ETHNICITY AT THE BORDER

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By
Chungjoon Lee

Thesis Committee:
Jerry Bentley, Chairperson
Theodore Jun Yoo
Shana Brown
We certify that we have read this thesis and that, in our opinion, it is satisfactory in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

THESIS COMMITTEE

[Signatures]

Chairperson

Theodore You
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A Note on Romanization

Pinyin is used for words in Chinese, except in cases where another spelling is widely accepted (e.g., Mao Tse-tung). For Korean words, the McCune-Reischauer system is used, except when a name is commonly spelled according to another system (e.g., Kim Il-sung). For Japanese words the Hepburn system is used.
Abstract

The Korean diaspora living in Yanbian, China—called the “Chosŏnjok”—have preserved their Korean ethnicity even after a century in a foreign land, such that they still speak Korean and maintain many elements of a Korean lifestyle. Yet at the same time, they are proud to have succeeded in Chinese society as the most affluent and educated of China’s 55 minority ethnic groups. This thesis will examine why the Chosŏnjok considered their ethnic identity to be important and how they were able to perpetuate their ethnicity.

This thesis will also provide a fresh perspective to the study of diaspora through an approach that combines ethnographic history and world history. Such an approach is useful for understanding the Chosŏnjok community’s actions and thoughts within the wider setting of 20th century East Asia. The Chosŏnjok’s adamancy to retain their Korean ethnicity stems from Yanbian’s turbulent and warn-torn history. The Chosŏnjok used their ethnicity to resist the domination and forced assimilation imposed by hostile foreign powers such as Japanese colonialism and various Chinese governments. At several junctures in their history, they politicized their ethnicity and invented new meanings for their ethnic symbols in order to mobilize their community and pursue self-determination in their way of life. Despite the subtle transformations to the Korean culture made by the Chosŏnjok, they have kept alive the core of their Korean ethnicity, which they call their minjoksim. The Chosŏnjok reveal that a diaspora’s ethnicity is a complex phenomenon involving multiple loyalties, hybrid expressions of culture, and unique historical circumstances.
Table 1: MAP OF YANBIAN

**legend**
- Yanbian Towns
- Major Cities
- Trans-Siberian Railroad
- South Manchurian Railroad
- Chosen Railway

[Map showing various cities and railways, including major cities and railways in Yanbian region.]

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Chapter 1: The Dynamics of Diaspora Ethnicity

Growing up in Los Angeles, I saw the rapid assimilation of Korean-American youth into American society and the widening gaps in culture and communication between the first generation (ilse) and the second generation (ise). Ilse tended to gather into ethnic enclaves because they were unfamiliar with the passwords of American society and required mutual support to overcome the alien landscape. Ise, however, were weaned on the hamburger and French fry pop culture of America and had only a fragmented knowledge of their ancestral land. That is why I was surprised to hear about the two million ethnic Koreans living in the People’s Republic of China who called themselves Chosŏnjok (조선족, 朝鮮族, “the Chosŏn people”). It was reported that even after six generations on foreign soil, they still spoke Korean, wore Korean dress in public, and lived in traditional Korean houses. I wondered how the Chosŏnjok’s pattern of assimilation had resulted in such a different outcome from the Korean-Americans’. So in 1989, I went to the Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture—a 1500 square mile region just north of North Korea—to study the Chosŏnjok’s history at Yanbian University. I was warmly welcomed by many Chosŏnjok who shared their lives with me and confided in me as a fellow ethnic Korean. Before my return to the U.S., I promised the Yanbian historian, Professor Changwuk Pak, to write the Chosŏnjok’s history in English and share their very dramatic story.

In this thesis, I will trace the difficult route the Chosŏnjok traveled to forge a diaspora community in China. I will examine why the Chosŏnjok considered their ethnic identity to be important, how they managed to maintain their ethnic identity while living in the historically volatile region of Manchuria, and the ways in which they politicized
their ethnicity in order to achieve their community’s goals.

**Theories of Ethnic Identity**

I begin with the premise that people can simultaneously belong to multiple communities including (but not limited to): national, class, occupational, local, religious, and ethnic communities. Our social identity is shaped by the levels of loyalty we express toward each of these communities and the different combinations of values that these communities impart upon us. Of these various types of identities, ethnic identity is among the most powerful because it is the most fundamental and earliest form of identity instilled in an individual.¹ Ethnic identity is based on the conception of a common ancestry and cultural heritage. This “feeling of continuity with the past” distinguishes ethnic loyalty from present-oriented loyalties such as class, occupation, and locality.² Ethnic loyalty often spans across different classes, occupations and localities to serve as the common denominator for unifying a people and differentiating them as a group.

Ethnic identity united the Chosŏnjok who inhabited Chinese territory and were subject to Chinese laws and customs, but who lived in a different reality because they thought of themselves as an extension of Korea. The Chosŏnjok distinguished themselves from the Han Chinese and the other ethnic groups in China by their *minjoksim* (민족심, 民族心, “ethnic pride” or “nationalism”): a loyalty toward Korean history and culture that is heartfelt by many Chosŏnjok. Professor Changwuk Pak describes *minjoksim* in this way:

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The Chinese identify with a Han past; there is little division in popular opinion as to their history. However, the Chosŏnjok do not feel themselves to be part of this history but associate themselves with a documentable past of about one hundred years in China and with the history of Korea before that.3

It is this loyalty toward Korean history and culture which unified the Chosŏnjok into an ethnic community and gave them the power to thrive in China through five significant periods of ethnic experience.

During the early immigration period (c. 1870-1910), the Chosŏnjok formed ethnic enclaves because life in a new land engendered tension, isolation, and danger. The Chosŏnjok had not lived in Yanbian very long when the Qing government imposed an assimilation policy. The Chosŏnjok reacted to this threat by rallying around the emblems of Korean culture to resist assimilation.

From 1910 to 1932, Japanese influences entered Yanbian, first through economic expansion then through military might. The Chosŏnjok found that their ethnic enclaves were not strong enough to resist the hegemonies of China and Japan to shape the Chosŏnjok into their desired images. As a result, the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic identity tended to fracture and they became “Chinese-Japanese-Koreans.”

When Japan ruled Yanbian as part of the colonial state of Manchukuo (1932-1945), it attempted to force its colonial institutions and cultural assimilation policies onto the Chosŏnjok. However, the Chosŏnjok resisted through various actions ranging from asserting their Korean cultural symbols to anti-Japanese guerrilla fighting.

With the rise of the PRC, the Chosŏnjok realized that organizing along ethnic lines was inadequate to uphold their community; they had to gain political and economic

3 Changwuk Park Interview: 7 July 1989.
powers as well. Therefore, the Chosŏnjok decided to ally with the Chinese Communist Party and participate in nation building as an ethnic minority of the PRC in exchange for limited local autonomy. However, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese government changed its stance and implemented harsh assimilation measures. When the Cultural Revolution ended, the Chosŏnjok celebrated the redemption of their political and social liberties in an ethnic renaissance.

In 1992, the normalization of relations between China and South Korea resulted in the Chosŏnjok’s developing an affinity for South Korea as the result of increased exchanges in communications, travel, goods, and media. Such exchanges helped the Chosŏnjok to form a transnational conception of Korean identity and inspired over 300,000 of them to migrate to South Korea.

To more fully appreciate these transformations in the Chosŏnjok’s ethnicity, we need to examine various theories which explain ethnicity’s power, its mechanics, and its ability to empower a community to assert its interests. There are three views regarding the motivating engines behind the power of ethnicity: the primordial, the circumstantial, and the relational.

**Primordial:** Ethnicity was once widely-believed to be based on primordial features such as language, religion, place of origin, and biogenetic physical features. The primordial view assumed that ethnicity was something stable, fixed, and unique, so it sought to understand the deep emotional attachment that people have to their ancestry.4

**Circumstantial:** The primordial theory lost its influence after Fredrik Barth argued that ethnicity reacts to and is dependent on external explanatory factors such as

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the environment, economics, politics, and class which invest ethnicity with potential for
action and mobilization. Therefore, ethnicity is flexible and context-dependent.

**Relational:** The current understanding of ethnic identity is the relational view,
which combines the primordial and circumstantialist views. Ethnicity is based on a
primordial loyalty that stems from the group’s basic agreement on, and attachment to, an
idea of shared descent. Yet these loyalties only become explicit, salient, and empowered
in interactions with changing socio-political contexts and relations of power. The
relational view emphasizes activism at the level of the ethnic group, which can use both
internal group characteristics and external influences to shape its identity.

In this thesis, I will apply the relational approach to examine the factors that
shaped the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic identity. The primordial component features an agrarian
Korean lifestyle that is thick with economic practices and social interactions created over
the centuries. When the Chosŏnjok founded agricultural communities on Chinese soil,
they also transplanted the Korean ways of working and living. They adopted some
Chinese practices in order to thrive in the new land, but they generally considered
Chinese practices to be incongruent with their social reality. The circumstantial
component often involved the forceful imposition of new conceptions of community onto
the Chosŏnjok by various governments: the Qing Empire, Republican China, Chinese
warlords, Japan, and the People’s Republic of China. In the view of the Chosŏnjok
ethnic group, these were shallow communities which often ran afoul of their existing
social reality; therefore, the Chosŏnjok expressed their displeasure at being forced to
adopt incongruent patterns of culture by bolstering their own sense of Korean identity.

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In addition to the general views of ethnicity, it is important to understand ethnicity's operational mechanics, and in particular, the idea of ethnic boundaries. In 1969, Fredrik Barth observed that ethnic groups create and perpetuate racial, territorial, linguistic, economic and/or religious "boundaries" which other groups recognize as being unique. An ethnic boundary serves two major purposes: (a) to enforce cohesiveness within the ethnic group as members communicate through commonly understood cultural symbols (e.g., kinship, myths of origin, rituals, dress, food, etc.) and (b) to reinforce ethnic distinctions vis-à-vis other ethnic groups through the persistent practice of specific cultural patterns. Barth also visualized the ethnic boundary as a porous boundary that permitted the diffusion of ideas and cultural practices between the larger society and the ethnic community in a dialectic manner.

Scholars have since modified and expanded Barth's approach. George De Vos argued that the ethnic boundary is not territorial, but psychological. What matters in the formation of the ethnic boundary is not the cultural differences per se but how these differences are perceived by the actors themselves. De Vos concluded that people could simultaneously have many social loyalties (e.g., national, occupational, and ethnic). Problems arise only if the rules of the social groups are mutually antagonistic. Bruce Batten further emphasized the subjective nature of ethnicity by showing that people pick and choose those technologies, social practices, and belief systems which flow through

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7 Barth, pp. 10-11.
the ethnic boundary in order to create their identities.⁹

I agree with the observations of Barth, De Vos, and Batten who respectively emphasized the features of cultural solidarity, psychology, and agency in the ethnic boundary. However, my conception of the ethnic boundary differs in that I see two levels of ethnic boundaries. The first level of ethnic boundary links the ethnic group’s members through shared cultural symbols. These cultural symbols have the value of “goods” or “capital” to those within the ethnic boundary who possess the codes to decipher them.¹⁰ The acts of transmitting, accumulating, distributing and reproducing cultural symbols from one generation to the next through various forms (e.g., stories, songs, dramas, images, rituals, food, language, and objects) empower the ethnic group by creating a common currency that can be drawn upon to mobilize the group in times of crisis.¹¹ This level of ethnic boundary acts as a defensive wall to protect and nurture the ethnic group.

The second level of ethnic boundary is an expansive net which emanates from the ethnic group and encompasses all the new ideas and processes that the ethnic group encounters. For example, the early Chosŏnjok migrants had a secondary ethnic boundary that covered Korea and southern Manchuria. Later, contact with the Japanese expanded the Chosŏnjok’s secondary ethnic boundary to encompass Japan, its railroads, and the capitalist market system. Today, the Chosŏnjok are connected to a wider world through travel, commerce, media and the Internet, so their secondary ethnic boundary easily embraces the Asian continent and extends as far as their imagination permits. In the

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¹¹ Keyes, p. 9.
region between the two ethnic boundaries is the "experimental region" where ideas are tested before being allowed through the primary defensive ethnic boundary. Thus, the ethnic group obtains its coherence through the primary boundary while the secondary boundary allows the ethnic group to reach out and connect with the wider world.

The two ethnic boundaries interact in the following manner. Depending on the political, economic, and social conditions of a particular historical period, the primary boundary's pores become smaller or larger, and at the same time, the shape of the secondary boundary changes to become tighter or looser. In times of repression, severe discrimination, social exploitation, or ethnic crisis, the primary boundary closes its pores and the secondary boundary shrinks in size to fortify the primary boundary, thereby limiting cultural experimentation and prompting an ethnic revival. Such a contraction in the ethnic boundaries can also occur in situations of intense spatial, geographical and social contact during which the ethnic group seeks to mark off its separate community. In contrast, during times of peace, the primary boundary opens its pores and the secondary ethnic boundary expands its net to cull the new ideas and processes in the wider social environment. Despite the ability of the ethnic boundaries to sustain an ethnic community, it is a delicate social construct. It is possible for strong outside forces—such as colonialism or great political persecution—to severely attack and damage the boundaries, thereby weakening the ethnic group's ability to use ethnicity as a communal force.

My contribution to the scholarly discussion on ethnic boundaries is my emphasis on their fluid shapes and their ability to respond to complex social changes. My conception is influenced by Paul Gilroy who sees identity construction in terms of a fluid,
ongoing process of hybridization which, at the same time, is based on a persistently existing shared heritage, an idea he calls "the changing same." To parallel this fluid conception of identity construction, ethnic boundaries should be fluid to accommodate the many layers of interactions that an ethnic group has with the larger environment.

