Chapter 11

Chinese Migration in Northeast Asia, 1860–1945

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1 Introduction

Until now, many studies on Southeast Asian or North American history have discussed overseas Chinese, but few have discussed Chinese migration within Northeast Asia. In fact, many episodes of Chinese migration in Northeast Asia from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries have been documented. Many merchants and laborers went to the Russian Far East, Korea, and Japan.

In the same period, domestic migration from North China (Huabei) to Northeast China (Dongbei) were observed. Many studies were conducted to guide administration of Northeast China. Previous research relevant to this chapter can be broadly divided into two kinds. The first concerns research before the end of World War II. Studies that analyze the situation at that time include materials by Japanese and Chinese research institutes. Such research developed out of interest in the administration of Northeast China and attempts to find out why large numbers of emigrants came from villages in North China. Chinese research institutes such as the School of Economics at Nanhai University undertook such research, but a number of Japanese establishments, led by the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR), kept meticulous records. The SMR maintained statistics on their many passengers who were Chinese migrants. In addition, the Japanese colonial leaders were concerned about the management of the migrant manpower from North China, which was in high demand. They established an employment agency, Fukusho in Dalian, to offer job placement services to migrants and, at the same time, collected data on their lives. When Manshukoku was established, Daitou koushi (later known as Manshu roukou kyokai [Manchurian Labor Association]) was created to regulate immigration into Manshukoku, and it also collected data on migrant workers. Naturally, beginning in 1945, interest in studies on Chinese migration declined. The second kind of research comprises post–World War II historical analyses of prewar surveys and materials from the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Such research arose from an interest in developing China’s frontier. This postwar research largely began in Taiwan and Japan, but in recent years,
new studies have emerged from Europe, the United States, and China. As migration studies gained popularity in the past decade, various new studies are being conducted.¹

This study examines Chinese migration, including both domestic and international migrants in Northeast Asia as a whole and from a macro perspective. Chinese migration in Northeast Asia was an extension of domestic Han Chinese migration in China. During the Qing period, a large number of migrants seeking agricultural work traveled from the Shandong Peninsula to the Liaodong Peninsula. During the period of instability that accompanied the transition from the Ming (1378–1644) to the Qing, a great deal of arable land was destroyed in the southern areas in Northeast China. Furthermore, when Qing loyalists moved to the new capital in Beijing, agricultural production declined. To boost production, an edict was issued in the tenth year of the reign of the Shunzhi emperor (1653) by the Qing government to encourage migration from North China to Northeast China, especially to Liaodong. However, this pro-migration policy was abruptly reversed in the fifth year of the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1740), purportedly to protect public order in the imperial homeland. Although officially forbidden, the flow of Han population into Northeast China once begun, continued.

The Tianjin treaty of 1858 and the convention of Beijing (1860) as the consequences of the Second Opium War are the two most important influential factors in this situation. According to them, the port of Tianjin was to open in 1860, Yingkou in 1861, and the port of Yantai was to open in 1861. As a result, the steamship was employed to transport large numbers of people. Migration was no longer limited to the country’s borders but extended to the Russian