but still retained old language when speaking of 'the unity of Chinese and Korean [*Zhong Han*] cadres, the unity of Chinese and Korean [*Zhong Han*] soldiers, and the unity of the Chinese and Korean [*Zhong Han*] peoples' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 362, 367).

Zhou Baozhong offered perhaps the most comprehensive and prescriptive report on relations between Chinese and Koreans in his 'On the Problem of the Korean Nationality in Yanbian.' Zhou claimed that uncoordinated and unsophisticated leadership in Yanbian in the immediate post-war period had nurtured many problems in local administration, including issues involving 'national relations' (*minzu guanxi*). Zhou said that 'segregation between Chinese and Koreans' (*Zhong Xian fenli*) was common and, in a striking admission, revealed that armed clashes (*wuzhuang chengtu*) had even taken place between Chinese and Korean forces in Wangqing, Helong, and Longjing after August 1945. Though Kang Sint'ae's arrival in Yanbian had done much to alleviate this tense situation, 'opposition between the Chinese and Korean nationalities' (*Zhong Xian minzu duili*) was still continuing unabated according to Zhou. Even since Han Chinese cadres had arrived from Yan'an, including Yong Wentao, 'the problem of unity between the Chinese and Korean nationalities has still not been resolved' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 354, 351).

Zhou's report was, above all, driven by two simple questions: 'Are Korean people [*Chaoxian renmin*] a minority nationality within Chinese territory? Or are they foreign nationals [*waiguo de qiaomin*]?' Zhou was attempting to resolve that lingering colonial legacy, and he was quick to answer his own question. Zhou announced that, 'in general, Korean residents are to be considered a minority nationality within Chinese territory' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 327).

With the trend toward ethnicization of the Koreans becoming more apparent, Kim Hwarak, with whom this essay opened, decided to leave

Yanbian in June 1946. Kim later reported that had been working with the Great Democratic League of the Korean Peoples in China (Zai Zhong Chaoxian renmin minzhu datongmeng) since October 1945. In Mandarin, this organization is more typically referred to as the Great Democratic League of the Yanbian Peoples (Yanbian renmin minzhu da tongmeng). Though a seemingly trivial distinction, the difference in nomenclature may be rather important. The Great Democratic League was initially an autonomous organization run by Koreans in greater Yanbian, but it was eventually absorbed, repurposed, and disbanded by the Chinese Communist Party. Chinese Communist leaders praised the Democratic League for its ability to organize citizens, but derided it for lacking 'unity' (*tuanjie*), a reference to how the organization approached relations between ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese (*Jiefang chuqi de Yanbian* 1999: 46).

Though his specific portfolio was never made clear, Kim was likely engaged in propaganda work, as the other activities of the Democratic League included staging military operations against bandits and repairing railroads, and Kim appears to have had neither a military nor an engineering background. From February through March 1946, he received political training, almost certainly from the Chinese Communist Party. For the next three months, he was working out in the field near Jiaohe on the outskirts of Yanbian. This may mean that Kim was completing agitation work on behalf of the CCP in and around Yanbian, but again, the specifics of this experience are not made clear in his dossier. The reasons for Kim's departure for Korea in 1946 are not known, but it is reasonable to suspect that he was disinterested in carving out a Korean enclave within the broader Chinese polity. Kim probably wanted Korean independence, not autonomy.

Conclusion: Resolving the Impasse

It was not until 15 August 1948, a full three years after the defeat of Japan, that the CCP began to adopt a more sophisticated ethnic platform. Though the Party continued to make being Han synonymous with being Chinese, the CCP recognized the need to start clarifying the distinction between Koreans as Chinese citizens (*gongmin*) and Koreans as foreign nationals (*qiaomin*) (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 383-7). As the Koreans in Yanbian were gradually recast as members of the Chinese nationality, the post-war project of transforming 'nationality' and

'ethnicity' into more rigidly fixed institutions and ideas becomes abundantly clear.

The language of the Yanbian Koreans as a minority nationality within China first began to surface in earnest in late 1948. Military reports on the activities of CCP troops in Yanbian announced that '[we] must also make it so the masses understand that the Korean people are a nationality with a motherland; they reside in China, and are considered a minority nationality within Chinese territory' (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 91). Still, the CCP was troubled by its own distinctions. It had yet to use the term 'Han' in Yanbian, and still clung to the old formula that being Chinese was equal to being Han. Thus, the 1949 New Year's report describing the main tasks to be performed over the coming year in Yanbian remarked on the Party's desire to 'further enhance the unity between the Chinese and Korean peoples' (*Zhong Chao renmin de tuanjie*), rather than enhancing the unity between the Han and Korean ethnic groups (Yanbian Chaoxian zu zizhizhou dang'anju [guan] 1985: 98).