**Politcizing Culture to Create Ethnic Boundaries**

Ethnic boundaries do not automatically emerge because people are of the same race or share the same language or culture. The ethnic group must mobilize and create their ethnic boundaries. The relational position sees ethnic identity as an instrumental tool or a political resource that can be used to further a group's interests. A group which cannot organize itself along lines of economics, political ideology, lineage, or class, will make use of whatever cultural mechanisms are available in order to articulate its organization. It is in such cases that ethnicity become politicized. An ethnic group assesses the fundamental saliency of its group structure in the face of external influences then accordingly decides to maintain or change its culture.

Cultural persistence occurs when the ethnic group insists that the best way to adapt to social changes is not to adopt the foreign patterns, but rather to continue its traditional patterns which it recognizes as the best solution to the situation. The repetition of similar cultural practices over time gives the impression that the cultural pattern is unchanging. However, what appears to outside observers as an "unchanging culture," is in reality a conscious decision to persist.

Cultural change occurs when the ethnic group finds that the cultural mechanisms

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13 Keyes, p. 11.
that have been previously used to resolve social tensions no longer work in the changed situation. Therefore, new meanings for particular cultural symbols are constructed in a dialogue with the external forces pressing on the ethnic boundaries. The new cultural meanings, called “invented traditions,” tend to occur more frequently during periods of rapid transformations of society.\textsuperscript{14} For example, in a period of crisis, an ethnic group can seize a cultural symbol and imbue it with greater symbolic power in order to mobilize the group to action.

The politicization of ethnic culture ties in with Michel Foucault’s concept of power relations between the state and its subjects. The state enforces discipline upon its subjects through institutional structures and classification systems designed to maintain political, economic, and social hierarchies. Disciplinary power takes effect when the individual internalizes the obedient behaviors that the disciplinarian desires and unconsciously performs his allotted role in the state-created hierarchies.\textsuperscript{15} However, disciplinary power is undermined when the subject consciously resists the discipline or manipulates the weak links of the disciplinary system. Michel de Certeau argued that there is a limit to the extent to which individuals are ever wholly dominated or integrated into centralized systems of control because individuals can employ subversive “tactics” against the strategies used by the dominant powers to conquer and manage.\textsuperscript{16}

In Yanbian, five different governments attempted to impose discipline upon the Chosŏnjok through forced assimilation policies and regulations limiting the ability of the


agrarian Chosŏnjok to own land and earn a livelihood in Manchuria. The Chosŏnjok recognized the disciplinary measures and often engaged in displays of resistance ranging from subversive tactics to large-scale violence. Since they often lacked direct political and economic means to protect their community, they used the technique of cultural persistence by tightening their ethnic boundaries to generate an ethnic revival. Thus organized along ethnic lines into a community, they negotiated their position vis-à-vis the state and acted to destabilize the state-imposed structure of inequality.

In the power dynamics between the various governments and the Chosŏnjok ethnic group, ethnic nationalism was a key piece of cultural capital for the Chosŏnjok. Ethnic nationalism is a bottom-up political movement in which people are united by passionate sentiments rooted in a common ethnicity and history. In contrast, state nationalism is a top-down political movement implemented by the state for the purpose of constructing a homogeneous “national” culture. An ethnic nationalist group will seek to manipulate the primordial aspects of its culture as “weapons of the weak” in its struggles, often over scarce resources such as land, jobs, status, or power.17

The Chosŏnjok’s ethnic nationalism was most strongly directed against Japan, which annexed the Korean peninsula in 1905 and caused hundreds of thousands of Koreans to migrate to Yanbian to escape Japanese colonial rule. However, Japan gradually consolidated its control over Yanbian and Manchuria, then sought to assimilate the Chosŏnjok into obedient Japanese subjects by promoting Japanese state nationalism and imposing forced assimilation measures. Against this, the Chosŏnjok ignited their ethnic nationalism to organize grass-roots political organizations, independence
demonstrations, and military campaigns.

In assessing ethnic nationalism, it is not always the case that state nationalism is used to dominate ethnic groups and exclude them from the center of the nation, while ethnic groups use ethnic nationalism to resist this domination. An ethnic group can also use ethnic nationalism to assert its belonging to the nation. For example, with the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the Chosŏnjok presented themselves as an ethnic minority loyal to the communist state. This cooperative blending of state and ethnic nationalisms was due to the PRC’s inclusive ethnic minorities policy which allowed the Chosŏnjok to the govern Yanbian as an “autonomous” prefecture.

A weakness in the theory of cultural politicization is that before ethnic culture can serve as the basis for orienting people to social action, it must become internalized by individuals. However, this is not easily accomplished since ethnicity is a highly personal and subjective form of identity. Moreover, since culture is a dynamic process, the cultural signifiers of ethnic identity often shift in meaning over time. The outcome is that not all members of an ethnic group assign the same level of importance to specific cultural signifiers. Among the Chosŏnjok, this disparity is most pronounced during the period from 1910-1932, when they were “Chinese-Japanese-Koreans” and each person carried within himself different proportions of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean identities.

**The Diaspora Perspective**

One problem with relativist view of ethnicity is its tendency to over-emphasize the positive side of strong ethnic boundaries and to idealize the cooperative nature of

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ethnic groups. In response to this shortcoming, scholars have been examining the concept of “diaspora” which emphasizes the processes of hybridity, fluidity, and creolization that are present in ethnic cultures.

Although “diaspora” is currently a popular academic topic, no global understanding has been reached as to the exact meaning and implications of the term. “Diaspora,” which once described the dispersed Jewish population, now applies to a variety of dispersed populations such as: immigrants, expatriates, refugees, and overseas communities.18 “Diaspora” as a concept has also developed a multiplicity of meanings: to describe a collective of people, a condition, a process, a field of inquiry, or an attribute. Academic journals such as Diaspora and Ethnic and Racial Studies relate diaspora to a wide range of topics including globalization, identity politics, transnationalism, orientalism, post-colonial theory, and subaltern studies. In recent years, academics have begun to narrow the concept of diaspora to examine three core elements: (1) physical dispersion across state borders, (2) orientation to a homeland—whether real or imaginary, and (3) the tension between ethnic boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion.19

(1) A diaspora is physically dispersed across state borders. A diaspora population does not reside within the political borders of its homeland. The Chosŏnjok crossed a small river and found themselves in an alien geopolitical realm. Interestingly, Yanbian was historically known as Kando (間島, Jiandao in Chinese), which means “the land in between,” and the Chosŏnjok have been strongly influenced by the ebbs and flows taking place in both Korea and China. Because they occupied a unique border

space, they engaged in a different set of attitude dynamics than their brethren on the peninsula or their Chinese neighbors. Over time, they constructed a distinctive ethnic identity based on their unique set of historical experiences.

(2) A diaspora has an orientation to a homeland—whether real or imaginary.

The concept of homeland orientation has been emphasized to various degrees by different scholars. William Safran focused heavily on homeland orientation and insisted that a diaspora maintains one or more of the following attitudes about its homeland: has a collective memory or myth about the homeland, regards the homeland as the true home and as the place to where one would return, is collectively committed to maintaining or restoring the homeland, and continues to relate (whether personally or vicariously) to the homeland. More recent discussions have de-emphasized homeland orientation by making the homeland not a place to which one wants to return, but rather an imagined community whose culture is re-created in diverse locations.

The Chosŏnjok have always remained stubbornly attached to the idea of the Korean peninsula as their homeland. But the homeland at the center of their imagination was Chosŏn, the country that existed before Japanese colonial rule. This attachment to Chosŏn motivated them to take a very active role in resisting Japanese colonialism; they continued to carry the torch for Korean independence even after the flame had died out on the peninsula. When the Korean peninsula divided into North and South in 1945 and the Korean War followed in 1950, the Chosŏnjok were troubled by the concept of a divided homeland. By 1988, however, the Chosŏnjok began to identify with South Korea as their symbolic homeland, thus reinventing their historical memory.

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(3) Tensions between ethnic boundary-maintenance and boundary-erosion.

Recent studies have been focusing on how, and to what extent, ethnic boundaries are maintained over an extended period of time by second, third, and subsequent generations. I believe that a diachronic approach is useful to show how ethnic groups transform their ethnic identity by changing the shape and size of their ethnic boundaries. The Chosŏnjok, over the course of their history, have shown their ethnic boundaries to be extremely resilient, far more so than those of other Korean diaspora groups worldwide.

Scholars have also been examining the factors that cause ethnic boundary-erosion. Ethnic boundaries can erode from the inside due to people's desire to forget or suppress their ethnic identity, or to give a higher loyalty to non-ethnic forms of communities. Ethnic boundaries can be damaged from the outside through heavy-handed state measures such as: military repression, racism, exclusion, and forced assimilation. In the case of the Chosŏnjok, their experiences with Japanese colonialism and the Chinese Cultural Revolution greatly weakened their ethnic boundaries and at times fractured their ethnic identity.

In recent years, diaspora analysis has fused with academic literature on transnationalism: the idea that social formations transcend nation-states and span territorial borders. The transnational optic does not frame the local and global in binary opposition, but instead views the nation-state and transnational practices as mutually constitutive. As such, transnationalism opens up the possibility of examining how a diaspora embodies a variety of characteristics, trajectories, experiences, and meanings as it connects simultaneously with several communities. A transnational view of ethnic identity formation looks not only at the nation-state, but also factors such as global
economics and communications as well as international politics, social trends and ideas in order to examine how an ethnic group positions itself within these larger movements. A transnational perspective is critical to understanding the Chosŏnjok because they are the product of several interlocking histories and cultures. Because they belong at the same time to several frames of reference, they have the ability to think and act at multiple scales as well as to fashion transnational social practices. The Chosŏnjok have always understood the significance of being “Korean” in the wider discourses of race, migration, international politics, and global economics, and this thesis will highlight such connections.

**Methodology**

In this thesis, I will illustrate how ethnic identity is shaped by a variety of complex forces and encounters, a complexity that master narratives have simplified. The Chosŏnjok cannot be pigeonholed into analytical categories such as “a Chinese minority,” “a Korean expatriate group,” or even “Korean-Chinese.” In particular, I challenge the dominant view in South Korea that Korean ethnic identity results from a homogeneous race and primordial culture. My examination of the Chosŏnjok will blur this assumption of a homogeneous ethnic identity and show how ethnic groups are the product of a perpetually evolving conflict among symbolic practices, material practices, and internal and external relations of force. To achieve a nuanced analysis, I will combine the approaches of world history and ethnographic history with a goal toward analyzing the Chosŏnjok’s historical situation from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. A world history approach considers transnational forces such as migration,
economics, cultural flows, and ecology. I will use the world history optic to examine economic, political, and situational factors of East Asia in order to contextualize the external forces that influenced the ethnic identity of the Chosŏnjok. An ethnographic approach will bring out the personal, close-up narratives that show how the macro-processes of world history have been understood by the Chosŏnjok. An ethnographic optic will examine the Chosŏnjok’s use of agency, symbols, literature and everyday practices to show how their ethnic identity is made in consort with various forces and encounters.

This world history + ethnographic history method will require that I tell the history at various times from a macro or micro perspective, depending on the story that needs to be told. In pursuing this narrative strategy, I am influenced by Bruno Latour who observes that the macro perspective is no more important than the micro perspective, and advises that we must naturally follow the actors and the networks they create in order to let the history reveal itself. 21 For this reason, I do not impose an overarching theory or grand narrative, but try to tell the history of the Chosŏnjok in a way that highlights their unique setting and issues. If there are theories that help to explain a particular historical situation, I will apply them to the extent that they enrich the history of the Chosŏnjok.

We shall see that at times, the direction of the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic identity is driven by a combination of economic conditions and cultural practices that reinforce one other, where an economic battle ends up becoming an ethnic battle. At other times, it is the political situation that drives the Chosŏnjok to mobilize along the lines of ethnicity. It is my conclusion since history is fluid and culture is mobile, that no singular force drives

ethnic identity, although it is possible for a particular force to have more weight during a particular historical period.

Finally, the world history + ethnographic history method is also useful for giving a voice to the Chosŏnjok in discourses concerning modernity. Modernity in Asia has historically involved the transformation of people into participants of nation-states, complex economic institutions, scientific rationalism, and progress. Both South Korean and Chinese histories tend to view modernity as a matter taking place within their particular national borders, and do not give much emphasis to the Chosŏnjok because they are considered to be a mere border people. In this thesis, I invert the center-margin relationship of the South Korean and Chinese discourses by arguing that the Chosŏnjok have a great deal to add to the modernity discourse precisely because of their position as a border people. For over a century, they have had to rework competing conceptions of culture, history, progress, and nationality while at the same time keeping alive the flame of their minjoksim. The Chosŏnjok should be appreciated for showing us how to create a malleable community that can maintain identities rooted in a traditional past while deftly negotiating complicated changes in the larger world.
Chapter 2: Crossing the River
(1870-1910)

The political border between China and Korea is demarcated by two rivers which flow from the Paektu Mountains (북두산, Changbaishan in Chinese: 長白山): the Tumen flows eastward into the Sea of Japan, and the Yalu flows westward into the Yellow Sea. The rivers are not particularly wide or fast flowing, so one can easily cross the border in a small boat or by foot in the wintertime, and in some places it is possible to wade across. China’s Qing Dynasty considered the land north of these rivers as the sacred birthplace of the Manchus and in 1677 closed off Manchuria as a Qing preserve in order to monopolize the trade in ginseng and fur and to maintain the purity of the Manchu race. To the south of the rivers, however, landless Korean peasants looked across this fluid border and saw fertile virgin farm land brimming with the hope of full stomachs and a better life. All they had to do was cross the river.

Yet the river contained political and psychological barriers. If the Koreans stayed on Korean territory, they could negotiate their familiar political and social systems, but if they crossed the border, they became subject to many unknowns: punishment by a foreign government, confiscation of their harvests, and possible harm by bandits. The Korean government also forbade its subjects from leaving Korean soil. A few brave Koreans did cross the river surreptitiously, when border guards were not on duty, in order to hunt, gather ginseng, or plant a few crops. It was not until the famine years of the 1870s that the decision to cross the river came to a large number of Koreans. Thousands

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crossed into the fertile plain called Kando (間島, Jiandao in Chinese, now called Yanbian) where they settled the land, raised crops, and established villages.

The early Chosŏnjok legitimated their entry into Yanbian and their occupancy of Chinese land by relying on invented traditions, both ancient and modern, which demonstrated their historical claim to the territory. Ancient Korean myths revealed that Mount Paektu was the birthplace of the Koreans’ mythic ancestor, Tan’gun, whose mother was a she-bear turned woman and whose father was heavenly king. Another ancient story claimed that Chumong, the founder of Koguryŏ Dynasty (37 B.C.-668 A.D.) was born in Manchuria, crossed the Tumen River on a bridge created by fish and tortoises, and founded a new capital in P’yŏngyang. The Koguryŏ kingdom at its apex encompassed what is present-day Jilin and Liaoning provinces in China as well as the northern and central regions of the Korean peninsula. The Korean peasants’ knowledge of these popular myths may have empowered them because they were able to position Korea’s mythic ancestors as having the same Paektu Mountain birthplace as the Qing ancestor, Aisin Gioro,23 therefore, they could claim equal standing with the Manchus in their rights to the territory. More important to the Chosŏnjok, however, was their own pioneer legacy of suffering and courage which strengthened their claims to the Yanbian land, as expressed in “The Moving Song”:

Ox moves slowly, the cart rattles along.
After each step, ox shakes its head three times, not wanting to go further.
Throwing all else away, wife taking baskets and pots on her head,
Silently we go, searching or fleeing.

23 Aisin Gioro, was born along Chŏnji Lake in the Paektu Mountains (in Chinese: Tianchi, 天池 in Changbaishan, 長白山). A celestial virgin named Fokolum ate a wondrous fruit then gave birth to a remarkable looking boy, who then grew into a fine warrior and floated down the river in a boat where he was ordained king by the people. H.E.M. James. The Long White Mountain. New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1968, p. 31.
Landless, we are looking for land without an owner.  
Yi or Qing government, we only want some land without an owner.  
Ox, look not east or west, to heaven or sea, just look straight ahead.  
The further away from the government office, the better we will be.  
Dear, do not worry, we will find the ideal place.  
We will go to spread rice seeds and plant rice.  
The sun will shine brightly.\(^{24}\)

A more personal pioneer story is told by Kim Hak-ch’ŏl in his 1953 short story “Striking Roots.” In the late 19th century, Kim’s youthful grandfather took his young wife and baby and tumbled like an acorn until he landed in Yanbian. Since he could not afford an ox to pull his plow, he dragged the plow himself and placed his young son on top of the ploughshare as a weight. Although he was ridiculed as “the tail-less ox” by his neighbors, he single-handedly carved out the land which three generations of Kim’s called their “native home” (kohyang, 고향, 故郷).\(^{25}\) Through such myths and hardship tales, the Chosŏnjok asserted their rights to a land that was not theirs to claim and began calling it kohyang. In 1881, when the Qing government conducted its first land survey of the region, they found over 10,000 Chosŏnjok living in Yanbian.\(^{26}\)

The Koreans did not enter Yanbian purely on the strength of myths alone; the overlapping interests of international politics were also involved. In 1860, Czarist Russia forced the Qing court to cede some 35,000 square miles of territory in far northern Manchuria (north of the Amur River and east of Ussuri River) and began building military bases. To prevent further Russian incursions into Chinese territory, the Qing decided as a national defense measure to open Manchuria to Chinese immigration. However, settlers from northern China could not reach Yanbian due to the difficulty of

crossing the Paektu Mountains, so Koreans were permitted to settle the Yanbian region. The border closure along the Tumen and Yalu rivers was abolished by the Qing in the 1870s, and by 1883, the Korean government also stopped monitoring the border. With the border controls lifted, Koreans flooded across the river and settled in Manchuria, an endless plain four times the size of the mountainous Korean peninsula.

*The New World Across the River*

The main reason pushing Koreans into Yanbian during the late 19th century was famine. However, other reasons such as the near bankruptcy of the Chosŏn government, peasant rebellions, and the oppressive Confucian social structure also affected the Koreans' decision to move to Manchuria. First, by moving to Yanbian, Korean peasants could escape the rigid social hierarchy and oppressive rule of the aristocratic yangban (양반, 阮班) class. Korea's Chosŏn Dynasty (also known as Yi Dynasty) was a rigidly stratified agrarian society where people were born into their social status and there was little room for upward social mobility. Peasants, who comprised two-thirds of the population, eked out a subsistence on small plots while the aristocratic yangban owned the majority of the land and wealth, controlled national politics, and by the mid-19th century were reviled for their corruption and misrule. In such restrictive circumstances, the peasants adopted a number of strategies for survival such as planting potatoes as a famine food and developing the kye (계, 契), a voluntary mutual assistance association that pooled resources to pay taxes, make repairs, or purchase farm tools for shared use. Despite the peasants' efforts at self-help, escalating taxes in the mid-19th century caused

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peasants to lose their lands and demoted them to agricultural laborers, handicraft workers, or miners. In poor harvest years, peasants abandoned their villages to take up lives of vagrant wandering or to engage in slash-and-burn agriculture on rocky hillsides.\textsuperscript{27}

In contrast to the economic and social frustrations of being a peasant in Korea, those who looked across the river envisioned a land free of yangban, free of oppressive taxation, and a chance to obtain some land of their own and to forge an independent life. The Qing government did not interfere with the early Korean settlements so long as the Koreans abstained from aggression, promised fidelity to the Qing emperor, and paid taxes to the Chinese state. With such leniency, the Chosŏnjok found themselves relatively free to develop social and economic niches for themselves in the Chinese landscape, working small plots of land for Qing landlords or cultivating private farms on unclaimed lands.

Second, the Korean migrants sought to escape Korea’s economic disaster and to seek a fresh start in Yanbian. The Chosŏn Dynasty employed a regressive land tax system that caused low-yielding lands (held by peasants) to be taxed at a much higher proportional rate than high-yielding lands (held by yangban). In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, tax levies were increased by local and national governments until they reached three to four times the legal rates.\textsuperscript{28} Furthermore, the Chosŏn Dynasty—in a desperate measure to increase state revenue—experimented with disastrous monetary policies which fueled high inflation. Such economic policies nearly bankrupted the government and aggravated peasant poverty.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} Eckert, et. al. eds., p. 214.
In contrast to dire economic conditions in Korea, those who migrated to Yanbian were in a unique position to market their agricultural skills to Qing landlords who needed farmers to convert their virgin lands into fields. Qing landlords were willing to lend the Chosŏnjok land, seeds and food until harvest time, and in exchange the Chosŏnjok reclaimed the wilderness and lived rent-free for three years.\(^\text{30}\)

Third, a rash of popular uprisings took place in 19th century Korea, of which the most spectacular was the Tonghak Rebellion of 1894-1895, a nationwide rebellion that almost overthrew the Chosŏn Dynasty. Tonghak leaders were able to translate the peasants’ mass frustration into group violence by advocating the overthrow of the state’s Confucian orthodoxy, the endorsement of social equality, and the removal the foreigners and commercialization which threatened their agrarian society.

In contrast to the revolutionary environment on the peninsula at the time, the Yanbian landscape was removed from the politics of Korea. Moreover, Chosŏnjok were not disturbed by Beijing, which had more immediate and serious concerns to deal with in central China such as the rise of the Boxer peasant movement and international political tensions with Japan which led to Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. The Chosŏnjok had their own set of concerns: that of building a diaspora community in a new land.

**Ethnic Boundaries of the Diaspora Community**

In contrast to the Chinese single men who went to Manchuria to make their fortune, the Koreans went to Yanbian with their families and with the intention of cultivating the land. The labor-intensive demands of agriculture meant that the

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Chosŏnjok became economically invested in the new land and felt a strong need to protect their fledgling communities. They constructed ethnic boundaries which tightly bound their villages. They maintained their ethnic boundaries by carrying on their traditional Korean lifestyle and by practicing an “inward-oriented” attitude. In economic terms, inward-orientation means that peasant communities attempt to reproduce their needs without becoming dependent on outsiders. In social terms, inward-orientation means that people view themselves as a relatively powerless group in a hostile society.31

The Chosŏnjok's attempts at self-protection caused them to establish social structures which perpetuated a way of life similar to that which they had practiced in Korea. They established *kye* associations as well labor exchange practices such as the *ture* (두레) in which a group of about a dozen families in a village exchanged labor on a permanent basis, covering activities from repairing irrigation channels to organizing funerals. Besides cooperative labor teams, they organized self-governing village political organizations called *hyangdang* (향당) which had three primary functions: to insure that all members of the community fulfilled their cooperative labor duties and that all received their rights; to settle disputes and maintain internal law and order; and to buffer their weak immigrant communities from the impact of strong outside forces. In addition to perpetuating Korean social structures, they also maintained Korean cultural traditions. They lived in Korean-style *choga* (초가, 草家, straw-thatched roof) houses, wore Korean clothing, ate Korean food, and continued to speak the Korean language. They engaged in ritual activities and festivals connected with the four seasons and cycle.

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of rice production such as the autumn moon festival (ch’usŏk, 추석, 秋夕).

While the Chosŏnjok maintained strong ethnic boundaries, these boundaries were porous and permitted exchanges with the Qing in Yanbian. The Chosŏnjok had to build personal connections with the Qing in order to obtain farmland and supplies. This meant having to overcome language barriers and adapt to a new socio-political climate. Nevertheless, they did not consider themselves to be Chinese. They maintained a diaspora attitude about the idea of the homeland: their actual lives were being lived on Chinese territory while simultaneously they envisioned Korea as their home. Their position as a border people strengthened their emotional attachment to Korea due to the territorial contiguity of Yanbian and the flow of people and goods across the river.

**Rice Production as a Point of Ethnic Conflict**

The Chosŏnjok’s ethnic boundaries were enhanced by the nature of their agricultural pursuits, in particular, paddy rice farming which they introduced to the Yanbian region. Because rice cultivation was labor-intensive, the constraints of manpower and water control imposed a degree of technical uniformity, cohesion, and cooperation among the Yanbian villagers. The had to pool their capital into kye, practice the *ture* labor exchange system, and organize self-governing village *hyangdang* in order to maximize their manpower and successfully cultivate paddy rice in Manchuria.

The Chosŏnjok’s abilities in paddy rice agriculture was welcomed by the Qing landlords because the wet-field technique of rice farming was more profitable than
Chinese-style dry-field farming, yielding twice as much rice per acre. Furthermore, the Chosŏnjoint used swampy lands that were considered unsuitable by Chinese farmers, and in doing so increased the acreage of agricultural lands in Yanbian. The Chosŏnjoint farmers also maintained a peculiar division of labor in agriculture with the Chinese farmers in Yanbian. While both groups cultivated millet, soybeans, and kaoliang (sorghum), the Chinese also grew barley, wheat, indigo and sesame. The Chosŏnjoint specialized in rye, tobacco, hemp, and rice. With this division of labor in agriculture, particularly with paddy cultivation carried out exclusively by the Chosŏnjoint, the early Chosŏnjoint settlers’ relations with their Qing landlords and Chinese neighbors could be described as “symbiotic”: the ethnic groups occupied different niches but remained in close ecological interdependence because they provided important goods and services for each other.

The Chosŏnjoint, who were enjoying a symbiotic relationship in Yanbian, felt that rice cultivation generated hope for a brighter livelihood as expressed in this song of the period:

On Manchu land’s wide fields
Rice grows, rice grows.
The place where we are growing has rice.
The rice growing place is where we are.
What do we own
But a hoe and a bucket.
With the hoe we dig and the bucket we carry.
On this rugged Manchu land we spread rice seeds
And try to build our living.