It was not until the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), convened in September 1949, that the CCP finally abandoned the jargon which had characterized much of the Japanese colonial era. The task fell on acclaimed military leader Zhu De to reframe how the CCP thought about and discussed the Koreans of Yanbian. Though Zhu's published remarks from the CPPCC lament over how landlords, warlords, and the Japanese invaders had 'sowed discord in the feelings among the Chinese and Korean people' (*tiaobo Zhong, Chao renmin de ganqing*), Zhu was intent on moving beyond the contentious past. He announced that 'the Korean people of the North-East constitute a part of the Chinese nation; they are a member of the large family of Chinese nationalities' (*Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi di yi jie quanti huiyi jianghui, baogao, fayan* 1949: 228).

Zhu's remarks publicly announced on the largest platform to date that the Koreans remaining in Yanbian and elsewhere in China were to become an official minority group within the broader Chinese nation. In doing so, the CCP signaled the beginnings of a post-war and post-Manchukuo order in which long-standing ambiguities surrounding national and ethnic identity were finally put to rest. But just as the CCP achieved a post-Manchukuo order, the Party itself was creating its own new set of problems. After granting 'autonomy' to Yanbian in 1952 and restructuring the area as an official ethnic Korean enclave, some Koreans in Yanbian began to believe that Yanbian would soon 'unite with the [North] Korean state' (*yu Chaoxian guo hebing*) and 'Kim Il Sung was dispatching leadership' to

Yanbian. Mistaking autonomy for unification with the DPRK, citizens remarked that the ongoing Korean War was 'no longer [the campaign] to Resist America and Aid Korea, but simply the [campaign to] Resist America' (*bu shi Kang Mei yuan Chao shi zhijie Kang Mei le!*). As the Tumen River was no longer a 'national boundary' (*guojie*), the minority of Han Chinese living in Yanbian also speculated that they would soon become overseas Chinese (Zhonggong Xinjiang Weiwu'er zizhiqu weiyuanhui yanjiushi 2000: 475–80). Though the CCP had overcome colonial configurations of nation and ethnicity in Yanbian by the early 1950s, the post-war transformations were perhaps just as consequential and contested.

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Glossary

- Bu shi Kang Mei yuan Chao shi zhijie Kang Mei!* 不是抗美援朝是
直接抗美援朝了!
- Chōe Yonggōn 崔庸健
- Chaoxian gongheguo wansui!* 朝鲜共和国万岁!
- Chaoxian minzu jiefang wansui!* 朝鲜民族解放万岁!
- Chaoxian minzu* 朝鲜民族
- Chaoxian qunzhong* 朝鲜群众
- Chaoxian ren* 朝鲜人
- Chaoxian renmin* 朝鲜人民
- Chaoxian wuchan jieji jiefang wansui!* 朝鲜无产阶级解放万岁!
- Chaozu keyi chengywei Zhonghua minzu zhong de yige shaoshu minzu* 朝鲜可以成为中华民族中的一个少数民族
- Dong Kunyi 董昆一
- Dongbei* 东北
- er deng guomin* 二等国民
- gongzhong quan* 耕种权
- gongmin* 公民
- guojie* 国界
- Han ren* 韩人
- Han zu* 汉族
- huxiang kanbuqi* 互相看不起
- Jiandao/Kando 间岛
- Jidong Fenshengwei 吉东分省委
- Kang Sin'ae 姜信泰
- Kang Tongju 姜东柱
- Kim Chaek 金策
- Kim Hwarak 金花洛
- Kim Il Sung 金日成
- Manchukuo 满洲国
- minzu guanxi* 民族关系
- minzu wenti* 民族问题
- Nribu wenxian* 内部文献
- Neiguo ren* 内国人
- qinomin* 侨民
- Riben ren* 日本人
- san deng guomin* 三等国民
- tiaobo Zhong Chao minzu guanxi* 挑拨中朝民族关系
- tiaobo Zhong, Chao renmin de ganqing* 挑拨中、朝人民的感情
- tuanyie* 团结
- waiguo de qiaomin* 外国的侨民
- wairen* 外人
- wuzhuang chongtu* 武装冲突
- Xia'ai de minzu pianxiang* 狭隘的民族偏向
- Yanbian renmin minzhu da tongmeng* 延边人民民主大同盟
- Yanbian* 延边
- Yong Wentao 雍文涛
- yu Chaoxian guo hebing* 与朝鲜国合并
- Zai Zhong Chaoxian renmin minzhu datongmeng 在中朝朝鲜人民民主大同盟
- zuocheng Zhong Chao minzu de moca* 造成中朝民族的摩擦
- Zhong Chao minzu de maodun* 中朝民族之间的矛盾
- Zhong Chao minzu* 中朝民族
- Zhong Chao renmin de tuanyie* 中朝人民的团结
- Zhong Han* 中韩
- Zhong Xian fenli* 朝鲜分离
- Zhong Xian minzu duili* 朝鲜民族对立
- Zhonggong Yanbian defang weiyuanhui* 中共延边地方委员会
- Zhonggong Yanbian weiyuanhui* 中共延边委员会
- Zhongguo minzu jiefang wansui* 中国民族解放万岁!
- Zhongguo qunzhong* 中国群众
- Zhongguo ren* 中国人
- Zhou Baozhong 周保中
- ziji ren* 自己人

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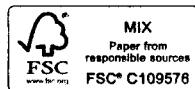
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William Edward Skillend
Pioneer of Korean Studies