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34 Barth, p. 19.
Nevertheless, paddy rice farming in Manchuria was not an easy task since the Chosŏnjok had to reclaim the grassland and dig irrigation ditches in a climate characterized by bitter cold and short frost-free periods. As soon as the winter ice began to melt, the farmers had to dig irrigation channels then divert water to the fields by moving branches, stones, and soil from the chilly water. Fields had to be sown from late May to early June. Some households used ox-drawn plows, while others depended on spades, hoes, and sickles to work the land.36

Despite the hard work undertaken by the Chosŏnjok, most of them were tenant farmers who paid rent ranging between 30% and 50% of their produce. They also had to provide non-agricultural labor to their landlords (e.g., for house repairs or ceremonies) and supply as much fuel as their landlords required. But overall, conditions of tenancy in Yanbian were far better than in Korea. A Chosŏnjok tenant who borrowed uncultivated barren land was allowed to reclaim and cultivate it for three years rent-free, while for cultivated land he had to make a contract of tenancy before he could use it. A Chosŏnjok who obtained Chinese nationality could become a landowner, but because attaining Chinese nationality was a difficult process, most Chosŏnjok did not seek nationality. Those who could not obtain positions as tenants or landowners worked as field hands doing planting, weeding, and harvesting, but their wages were much lower than their Chinese counterparts. A Chosŏnjok adult earned less than a working Chinese child.37

With the establishment of an economic relationship centered on paddy farming, the history of Chosŏnjok became highly entwined with rice production. The rapid

agricultural development of Yanbian, due primarily to the Chosŏnjok’s reclaiming of wilderness lands, increased the agricultural value of the land in the region. As a result, there developed a competition over resources and wealth between the Qing and the Chosŏnjok. This led to a breakdown of the symbiotic relationship, since any variation in the actions of one group has effects on the other. \(^{38}\) The Qing landlords attempted to control newly cultivated agricultural lands and profit from their tenants while the Chosŏnjok peasants desired greater economic autonomy. Qing landlords imposed increasingly heavy rents on their Chosŏnjok tenants, often 60% of production, as well as fees for the cost of seed and equipment. The tenants were also subject to unusual government levies on salt, cow ownership, public gatherings, doorsills and chimneys. \(^{39}\) The combination of high rents and extortionate fees began to make life difficult for Chosŏnjok farmers. Lands which had been cultivated by the Chosŏnjok as their own became subject to confiscation if they lacked Chinese nationality. The Chosŏnjok farmers became susceptible to labor exploitation because they possessed limited political and economic rights in China, and as a result, they faced impoverishment.

The break-up of the symbiotic relationship challenged the Chosŏnjok’s sense of local autonomy. The Yanbian land which they had cultivated with their p’ittam (피 닫, blood and sweat) was being taken from them by the Qing landlords and government. The Chosŏnjok, in an effort to empower themselves, relied more heavily on their ethnic boundaries to exert their economic autonomy and to resist assimilation. When the Qing

\(^{37}\) Tsurushima (1979), pp. 5-7.
\(^{38}\) Barth, p. 20.
government decreed a Sinicization law in 1883, ordering the Chosŏnjok to cut their hair, wear Chinese clothes, and accept Chinese nationality, the Chosŏnjok protested.

**Hairstyle: The Politicization of a Cultural Style**

Qing China reacted to the growing migration of Koreans to Yanbian by enacting measures which would assure the allegiance of the Chosŏnjok to the Chinese government, Sinicize them, and grant them Chinese nationality. The naturalization process was simple: wear black Manchu clothing and cut one’s hair into a Manchu queue, a long braid with the forehead hair shaved off. In contrast, Korean men wore their hair in a topknot, a ponytail wrapped tightly into a knot at the top of the head. Korean boys traditionally wore their hair in a danggi (다기), a braid like a queue, except that the forehead was not shaved. The Koreans’ regard for their hairstyle was apparent even to foreign travelers of the 19th century such as Isabella Bird Bishop:

> The topknot is more to a Korean than a queue is to the Chinese. The queue to the latter may be a sign of subjugation or loyalty to the government and that is all, and the small Chinese boy wears it as soon as hair is long enough to plait. To the Korean, the Top Knot means nationality, antiquity (some say five centuries, others 2000 years), sanctity derived from antiquity, entrance on manhood socially and legally. 40

The Chosŏnjok who wore white clothes and a topknot/danggi, were upset when the Korean hairstyle was selected by the Qing as a target for elimination. Their attitude can be understood by examining the concept of assimilation. Assimilation is the decline of an ethnic distinction by a group and its corollary cultural and social differences due to the

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active efforts of the group members. The Chosŏnjok were assimilated to the extent that they were willing to let certain Chinese practices seep through their ethnic boundaries. However, when the Qing government tried to force assimilation measures through the ethnic boundaries, the Chosŏnjok rallied around the cultural symbol of the topknot/danggi and imbued it with political meanings relating to the preservation of age-old native customs and Korean identity in order to tighten their ethnic boundaries.

According to Pukhando, a semi-autobiographical novel about four generations in Yanbian, the Qing mandates led to conflicting emotions among the Chosŏnjok as they struggled to with the assimilation required of them in the hairstyle mandate:

Here in Feifengchun, the May Fifth Festival has been a big festive event with wrestling, lion games, rope-walking. This year, however, the ongoing bickering with the Qing people has caused the Festival to be cancelled...

The day was fine, so as a day off from fieldwork, Ch'angyun and his friend Hyŏndo, who was visiting from a nearby village, took their A-frames and went to gather fuel.

Ch'angyun untied from his A-frame the lunch his mother had made.

‘Why is it that you haven’t cut your hair?’

Ch’angyun, who was opening his lunch, had braided hair worn as a black danggi. Staring at him was Hyŏndo whose own hair was closely shaven. His haircut appeared recent; one could clearly see the line where his hair used to be parted.

Ch’angyun, whose mind was troubled about not being able to cut his hair, found his face blushing and replied, ‘My Big Pa (grandfather) won’t let me do it.’

‘Your Big Pa?’

‘Yeah.’

Hyōndo, with a perplexed expression said to himself, ‘Your Big Pa, who has even been to Paektu Mountain, won’t let you...’ Hyōndo’s ears had been filled by his own grandfather’s many war stories involving Ch’angyun’s grandfather, so in his young heart he greatly admired Elder Yi Hanbok. He had no idea that the nearly sixty-year-old was not displaying elderly obstinacy as he thought, but that Ch’angyun’s grandfather still feared the tail-like hair of the Qing.

‘That may be, but he won’t let me cut my hair,’ Ch’angyun replied as he sat next to Hyōndo and opened his lunch.

‘How can that be?’ Hyōndo suspected that Ch’angyun’s grandfather had a profound reason for prohibiting Ch’angyun from cutting his hair.

But that was the reason. In Hyōndo’s hometown, adults and children alike all had to cut their hair. And it was carried out because Hyōndo’s grandfather, who was the village elder, gave the order.42

The Chosŏnjok, who thought of themselves as an extension of the Korean state and not as a part of the Chinese state, tended to perceive the Qing mandate as hostile action by a foreign government aimed at disrupting their community. Since they lacked political and economic powers in Yanbian, they mobilized themselves along the lines of ethnic nationalism. They claimed that the Koreans must not shave their hair because Confucian precepts stated that one’s body is received from one’s parents, and consequently, filial duty required that one refuse to inflict any damage upon one’s body. The political message behind the Chosŏnjok’s protest was that they would resist foreign pressures which challenged their established way of life.43

The problem for the Chosŏnjok was that the Qing queue was required to obtain Chinese nationality, which itself was a precondition for landownership. Since without

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43 In a parallel scenario, Koreans on the peninsula engaged in protests when in 1895 King Kojong cut off his topknot (under the influence of a pro-Japanese cabinet) and ordered all male citizens to do the same. Chong-Sik Lee. The Politics of Korean Nationalism. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, p. 48.
Chinese nationality the Chosŏnjok could risk confiscation of their lands and face deportation, in practice they had to achieve a compromise between the realities of losing their livelihood and of losing their ethnic identity. Chosŏnjok responded to the Qing hair and clothing edicts in the following ways: 30% wore “Qing hair but Korean clothes” or else wore “Qing clothes and hat in public but Korean clothes at home”; 50% disregarded the Qing mandate and continued to wear Korean clothing and hairstyle; and only 20% complied fully with the Qing edict. 44 Despite the Chosŏnjok’s active resistance, the Qing government, which was suffering from internal weakness during the last years of its dynasty, did not have the military strength to evict the Chosŏnjok or to prevent their ever growing migration into Yanbian.

In the Chosŏnjok’s early communities, their ethnic boundaries were tightly reinforced by myths, traditional customs, and agricultural practices. They were not receptive to the Chinese political and social systems that they generally perceived as antagonistic to their inward-oriented social order. By 1905, however, the Chosŏnjok began to realize that their inward-oriented worldview could not survive in the face of Manchuria’s growing importance as a site of conflict for the surrounding Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian nations.

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Manchuria, with its abundant natural resources and vast arable lands, was a prize territory for China’s rivals. It was an ideal hinterland for a core nation’s economic development and could absorb and sustain a nation’s excess population. China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 exposed Manchuria to a takeover by Russia and Japan. Russia took advantage of the Qing government’s weakness in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 and attempted to occupy southern Manchuria. When in 1905, Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War, Japan established a political protectorate over the Korean peninsula and also took over 550 miles of the Russian-built Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria from Lushun (Port Arthur) to Changchun, which was renamed the South Manchurian Railway (满鉄, Mantetsu). Thus, Japan strategically positioned itself across the southern borders of Manchuria and became the preeminent foreign threat to Manchuria.

Yanbian, which lay on the border region between Korea and the rest of Manchuria, became a primary stepping stone for Japanese entry into Manchuria. The Japanese army set up a field office in Yanbian in 1907 on the pretext that it was the duty of the Japanese government to eradicate Korean nationalists who opposed the protectorate and to shelter its Korean subjects in Manchuria. Japan claimed that all ethnic Koreans—whether they were inside or outside Korea—were Japanese subjects. Japan even went so far as to claim that Yanbian was Korean territory. Thus, Yanbian became the centerpiece of two opposing, overlapping borders created by China and Japan. China raced to block Japan’s expansion into Manchuria by tripling its army and
police presence in Yanbian in an effort to force a separation between the Chosŏnjok and Japanese power. China wanted the Chosŏnjok to become Chinese nationals and offered incentives such as: exemption from land tax, permission to cultivate wasteland free of charge, and the right to purchase tillable land at wasteland prices. Japan tried to foil this plan by barring the Chosŏnjok from filing for Chinese nationality and by encouraging the migration of Japan-friendly Koreans into Yanbian. Since the Chosŏnjok outnumbered the Chinese in Yanbian by 3-to-1, if Japan could sway the political allegiance of the Chosŏnjok, the region would fall easily into Japanese hands. For the next two decades, both China and Japan applied heavy pressures on the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic boundaries as each tried to co-opt the Chosŏnjok in their struggles to control Manchuria. As a result, the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic boundaries were fractured during this period and they became “Chinese-Japanese-Koreans.”

The Kando Treaty

In 1909, the Kando (Jiandao) Treaty between China and Japan recognized Yanbian as Chinese territory, but the Chosŏnjok as Japanese subjects. Chosŏnjok had the right to reside in Yanbian and own property without becoming Chinese nationals so long as they complied with Chinese laws. Japan was permitted to establish consulates and consular police in Longjing and four Yanbian towns, which were initially staffed with 76 officers. But since most Chosŏnjok did not live in these towns, Japan used these consulates as bases for extensive operations in Manchuria and freely transgressed

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45 Hyun Ok Park, p. 209.
Chinese sovereignty. The Chinese began to blame the Chosŏnjok for Japan’s growing presence in Manchuria.

One Chosŏnjok who was incensed with the Kando Treaty was Sin Ch’acho, who gained prominence through his newspaper writings. In 1910, following Korea’s annexation to the Japanese empire, Sin fled to Manchuria where he wrote about anti-Japanese nationalism. He lambasted Japan for using its protectorate powers to negotiate away Korea’s historical claims to Yanbian. In his writings, Sin rekindled memories of a lost “Korean” Manchuria by recalling that the Korean ancestor T’angun was born in Manchuria and that the Koguryo Kingdom once embraced Manchuria. His argument melted the territorial boundaries in conventional histories that represented Korea as a peninsula and shifted the focus of historical inquiry toward minjok (민족, 民族), a racially defined nation. Sin urged the Chosŏnjok to think of themselves as an extension of the Korean nation, remain faithful to their homeland, maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and solidarity, and not become subject to the competing political claims of China and Japan.47

Japanese Economic Expansion into Manchuria

With Japan’s acquisition of the South Manchurian Railway (“SMR”) in 1905, its entry into the Manchurian marketplace was swift and formidable. The SMR vigorously expanded its operations beyond freight and passenger trains to include coal mines, port facilities, warehouses, hotels, schools, hospitals, and public utilities.48 The SMR allowed

Japanese industries and marketers to enter Manchuria with manufactured goods, banks, factories, and department stores. Japan gained control over the economic markets in Manchuria, beginning with cotton yarn and fabric then expanding to other commodities. By 1934, over 70% of Manchuria’s imports were from Japan.49

In Yanbian, Japanese commerce and capital also took over the region. Commerce requiring capital investment (e.g. breweries or flour mills) had been run by Chinese, but these could not compete with Japanese industries. Chosŏnjok industry consisted mostly of handicrafts and cottage work which provided supplementary income for agricultural families and helped to keep the household at, or slightly above, the subsistence level. When Japanese businesses monopolized the production and distribution of commodities which were important to the Chosŏnjok and which were in short supply in Yanbian (e.g. cloth), they eventually nullified the Chosŏnjok handicraft economy and created a dependency on Japanese-made consumer products. Furthermore, Japanese capital offered through development companies, pro-Japanese associations, and credit unions came to be the primary means for Chosŏnjok farmers to obtain funds to acquire land, fund their spring planting, and obtain necessities. Since the majority of Chosŏnjok farmers in Manchuria were poor, they put up as collateral a share of their upcoming rice harvest. The average poor farmer who owned between 15 and 60 acres of land held an average debt which comprised almost one-third of his household income. The interest rates were extortionate with a minimum rate of 3 percent per month; therefore, it was difficult for farmers to maintain the interest payments on their loans and impossible for

them to repay their debt principal.\textsuperscript{50} The usual scenario was for the farmers to sink more heavily in debt with each passing year.

The SMR was not only a foray into the Manchurian marketplace, but also served to extract Manchuria’s agriculture for the Japanese market. As Japan changed its economic role to focus on industrialization, Manchuria became Japan’s agricultural hinterland. Japan’s demand for soybeans and rice tilted Manchuria’s agricultural production in favor of these products. Prices for Manchurian agricultural products became closely linked to market conditions in Osaka and Tokyo. Yanbian’s farmers were badly affected by a sharp fall in rice prices from 1919 to 1922, and again from 1925 to 1931 (the price of rice in 1931 was only 39\% of the 1925 price).\textsuperscript{51} While big landlords—such as the Japanese-operated Oriental Development Company—were able to reap benefits from the increased commercialization of agriculture, small farmers were forced to sell their crops for survival rather than for profit. The Chosŏnjok farmers found their subsistence margin further reduced and had to sell their rice in order to be able to eat millet. Many small farmers lost their landholdings and were demoted to tenant farmers. Among the 53,000 farming households residing in Yanbian during the years 1925 to 1928, the number of tenant farmers tripled. There were 11,751 tenant households in 1925; 12,296 tenant households in 1926; and 34,274 tenant households in 1928.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, the Chosŏnjok’s interactions with the new economic institutions forced open their inward-oriented economic structures and bound them to a wage-based, cash-crop agricultural system.

The Japanese railroads and commerce accelerated the incorporation of Manchuria as an economic colony of Japan within the world-system thesis developed by Immanuel Wallerstein who argued that as capitalism develops, it transcends national boundaries. Core nations develop the infrastructure and market institutions of the periphery regions in order to tie the periphery to serve the interests of the core.\textsuperscript{53} Japanese capitalism first encompassed Korea as a periphery, then Manchuria through its maximization of rapid exchange times in market relations with these neighboring territories. Railroads were the prime medium for integrating these peripheral regions to the Japanese metropole.\textsuperscript{54}

The Chosŏnjok realized that the modernity brought by Japanese railroads, capital and trade was fraught with shortcomings, corruption, and monopolistic practices. In particular, they saw the SMR’s expansion into Yanbian as a threat to their community. When the SMR began building a railway line through Yanbian in the 1920s to link the Manchurian city of Jilin with the Korean city of Hoeryŏng, the Chosŏnjok realized that this rail line would be the linchpin connecting the Manchurian and Korean railways and securing Japanese transportation control over the entire Sea of Japan region. This rail line would allow the Japanese to bypass the Russian-controlled port of Vladivostok and would provide a much shorter shipping line than through Port Arthur. Moreover, Yanbian’s coal, soybeans, rice, millet, wood, and raw materials would become easily available for the economic development of the Japanese Empire. The Chosŏnjok rallied and in October 1928, Chosŏnjok farmers, students and businessmen in Longjing and Yanji united to demonstrate against the construction of the railway. They sent a petition

\textsuperscript{52} Chosŏnjok Ryaksa, pp. 75-77.
to the Jilin provincial government stating: "The people will build the railroad. Why allow foreigners to build and use what could be owned by the nation?" When the petition failed, they resorted to violence, burning nineteen houses, destroying four bridges, and destroying one electric station. Despite such protests, the Jilin-Dunhua portion of the line was competed in 1928, the Yanji-Tumen portion was completed in 1929, and the gap in the line between Dunhua and Yanji was completed in 1933.56

**Competing Political Hegemonies in Yanbian**

After the collapse of the Qing Empire in 1911, Manchuria became a political battleground for several competitors: Republican China, the warlord Zhang Zuolin, and Japan. Republican China presented itself as a national regime, but its reach in Manchuria was weak, and the region came to be controlled by Zhang Zuolin with the help of Japanese financial assistance, arms, and military advisers. By this time, Japan had officially made Korea into a colony and its power over the Chosŏnjok had also strengthened considerably. Therefore, when Republican China encouraged the Chosŏnjok to become Chinese nationals, Japan forbade Chosŏnjok from becoming naturalized by labeling them subjects of the Japanese Empire. In 1915, after Republican China’s President, Yuan Shikai, received Japan’s infamous Twenty-One Demands, Japan acquired the right to lease land, open businesses, invest in joint ventures, and operate mines in Manchuria. As to the status of Chosŏnjok, China did not recognize Japan’s sovereignty over them, but Japan continued to monitor the Chosŏnjok and increased its

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55 *Chosŏnjok Ryaksa*, p. 92.
consular police force in Yanbian to over 100 men. The warlord Zhang Zuolin did not like the increased Japanese and Korean presence in Manchuria, so he sought to fill Manchuria with Han Chinese by sending recruiters to China’s major ports and railway terminals to recruit migrants. Japan’s expansionism in Manchuria was also seriously challenged by the rise of a Chinese nationalist movement which developed after the Twenty-One Demands. China’s Nationalist Party, Communist Party, and even the regional warlords joined in the anti-Japanese nationalist movement. In reaction, the Japanese army became more aggressive over the course of the 1920s in order to protect its informal empire in Manchuria.

In these political battles between China and Japan, the Chosōnjok became a bone of contention as the Chosōnjok population in Manchuria continued to balloon:

**Table 2: Chosōnjok Population in Manchuria (1881-1931)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Chosōnjok Population in Manchuria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>65,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>78,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>323,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>238,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>252,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>431,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>459,427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>488,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>515,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>557,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>597,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>607,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>630,982</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Yanbian alone, Chosŏnjok numbered over 100,000 in 1910, and 300,000 by 1920. Many of these incoming migrants were either fleeing Japanese political persecution on the peninsula or poor peasants who had lost their lands as a result of the colonial land survey of Korea between 1910 and 1918. The rise in Korean immigration in Manchuria intensified existing tensions between the Chinese and Chosŏnjok for two reasons: (1) the Chosŏnjok competed with Chinese for resources, and (2) wherever the Chosŏnjok went, the Japanese were sure to follow claiming the need to protect its nationals. At the same time, Chosŏnjok were valuable as rice growers, so both China and Japan endeavored to convert the Chosŏnjok into loyal subjects of their competing hegemonies. To co-opt the Chosŏnjok, Republican China initiated a cultural assimilation policy requiring the Chosŏnjok to adopt Chinese dress, customs, and language; build new houses in the Chinese style; and engage in collective rice farming with the Chinese. It also established the pro-Chinese Association for Korean Cultivators. To counter China, the Japanese consulates organized the Korean Association (Chosŏnin minhoe, 조선인민회, 朝鮮人民會) to enforce their orders, collect data on Chosŏnjok, carry out daily surveillance of Chosŏnjok, issue travel permits, and curtail the influence of Korean nationalists. Chosŏnjok who did not join the Korean Association were suspected of defying Japan. In the 1920s, Republican China changed its strategy to legally distinguish between nationals and non-nationals: only Chinese nationals could buy or lease land. The problem was that those Chosŏnjok applying for naturalization needed to include

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57 Hyun Ok Park, p. 116.  
58 Hyun Ok Park, p. 104.
proof that they had left their registration as Japanese subjects; however, Japan would not allow the Chosönjok to do so. So China passed directives to prohibit non-naturalized Chosönjok from borrowing land (1928), to repossess land borrowed by non-naturalized Chosönjok (February 1929), to control Korean immigrants (April 1929), and to control Chosönjok land and cultivation (July 1929). At the local level, some Chinese officials took steps to prohibit Chosönjok from acquiring Chinese nationality and owning land, or pressured Chinese landlords to evict non-naturalized Chosönjok. In some areas there was local hostility against Chosönjok who were dispossessed of lands on the pretext of contract errors and whose Korean houses were torn down on the charge that the wood had been stolen from Chinese forests. The only areas where Chosönjok could feel fairly secure as to their immigration status and landholding rights were in Yanbian’s Yanji and Helong counties where non-naturalized Chosönjok could reside and own land.

Despite these various strategies to turn the Chosönjok into “Chinese” and “Japanese,” the great majority of the Chosönjok remained non-naturalized. The main concern for the Chosönjok was maintaining a livelihood through agriculture. Since the Chinese nationality requirement hindered their ability to own land, they found ways to subvert the requirement by forming partnerships to purchase land that was registered and nominally owned by a Chosönjok with Chinese nationality. The Chosönjok farmer’s biggest obstacle to landownership was not Chinese nationality, but the need for start-up capital that many lacked. Nor was the lack of nationality a steep barrier to earning a basic livelihood since Chosönjok were in demand for their rice cultivating skills, so it

was possible for them to work as tenant farmers for a Chinese landlord or as wage laborers so long as they were willing to migrate frequently or live in periphery regions to evade the legal restrictions on settlement.  

In contrast, it was much harder for the Chosŏnjok to subvert the Japanese systems of land tenure and control by capital. Japanese banks and development companies commanded Manchurian land by financing and managing the farms of Chosŏnjok peasants with Chinese nationality. When Chosŏnjok landowners failed to repay their loans, the company would seize the land and hire tenants to cultivate it. In contrast, when Chinese borrowers failed to repay loans, the development company had to transfer the foreclosed land to the Chinese government. Japanese banks and development companies also took advantage of the rapid in-migration of Koreans to Yanbian by renting out small plots to the highest bidder, thereby driving the newly migrated farmers to compete with each other for use of the land and collecting high rents and large profits.

*Which Loyalties: Japan, China, or Korea?*

The Sino-Japanese rivalry in Manchuria placed the Chosŏnjok in a precarious situation and forced them to consider how their ethnic boundaries should be represented and signified. Jean and John Comaroff have theorized that the essence of colonization has less to do with political overrule than in seizing and transforming “others” by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their own choosing. China and Japan each assumed that it had the capacity to transform the

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61 Hyun Ok Park, p. 21.
62 Hyun Ok Park, p. 103.
Chosŏnjok into its own desired image. This tension between the two nations rendered
Korean ethnicity indeterminate and forced the Chosŏnjok to make decisions about
whether to accept the inscribed representations of the Chinese and Japanese, or to forge a
unique identity for themselves.

The Chosŏnjok responded in various ways to their status as Chinese-Japanese-Koreans. Their participation, whether voluntary or coerced, in a wide array of political
groups indicates the complexity of the decisions they faced. Some Chosŏnjok joined
pro-Japanese organizations like the Korean Association and the Association for the
Protection of People (Pominhoe, 포민회, 保民會). Some joined pro-Chinese
organizations that encouraged Chosŏnjok to become Chinese nationals. Some joined in a
Korean self-rule movement which denounced both Chinese and Japanese authorities.
Some participated in the Korean nationalist movement by hiding independence fighters
from the Japanese police, supplying provisions, or taking part in guerrilla activities.
Other more radical Chosŏnjok established anti-Japanese military units such as the
Military School of the New Rising and the Korean Restoration Army. Despite the various
available affiliations, in March 1919, the Korean independence movement took center
stage in uniting the Chosŏnjok with their brethren on the peninsula.

The March First Movement of 1919 involved mass demonstrations throughout the
peninsula on a level never seen before in Korean history. A decade of harsh Japanese
colonial rule combined with the spread of literacy and communications had galvanized
the Chosŏnjok’s national consciousness. A group of religious leaders signed a
declaration of independence and thousands gathered in Seoul’s Pagoda Park to hear the
declaration read aloud on March 1. The declaration asserted that King Kojong had been
assassinated by poisoning, and it appealed to the Korean people to avenge his death. It also stated that many small nations were obtaining their independence through the principle of self-determination advocated by the American President Woodrow Wilson; that Koreans abroad were appealing for Korea’s national independence at the Paris Peace Conference; and therefore, all Koreans must support the endeavor through mass demonstrations. The entire peninsula erupted into demonstrations where men, women, young and old shouted in the streets for liberation. But these peaceful demonstrators were shot at by the Japanese police, and over 20,000 were arrested in a brutal crackdown.

Modern communications enabled news of the March First declaration to reach Yanbian. On March 3, 1919, eight thousand Chosŏnjok gathered in Longjing to promulgate an independence proclamation as part of the March First Movement. The Chosŏnjok petitioned Beijing to “Return our nation to us” and shouted in the streets, “Even if we die, we will reclaim our nation.” The demonstration ended in bloodshed when the Chinese army, provoked by the Japanese police, fired bullets into the peaceful demonstrators.

In the March First Movement, the Chosŏnjok incorporated homeland nationalism into their ethnic discourse. They mobilized their cultural symbol—the death of their Korean king—to create an awareness of, and give political meaning to, a common cultural identity which separated themselves from the Chinese and Japanese. They utilized their common ethnic bonds to the peninsula to amplify a spectacular ethnic nationalist movement to reclaim their homeland’s independence. The brutal aftermath of the March

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65 Chosŏnjok Ryaksu, p. 50.
First Movement and the arrival of radical Korean nationalists from the peninsula only galvanized the Chosŏnjok to become more fervently nationalistic. After the March First Movement was silenced on the peninsula, these 460,000 diaspora Chosŏnjok continued to be the most active group of Korean nationalists both inside and outside the peninsula. Nevertheless, their fragmented identities prevented them from successfully congregating their forces. They operated in diverse and unrelated groups such as the Korean People’s Association in West Yanbian, the North Kando Great Korean National Association, and the Korean Communists. The thousands who chose to dedicate their lives to the cause of Korean independence activities carried out decades of guerilla warfare against the Japanese in the Paektu Mountain region.

On September 12, 1920, a “bandit” force of several hundred men attacked the town of Hunchun and burned several consular buildings, looted local shops and murdered a number of Japanese and pro-Japanese residents. The events in Hunchun were likely staged by agents of the Japanese Army to provide a reason for large-scale military operations in Yanbian. Over the next several months, the Japanese Army stationed in Korea crossed the border and joined the Yanbian consular police forces to carry out search-and-destroy patrols which included numerous arrests and on-site executions. Japan defended its actions as necessary to curb lawlessness among its Korean subjects. However, the Chosŏnjok resisted this intrusion into their territory through armed combat. The most famous battle between the Chosŏnjok and the Japanese troops took place at Qingshanli (青山里, Ch’öngsallī in Korean) in October 1920. About 1,800 Korean fighters were outnumbered by 20,000 Japanese soldiers, but the local Chosŏnjok’s
knowledge of the forest paths enabled the Korean fighters to kill 3,300 Japanese while suffering only 60 casualties. However, eight days after the battle, Japanese soldiers retaliated against the Chosŏnjok civilians at Qingshanli.\textsuperscript{67} The resulting massacre is described in \textit{Pukkando}:

> It was about seven o’clock in the morning. Morning smoke began to appear from one house then another. Twenty armed Japanese soldiers sieged the village. Because they were narrow-tongued, they used an interpreter to order all the villagers to gather in the town church. The woman washing rice, the girl at the well, the old man sweeping his yard, the young men getting fertilizer from the stable, the boys spinning tops, young and old, men and women, everyone had to go to the church.

> The small church was packed with villagers like steamed bean sprouts. Armed soldiers policed the churchyard while inside the troop commander ordered the old, the women, and the children to leave the church grounds. Those remaining were 31 men aged between twenty and forty. These 31 men were tied with rope and forced to kneel on the floor. Millet grain and straw stored in the church were dumped all over the floor and drenched in gasoline. A fire was lit. In a flash, the inside of the church burst into flames.

> Shrieks. Doomed curses and screams. A voice calling for his son. Another crying for his mother. Some tried to leap out but the door was secured from the outside. That’s not all. Those who broke the windows and pushed their torsos out were shot down by soldiers carrying machine guns. Their families were sent away and not allowed to come near the church, so their anguished cries vanished into thin air. Instead of their cries, flames burst out.

\textsuperscript{66} Esselstrom, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{67} Chosŏnjok \textit{Ryaksa}, p. 64.
The church was engulfed in flames. The soldiers set the nearby school on fire. Nine houses were also set alight. Villagers were not allowed to go within the vicinity of the church. After seeing the school and houses go up in flames, with a call of ‘Let’s go!’ the Japanese soldiers withdrew as if departing a picnic. Only then did those remaining alive awake from their numbness and begin to wail.

The Japanese army then marched through Longjing, Yanji, Hunchun, and other towns in southern Manchuria, killing 20,000 in less than 10 days in an attempt to eradicate the activists. The Chinese government worried that the presence of radical Korean groups would threaten the security of Yanbian and provide the Japanese army with a convenient excuse for overtaking Manchuria. To the Chinese, Chosŏnjok were “running dogs” of Japan and a disruptive social force in Manchurian society that needed to be controlled.

### The Mukden Agreement

In an attempt to control the Korean militants, China and Japan concluded the Mukden Agreement (Mitsuya Agreement) in 1925 to structure a new framework of Sino-Japanese cooperation for the purpose of managing the Chosŏnjok. The agreement stated that Chinese authorities would take greater steps to monitor the Chosŏnjok such as: keeping an accurate census, preventing Chosŏnjok from entering Korea with arms, and disbanding “disloyal” Korean societies. Japan and China also agreed to cooperate with each other to watch, arrest, and extradite suspected recalcitrants among the Chosŏnjok. As a result of this agreement, the number of disturbances led by “recalcitrant Koreans” decreased dramatically in 1925-1926. Chinese police zealously pursued Korean radicals, motivated in no small part by the financial incentives offered by the Japanese. However,

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entirely innocent Chosŏnjok also faced harassment by Chinese police who sometimes molested innocent farmers, extracted large sums of money in “fines,” drove them off their land, or killed them. Such outrages, which became increasingly frequent after 1927, compounded the Chosŏnjok’s frustration in having to survive as “Chinese-Japanese-Koreans,” as captured in this 1929 poem by Sin Chae’ho:

Poverty and disease
Even for a brief time
Has no chance to leave.

Forty years under
So much dirt and hardship.

Mountains and water at the edge of a national border
Put one’s mind into despair.
I cannot even bring myself to sing this song.70

Despite strict Japanese police control over the Korean peninsula and Yanbian, the Chosŏnjok nationalists continued their resistance activities. Most of the resistance activities were carried out by the Korean Communists who had a secure base in Yanbian and enlisted 20,000 supporters. In 1930, on the anniversary of the March First Movement, Korean Communists in Yanji organized hundreds of farmers in different localities and carried out mass demonstrations, in which banners displayed “Destroy Japanese Imperialism” or “Long Live Korean Independence” and hundreds of thousands of leaflets were distributed. Groups such as the Haegu Farmers’ Association cried out in their March 31, 1930, declaration:

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69 Esselstrom, p. 51.
70 Chosŏnjok Paengnyŏn Sabwa, Volume 1, p. 239.
Tenant farmers, let us oppose the misbehavior of the landlords!
Let us oppose the landowners who destroy the tenant farmers’ household goods!
Let us oppose the landlords’ expelling of the tenants!
Let us oppose the confiscation of land!
When we are arrested by the government, let us protest together!  

Emboldened by their success, 600 to 700 Korean Communists, led by Kim Ch’ŏl, attacked the towns of Hunchun, Longjing, and Toudaogou on the nights of May 29, 30 and 31, 1930. While supporting units exploded firecrackers and shouted slogans to distract the police, the main units set fire to the Japanese consulate, East Asian Colonial Company office, electric power facilities, railroad bridges, the printing house, schools, and the homes of certain police informers, pro-Japanese individuals, and wealthy bourgeoisie. The Communist insurgency in Yanbian continued throughout the “Spring and Autumn Revolts” of 1930 in which students and farmers were mobilized to protest and throw off the Japanese grip over Yanbian.

The Korean Communist, Pak Yonsŏ, organized a guerilla unit to carry out radical activities. It consisted of 80 members, each equipped with a pistol and bombs. The guerillas raided villages and demanded the free distribution of lands and the abolition of all tenant fees, burned loan documents, and denounced all debts. They sometimes killed the rich and pro-Japanese, burned crops, and destroyed landlords’ properties. The Korean Communists knew that the peasantry was their key support base and so organized peasant union movements to protest against high taxes and police interference in village affairs. Their actions would not have displayed such ferocity if they did not feel a strong

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71 Chosŏnistik Paengnyŏn Sahwa, Volume 1, p. 74.
sense of ethnic nationalism. Japanese authorities recorded 690 appearances of Korean guerillas during 1930, with the cumulative number of guerillas reported at 15,810.73

The 1930 Revolt led to an ideological conflict among the Chosŏnjok. Whenever the Korean Communists would appear, the Japanese police and the Chinese soldiers were not far behind. All three groups wreaked havoc on the lives of the local villagers and townsfolk. While the Communists' activities were aggressive, they did not provide a lasting solution to the problem that the Chosŏnjok were facing: how to accommodate the conflicts imposed on them as the result of larger international forces taking over Manchuria. The events taking place in China, Japan, and Korea, as well as the entry of the capitalist marketplace had broken down their inward-oriented worldview and economic autonomy, but there was no satisfying solution to their dilemma. Their ambiguous political status as Chinese-Japanese-Koreans compelled them to reformulate their understanding of ethnicity, but after the collapse of the March First Movement, their minjoksim suffered heavy blows. The best they could do was to seek cover within the damaged remains of their ethnic boundaries and go about trying to earn a livelihood in a foreign land whose political situation was even more confused than in their homeland. Despite their efforts to go about their daily lives, in the Wanbaoshan Affair of 1931, a group of Chosŏnjok farmers ended up as pawns in a Japanese plan to conquer Manchuria.

**The Wanbaoshan Affair (萬寶山事件, in Korean: Manbosan Sakŏn)**

North of Yanbian, in the town of Wanbaoshan (near Changchun) a group of Chosŏnjok farmers leased 500 acres of land from Hao Yongde, the Chinese owner of the

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Changnong Real Estate Company. The Chosŏnjok farmers agreed to pay rent in rice equivalent to $3,500 in gold annually, signed a ten-year lease, received local official consent, and began digging an irrigation ditch to convert the land into rice paddies.

Jealousy was aroused among the Chinese landowners and stories were circulated to the effect that the irrigation works would flood neighboring Chinese farms and sever the transportation route on the Yidong River which the Chinese farmers used on a regular basis; therefore, the Chinese protested to the local authorities. On May 25, 1931, after five miles of ditch had been completed, 200 Chinese police and soldiers appeared to order the Chosŏnjok to halt construction and leave Wanbaoshan. At this point, the Japanese Consul-General in Changchun intervened by dispatching a group of Chosŏnjok farmers to Wanbaoshan accompanied by 60 Japanese police armed with machine guns.

With the revelation that Hao Yongde’s Changnong Real Estate Company was part of a Japanese plan to facilitate communication and transportation for the Japanese army, some 400 enraged Chinese farmers destroyed the irrigation ditch and attacked the Chosŏnjok workers on July 1. After a two-day skirmish between the Chinese and Chosŏnjok, the Chinese authorities expelled all Chosŏnjok from Wanbaoshan. In reaction to this move, the Japanese Consul-General circulated throughout Korea in the Chosŏn Daily (Chosŏn Ilbo, 朝鮮日報) exaggerated reports that Chosŏnjok in Wanbaoshan were being persecuted by hundreds of police officers. The Wanbaoshan Affair was so played up in the press that it led to inflamed public opinion and
anti-Chinese riots in Korean cities. The riots killed 127 Chinese citizens, wounded 393 more, and destroyed 2.5 million yen worth of property.⁷⁴

News of the persecution of the Chinese in Korea enraged the Chinese public in Manchuria. The Japanese Army had just launched a coordinated military assault on Manchuria on September 19, 1931, which used the SMR and Yanbian as its stepping stones. The Chinese were angry over this attack and in their anti-Japanese hatred unleashed a wave of anti-Korean attacks in Manchuria. Assaults, rape, the destruction and looting of Chosŏnjok villages compelled tens of thousands of Chosŏnjok to flee to the protection of Japanese authorities along the SMR and in the consulates. Stories were told of Chinese railwaymen preventing the Chosŏnjok from boarding the trains such that the refugees had to hide in the mountains or huddle in reed blinds by day and walk for many nights to reach refuge in the cities. Nearly 35,000 refugees arrived in Yanbian.⁷⁵

In Yanbian itself, Chinese retaliation of similar brutality did not occur since the Chosŏnjok were the majority there by 4-to-1. When the confusion ended in March 1932, Japan was in control of all Manchuria and had created the puppet state of Manchukuo with the last Qing emperor Pu-yi as its puppet ruler.

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⁷⁵ Hyun Ok Park, p. 128.
Chapter 4: Manchukuo: Military Control and Forced Assimilation (1932-1945)

Japan's conquest of Manchukuo in 1932 nearly doubled the size of its empire, which already consisted of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Sakhalin, and Micronesia. Since Japan's population of 67 million was over twice that of Manchukuo's population of 30 million, the Japanese government made plans to fill Manchukuo with Japan's surplus population and to transform it into the agricultural bastion of the Empire. Japan also aggressively expanded the SMR by constructing an additional 4,500 miles of railroad by 1934.

In Yanbian, the Chosonjok suddenly found themselves transformed into colonial subjects. The colonial government developed plans to firmly affix Yanbian to the Manchukuo state and make the Chosonjok into obedient colonial subjects through a strict policy of colonial discipline, police supervision, forced assimilation, and farming concentration camps. However, because the Japanese could not consolidate their control over the Chosonjok's minjoksim, Yanbian became the center of anti-Japanese movements in Manchukuo until the Japanese fled at the end of World War II.

Theories of Colonial Discipline

Michel Foucault explained that disciplinary power works not from the outside to restrict individuals and their actions, but through the internalization by individuals of those behaviors that the disciplinarian desires. Discipline must become so habituated, so deeply inscribed in everyday nature, that it acts as an invisible control upon the populace. In the modern nation-state, the disciplinary values that are desired are those of order,
efficiency, and precision which become internalized in citizens through hierarchical arrangements, organization, supervision, surveillance, and scheduling. Once citizens accept these values, the power of discipline can be used to reassemble local institutions (i.e., schools, armies, and factories) into more productive combinations that favor the development of the nation-state.\textsuperscript{76}

Timothy Mitchell took Foucault’s analysis a step further to examine how discipline is used in the colonial context. He theorized that the power to colonize occurs when the ruling political order inscribes onto the colonial society new conceptions of space, personhood, and of experiencing the real. These new conceptions are introduced through a concomitant process of reshaping the physical space by building modern spaces such as the barracks, school, and city as well as by enforcing upon the colonial population new conceptions of time and order for use in the modern social spaces. The purpose of colonial reforms is to rearrange the colony’s social spaces and discipline the colonial subjects so that the colonial structures can be linked to the metropole’s political economy.\textsuperscript{77} In Yanbian, the colonial government built modern spaces, enforced new conceptions of order, and tried to instill a Japanese consciousness into the Chosonjok through two methods: forced assimilation and the village concentration (\textit{chipdan purak}, 집단부락, 集團部落).

The power of Foucauldian discipline is undermined by resistance on the part of the subject who can manipulate and exploit the weak links of the disciplinary system. Michel de Certeau theorized that there is a limit to the extent to which individuals are...
ever wholly dominated or integrated into centralized systems of control because individual subjects can employ subversive "tactics" against the strategies that are employed by the dominant powers to conquer and manage.\textsuperscript{78} The Chosŏnjok interacted with colonial disciplinary measures by displaying resistance and tactics ranging from small acts to large-scale violence. They exerted their agency by politicizing their culture in order to negotiate their position vis-à-vis the colonial state and to destabilize the state-imposed structures of inequality. These acts of resistance empowered the Chosŏnjok and helped to rebuild and bolster their ethnic boundaries. Now that Chinese government was out of the picture, the Chosŏnjok no longer had to deal with competing hegemonies and could realign their ethnic identity against their historical common enemy, Japan. The Chosŏnjok revived their \textit{minjoksim} and used it to challenge the colonial state's disciplinary measures.

\textit{Forced Assimilation}

In Manchukuo, Japan exercised overt methods to move the bodies and shape the minds of its colonial subjects. It began by increasing its police surveillance; police stations in Manchuria increased from 628 to 1,450 in the 1933-1943 period,\textsuperscript{79} and the Yanbian police force grew to 665 men in 1932.\textsuperscript{80} The pro-Japanese Korean Association increased from 34 branches in 1931 to 113 branches in 1935, and all Chosŏnjok heads of households were required to join the Korean Association—upon the threat of death—such that about 84% of the Chosŏnjok families in Yanbian were enrolled.\textsuperscript{81} The colonial

\textsuperscript{78} de Certeau, pp. 29-42.
\textsuperscript{79} Changwuk Pak interview: 24 July 1989.
\textsuperscript{80} Esselstrom, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{81} Hyun Ok Park, p. 168.
government was serious about enforcing its power and used terror to achieve it. In Yanji County alone, more than 20,000 people were killed in terrible massacres between 1933 and 1935 for refusal to comply with colonial dictates. 82

To enforce psychological discipline, the Japanese employed the assimilation policy of *isshi-dōjin* (一視同仁, All peoples under the sway of the Japanese Emperor shared equality in his benevolence) which demanded conformity through worship of the Japanese emperor and attendance at Shinto shrine ceremonies. Implicit in the *isshi-dōjin* policy was a separation between the Japanese “master peoples” (主人民族, *shūjin minzoku*) and colonial “friendly peoples” (友人民族, *yūjin minzoku*) who were thought to be incapable of progressing and modernizing as quickly as the Japanese. 83 The Manchukuo government’s public motto of “Harmony among the five races: Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Japanese, and Koreans” was in effect a racial binary which emphasized the superiority of the Japanese vis-à-vis the biological and social inferiority of the colonized peoples. The colonial government often publicly emphasized the inferiority of the Chosŏnjok. A SMR article, “The Koreans in Manchuria,” concluded that the Chosŏnjok lacked a progressive spirit because they indulged in drinking and gambling which made them indolent and desirous to eat “the bread of idleness.” 84 In accordance with the racial binary, the Chosŏnjok were considered worthy only of second-class citizenship until they could be assimilated into the superior Japanese

ideology and cultural heritage. The colonial government believed that the discipline of schooling could be used to transform Manchuria’s youth into industrious and obedient subjects through its continuous instruction, inspection, and control. Education would instill an acceptance of “benevolent Japanese colonial rule” as the inevitable outcome of the prevailing world situation and persuade colonial subjects that any rash acts against colonial rule would be futile. However, the Chosonjok saw the education policy as a measure to brainwash them of their humanity. According to Professor Pak: “In a fascist style, the Japanese wanted to impose a slave culture on the Chosonjok and Chinese through educational programs designed to make them ignorant people...Thus, all non-Japanese were trampled on for fourteen years and lived like cows and horses.”

The colonial government also emphasized use of the Japanese language in the belief that communication through a mutual language would unify the colonial subjects’ sentiments, thinking, and finally their national identity as subjects of the Japanese Empire. All Chosonjok were required to recite the “Oath of the Imperial Subject” upon

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87 Changwuk Pak Interview: 24 July 1989.
88 Two types of pledges of allegiance were to be recited at all public occasions, one designed for elementary school children and the other for adults (Lee & DeVos, p. 161):

Pledge for School Children
1. We are the subjects of the Empire of Greater Japan.
2. We, by uniting our minds, pledge allegiance to His Majesty the Emperor.
3. We, by perseverance and training, will become good, strong subjects.

Pledge for Adults
1. We are Imperial subjects and pledge our allegiance to the Empire.
2. We Imperial subjects, by mutual faith, love, and cooperation, will strengthen our union.
3. We Imperial subjects, by perseverance and training, will cultivate our strength to exalt the Imperial Way.
demand by any policeman; those who would not or could not recite the Oath were fined and sometimes beaten. Older Chosŏnjok who had difficulty learning the Oath were afraid to go to the market and would have to send their children to run the family’s errands. Some Chosŏnjok learned Japanese because they were forced to comply (e.g., schoolchildren) while others learned to improve their job conditions, but most Chosŏnjok resisted learning Japanese.

Japanese rule in Manchukuo made clear that its forced assimilation policy was not a mere “ideology” but part of a larger, more powerful colonial “hegemony.” “Hegemony” consists of constructs and conventions that come to be shared throughout a political community; it is taken for granted as the natural shape of the world and is non-negotiable. Less powerful is “ideology” which is the system of meanings, values, and beliefs of a particular social group. While the Chosŏnjok were being pressured to adopt Japanese hegemony through education, language, and police control, they used their ethnicity as an ideology by which to resist the Japanese hegemony. The Chosŏnjok refused to accept Japanese assertions of cultural superiority, and the heavy-handed assimilation measures only politicized the ethnic differences between the Japanese and themselves. For the Chosŏnjok, as fewer opportunities for outright revolt became available, resistance through cultural elements became stronger. The wearing of Korean clothes despite Japanese edicts was one form of resistance. In my interviews, some Chosŏnjok elders recalled proudly wearing their Korean clothes and straw shoes (조선, ch'osin) right until

89 Mr. Kim interview: 24 June 1989.
90 Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, pp. 22-24.
the end of Japanese rule. Songs such as the “Clothes Mending Song” also expressed their resistance to the Japanese regime:

The clothes we wear
While capturing and killing the enemy,
Charging on the ice,
Lying ambush in a gorge,
Sew, finely and durably.
With a mind to capture the enemy,
One stitch for you, one for me.

In addition to clothing, rice also held great symbolism for the Chosŏnjok as an emblem of resistance. The Chosŏnjok (90% of whom were farmers) generally had little economic mobility because the rice they produced was not marketed by themselves but extracted by the colonial state and its development companies through high tenant fees, high interest rates charged for loans, and outright requisitions. Some Chosŏnjok farmers, rather than see their produce shipped off to Japan, simply stopped farming and grew only enough to live on. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937 and Chosŏnjok were ordered to feed the Japanese troops, the Chosŏnjok farmers resorted to burying their foodstuffs. The consumption of rice also distinguished the Japanese “master peoples” from the colonial subjects. Since in Manchukuo the ability to eat rice was possible only in association with Japanese power, the Chosŏnjok began to interpret the eating of rice as a shameful act and to praise the eating of kaoliang (sorghum), millet and other lesser grains as a sign of nationalism and opposition to Japanese rule. A common idiom of the period, used when people spoke about a desperate situation from which there is no

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91 Changwuk Park and Mr. Kim interview: 17 July 1989.
92 Chosŏnjok Paengnyŏn Sahwa, Volume 2, pp. 92-93.
93 Chosŏnjok Ryaksa, p. 234.
pleasant way out, was: “That is like a Japanese eating kaoliang.”

The Chosŏnjjok, who were deprived of direct political and economic means to oppose their Japanese rulers, used subversion, tactics, and cultural elements to express their minjoksim. However, for some Chosŏnjjok, small actions were insufficient to show their resistance to Japanese rule, and they advocated military resistance for the purpose of liberating Yanbian and Korea. The most active militants were the Korean Communists (“KC”), who had been operating in Manchuria since 1920. The KC made intensive efforts to interact with various nationalist, labor, and farm groups such that by 1930 there were 3,800 KC members in Yanbian with hundreds of branches and associated farmers’ leagues (농민동맹, nongmin tongmaeng) containing some 16,000 members. The KC gained popular support through their battles against the Japanese police and army, their slogans for radical economic change and for recovering Korean independence, and by wide dissemination of their ideology to the generally illiterate peasantry through music such as “The General Mobilization Song”:

Let’s go, let’s go, let’s go out to fight!
With courageous spirit, let us hurry, hurry!
Demand the death of imperialism and its selling of our country.
Eradicate pillage and slaughter.

It’s come, it’s come, revolution has come.
Revolutionary spirit is covering the whole world.
Moneyless worker, come out with your hammer.
Landless farmer, come out with your hoe.
Rice-cooking sister, come out with your kitchen knife.
 Literary brother, come out with your brush.
 Asia’s proletariat and Europe’s workers,

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95 Chong-Sik Lee (1983), pp. 112-123.
Let the world's proletariat effect a general mobilization.
Let's build, let's build a proletarian world,
Workers, farmers, holding sovereignty.
The landed bastards' property and the extortionists' estates,
Under Red sovereignty, let's return them to the people.96

The KC suffered a setback after they joined with the Chinese Communist Party ("CCP") in 1930 and were instructed by the CCP's leader, Li Li-san, to carry out an aggressive plan of guerilla warfare in Manchuria.97 The Revolt of May 30, 1930 and the "Spring and Autumn Revolts" were the products of this CCP order.

With the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, the Communist movement gained momentum as the KC and CCP worked together in an anti-Japanese united front. Over the next two years, a dramatic increase in the number of anti-Japanese incidents in Manchuria was reported:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of times reported</th>
<th>Cumulative number of resisters reported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>3,816</td>
<td>3,774,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>13,072</td>
<td>2,668,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>13,395</td>
<td>900,204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, the united front crumbled when the CCP launched a three-year witch hunt against the KC to ferret out suspected pro-Japanese spies (1933-1936). Fear induced many to forsake the KC and dissolve their guerilla bases. When the purge ended, only two Chosŏnjok remained in the CCP leadership, one of whom was Kim Il-sung, the

future leader of North Korea.  

The KC and CCP had differing objectives which overshadowed their cooperation. The KC fought for self-rule in Yanbian and the liberation of the Korean peninsula from Japanese rule. In contrast, the CCP fought for political control over China, of which Manchukuo was only a part. The CCP wanted the KC to commit to the Chinese agenda, which the KC decided to do in 1936 when they disbanded their operations in Yanbian and joined the CCP armies in other areas of Manchuria. However, the KC maintained a special unit devoted toward Korean liberation, consisting exclusively of Chosŏnjok. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 revitalized the KC. The KC fought the Japanese on two fronts: together with the CCP and in guerrilla units the Paektu Mountains. These actions were later rewarded by the CCP when China became a communist nation.

Village Concentrations

The village concentrations began in Yanbian in 1934 for the purpose of isolating the KC from the general population and thereby cutting off their source of food, supplies, and intelligence information. Japanese troops ordered villagers in remote locations to move with little or no notice, then destroyed their homes. When the families arrived at the village concentration site, they were required to build the actual village and connecting highways; however, a lack of building materials meant that roofs had to be made of tree bark or straw and walls were full of holes which could not keep out the cold

99 Hyun Ok Park, p. 226.
wind and snow. In some places, where construction was started late in the year, people had to pass their first winter by living in caves. People lacked adequate clothing, food and bedding which facilitated the spread of epidemics such as typhoid. The farmers could not return to their home villages to harvest their crops or collect their belongings because they could not leave the village concentrations without travel permits. So as their hometown harvests wasted away, laws preventing the transport of grain to the village concentrations led to severe food shortages that continued for years. In Yanbian’s five counties, there were eighteen village concentrations.

The colonial government then realized that the village concentrations could be used as a method of disciplined agricultural production. The architecture of the village concentrations gives a visual form to the surveillance and discipline that took place there. Each village was circumscribed with a wall, often topped with barbed wire, and the entry gate was kept closed during the night. The village was divided into four sectors, each of which was expected to accommodate one communal well and 25 households, or one-fourth of the total number of households in the village. In the village center, there was a police station, school, health center, and in some cases a surveillance tower. The villagers were sent out every morning to work in the fields and were herded back into the compound at night. By 1937, nearly 10,000 village concentrations had been constructed across Manchukuo and 5,500,000 people herded into them. Many more were built until the end of World War II.

Manchukuo’s village concentrations controlled not only agricultural production,

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101 Chosŏnjok Ryaksu, p. 131.
102 Hyun Ok Park, p. 175.
but created an entirely new social system in the colony. Peasants in the village concentrations were required to rent the land they farmed, but as the relocated peasants possessed almost nothing, they had to borrow from the Japanese banks to purchase food, clothing, seeds and farming tools at high interest rates that they could not repay. The going interest rate for one *mal* of borrowed rice was five to twelve *mal* of rice in repayment.\(^{104}\) When the farmers failed to pay the extortionate interest rates, they became indentured to the bank and were made to work in the village concentrations until the debt could be repaid. But the small land plots surrounding the village concentrations prevented the peasants from ever creating a marketable surplus. Therefore, the parties who profited were the Japanese development companies which purchased the crops at low prices and sold them at higher prices on the market. In contrast, pauperization of farmers was universal in all the village concentrations,\(^{105}\) but given the constant police surveillance, the farmers could not easily run away. Farming families within the village were divided into groups of ten households and if any one member of the group was accused of violating Japanese authority, then all ten of the households were punished.\(^{106}\) Thus, the village concentrations were impressive feats from the perspective of Foucaultian discipline because they sought to control the productive actions of the farmers through a combination of financial capital, the property system, the regulation of labor, and constant surveillance.

It should be remembered that the original purpose of the village concentrations was to physically separate the anti-Japanese guerillas from the general population, but the

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strictures of the system in fact drove the masses to hate the Japanese and sympathize with the Communists and to provide them with food.\textsuperscript{107} However, over time, as the village concentration system became widely implemented, the Communists could not purchase food from the locals and had to conduct raids. These raids aroused complex emotions among the villagers because if a village was easily overrun, the Japanese authorities would suspect the villagers of complicity, thus inviting retribution. Moreover, food was scarce everywhere such that food taken by the guerillas was not replaceable. Over time, the peasants became weary of the guerilla attacks and the Japanese army's relentless pursuit of the guerillas diminished the hope of a Communist victory in the peasants' minds. Without the support of the peasants, the guerillas could not survive and had to move to the mountains to evade the Japanese army.\textsuperscript{108}

\textit{Japan Encourages Immigration to Manchukuo}

As the colonial government enforced its disciplinary measures in Manchukuo and the colony became more secure, Japan looked to fulfill its long-held romance of sending its farmers to Manchukuo to build an agricultural breadbasket. Japanese settlers were brought into three parts of Manchuria: the rice-farming region in Yanbian; strategic places threatened by anti-Japanese forces in other parts of Manchuria; and locations along the South Manchurian Railway. Most of the Japanese settlers were from the lowest stratum of rural society who desired to become independent farmers in Manchukuo. However, Japanese farmers could not compete with Chinese and Chosŏnjok farmers whose efficiency was equal to the Japanese, but whose average annual income did not

\textsuperscript{106} Changwuk Pak interview: 24 July 1989.
\textsuperscript{107} Chong-Sik Lee (1983), p. 274.
exceed 100 yen, while the average annual living cost of a Japanese farmer was 150 yen. The Japanese farmers, therefore, achieved economic mobility through the advantageous financing provided by Japanese banks and at the expense of the Chinese and Chosŏnjok farmers whose existing farms were confiscated and allocated to the Japanese settlers. Despite the early flush of Japanese settlement in Manchuria, Japan’s emigration numbers fell drastically from its targeted figures, particularly after Japan entered the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and World War II in 1941. Between 1932 and 1945, the number of Japanese migrants to Manchukuo was 305,867 which was only 28.3% of the targeted migration goal of 1,081,050. The bulk of Japanese migrants went to the urban centers.

With the lackluster Japanese migration to Manchukuo, Japan decided to encourage Koreans—especially from the southern provinces—to migrate. Such migration would ease the rising tension between landlords and landless peasants on the peninsula, deter Koreans from going to Japan to seek work, and help alleviate the food shortage in Japan as the Koreans could be used to carve out new agricultural regions in Manchuria’s wilderness. Official immigration for Koreans consisted of the “group” (chiptan) and “cluster” (chiphap) programs of 1937 to 1938. The Korean Government-General financed all the expenses of migration and settlement under the group program, but contributed only partial funding for those who could freely settle under the cluster program. In 1939, the “dispersed” (punsan) program was added for individuals who at their own expense could settle freely or join their relatives or acquaintances. The Korean

Government-General screened prospective emigrants and granted visas only to those whose political profiles demonstrated an ability to assimilate into Manchurian society.\(^{112}\)

In Korea, the perception that Manchuria was a welcoming place was popularized through the slogans of the Korea-Manchuria Development Company: “Unclaimed and fertile land is everywhere in Manchuria”; “Grain and farming seed for the first year, as well as transportation fees will be loaned”; “By working diligently for only a few years, everyone can be a landowner”; and “We are waiting for you with houses ready.”\(^{113}\) The southern Korean migrants were likely unaware of the difficult struggles that the Chosŏnjok had been enduring or of the village concentrations that awaited them. The new wave of Korean migrants were motivated by the dream of becoming small property owners or of jobs in the burgeoning industrial sector, and some 1,200,000 Koreans migrated to Manchukuo between 1937 and 1945:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Increase in Koreans in Manchuria</th>
<th>Total Chosŏnjok Population in Manchuria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>23,863</td>
<td>630,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>42,812</td>
<td>673,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>43,194</td>
<td>719,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>248,496</td>
<td>968,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>87,636</td>
<td>1,056,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>88,880</td>
<td>1,145,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>155,000</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>114,144</td>
<td>1,414,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>785,856</td>
<td>2,200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{111}\) Louise Young, pp. 394-395.
\(^{112}\) Hyun Ok Park, p. 144.
\(^{113}\) Hyun Ok Park, p. 181.
The Korean migrants entering Manchukuo were tightly controlled by the colonial government’s institutional networks which included the development companies, the Korean Association, and financial associations. However, some of the migrants were able to use tactics to exploit the administrative discord between the Japanese army and the Korean Government-General to evade government regulations on immigration and settlement.

During the Manchukuo years, the Chosŏnjok’s response to Japanese rule varied to include collaborators and dissidents, and new residents. The more established Chosŏnjok remembered their bitter years as Chinese-Japanese-Koreans and took actions to resist the colonial hegemony of forced assimilation and village concentrations. They employed their ethnicity as an ideology against Japanese hegemony. In contrast, the new migrants did not carry this particular historical baggage, but were more interested in obtaining land and making a fresh start. However, once the new migrants arrived in Manchukuo, they did not find reality to match their expectations as many were shipped off to village concentrations in Northern Manchuria. Within a few years, however, the situation for both the old and new waves of Korean diaspora would change dramatically again as Japan lost World War II and the colonial state of Manchukuo instantly dissolved.
Chapter 5: Becoming an Ethnic Minority in the PRC (1945-1992)

With the abrupt collapse of the Japanese Empire, the populations of Manchukuo found themselves suddenly liberated. The initial response of the Chosŏnjok was to celebrate their emancipation:

After 1945, the black clouds which had hung thick and low over our heads lifted. Not long after that, we were owners of our land and were singing songs.114

The next concern among many of the 2,200,000 Chosŏnjok was to find a way to return to the liberated Korean peninsula. Their repatriation was heavily determined by Manchuria’s political climate, in particular the battles between the Chinese Communist Party (“CCP”) and Guomindang (“KMT”), each of which controlled different pockets of Manchuria. The KMT saw the Chosŏnjok as “Japanese” so it decided to return them all to Korea and to seize their assets. For this reason, many Chosŏnjok living in the KMT-controlled zones were faced with the decision to move to the CCP-controlled areas, to cross the border to North Korea on their own, or return to South Korea on transport arranged by the KMT on American ships. In contrast, the CCP encouraged the Chosŏnjok to settle in Manchuria through an aggressive land reform program which appealed to the Chosŏnjok farmers. Overall, about 800,000 Chosŏnjok repatriated and about 1,400,000 remained in China. Many more Chosŏnjok repatriated from the KMT-occupied area near the Yalu River than from the CCP-occupied area near the

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Given the opposing policies of the KMT and CCP, those Chosŏnjok who remained in China generally favored the CCP during the next four years of civil war. The KMT, despite Soviet assistance, could not deploy its forces in a timely manner to establish control over Manchuria. In the meanwhile, the CCP moved quickly into the region and by October 1945 installed 110,000 troops and 20,000 party members, and prepared itself for battles against the KMT.

Since different regions of Manchuria were held by the KMT or CCP, the Chosŏnjok dealt with these opposing governments at local levels. In KMT areas, Chosŏnjok civilians organized societies to solve many local issues involving repatriation, education, and the seizure of their assets. As the KMT’s seizure policy led to rising unemployment among Chosŏnjok and poverty among dispossessed farming households, Chosŏnjok farmers became disgruntled and rose up in three demonstrations during the 1945-46 period. In 1948, the KMT changed its stance to grant Chinese residency for all Chosŏnjok involved in rice farming. The KMT also engaged in rudimentary land reform by redistributing Japanese assets, but as there were no criteria for distribution, the richer peasants took the better and larger lands while poor peasants received hardly any land at all.

Yanbian fell easily under CCP control. The Chosŏnjok generally supported the CCP because they had been exposed to the basic tenets of Communism by the Korean Communists during the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, the CCP’s land reform was more

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116 Chosŏnjok Ryaksa, p. 105.
favorable to the poor Chosŏnjok peasants who made up 72% of the entire Yanbian population in 1945. Happily they accepted the land, farming equipment, and livestock as expressed in “The Joy of Acquiring Land”:

Even in our tumble-down house  
A brilliant new morning has arrived.  
Ae-ra, how good it is, Ae-ra how great!  
A new life can begin.  
The landlord’s land, one tan of land,  
Has been distributed into our hands.  

A second measure employed by the CCP was to provide the Chosŏnjok with dual citizenship. This idea developed when Li Junxiu, the Yanbian Regional Secretary, asked an old Chosŏnjok man whether he preferred China or Korea. The man answered, “This is my homeland and that is also my homeland just like father and mother. How can I say I like one more than the other?” Touched by this answer, Liu advocated dual citizenship which would respect Korean sentiments toward their motherland while concurrently recognizing them as Chinese citizens. In reality, however, dual citizenship did not help the Chosŏnjok were who denied entry by the North Koreans at the border.

During the ensuing civil war, over 62,000 Chosŏnjok joined the CCP’s army, with 34,000 of them coming from Yanbian. Chosŏnjok soldiers formed the backbone of the CCP’s Fourth Field Army and saw action in numerous battles. Another 100,000 Chosŏnjok joined the public security guards, task forces, armed militia, and took part in logistics work. In Yanbian alone, 36,000 Chosŏnjok acted as stretcher-bearers and

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117 Chun-seon Kim, p. 97.  
118 Chun-seon Kim, p. 104.  
119 Sunyŏn Pak (1945) in Chosŏnjok Paengyŏn Sahwa, Volume 3, p. 192.  
One tan (a Korean measurement for land area) is equivalent to 2.45 acres.
porters for those fighting on the front.\textsuperscript{121} As the war continued, the KMT struggled to control Manchuria while the CCP matured into a powerful military force with an effective land reform program, an efficient organization, and an appealing ideology. In the fall of 1948, the KMT’s last strongholds in Manchuria, the cities of Shenyang and Changchun, surrendered. The following year, the People’s Republic of China (“PRC”) was established on October 1, 1949.

Now that Manchuria was integrated into PRC, the Chosŏnjok became intensely aware of their need to transform themselves into citizens of a Communist state and to display their political loyalty to the CCP and China. Their loyalties were put to the test several months later with the outbreak of the Korean War.

\textbf{The Korean War}

Just as China was beginning to recover from its civil war, the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950. The PRC was concerned that the U.S. military intervention in South Korea and the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Taiwan Strait were plans by American imperialists to encircle China with capitalist countries: South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, and Vietnam. There was already a strong anti-American sentiment within the CCP because of the American support given to the KMT during the civil war, so after the KMT’s exile to Taiwan, America came to replace Chiang Kai-shek as the foremost enemy of China.\textsuperscript{122} Throughout the PRC, “Resist America, Aid Korea” became the slogan used to arouse patriotism and mobilize China into a war orbit.

Beyond defending Chinese territory against U.S. attack, there were other

\textsuperscript{120} Chun-seon Kim, pp. 100-102.
\textsuperscript{121} Qicheng Ma, p. 229.
important reasons for China's participation in the Korean War. First, the CCP wanted to mobilize the external pressure caused by the Korean War into a driving force for consolidating its rule in China. The “Resist America, Aid Korea” campaign was used to arrest 2,500,000 “reactionaries” and to execute 710,000 of them by May 1951 as well as to nationalize a large number of private factories in 1952-1953.123 Second, the Chinese army had 5,000,000 soldiers who were suffering from unemployment since the defeat of the KMT.124 Third, Mao Tse-tung believed that nothing could be more appealing to the Chinese people's nationalism than the prospect of defeating a powerful enemy like the U.S. in a major military confrontation. China's victory, even at a heavy price, would instill in the Chinese people a sense that the PRC was a great nation in the world and the promoter of the great Eastern Revolution. Therefore, immediately after the start of the Korean War, the PRC moved its forces into Manchuria. Mao also communicated to North Korea's leader, Kim Il-Sung, that China would provide ground troop support even if the Soviets failed to dispatch its promised air force support. Thus, the PRC's preparations to intervene in the Korean War reached a high degree of preparation even before U.S. forces landed in Inchon on September 15, 1950, and began to push north of the 38th parallel. More than 2,000,000 Chinese engaged in battlefield operations and by the end of the war China had lost 390,000 troops. Even with these heavy losses, CCP leaders came to the conclusion that China had successfully challenged the Americans, and Mao proudly stated that “the imperialist aggressors ought to bear this in mind: the

Chinese people are now organized, they are not to be trifled with.125

The Korean War forced the Chosŏnjok to take a stand on their political loyalties, whether to ally with the CCP and remain in the Chinese nation or to join the battle in Korea. The Chosŏnjok could not conceive of a divided homeland; in their minds, Korea was still the unified state of Chosŏn, so they did not want to side with either “North” or “South” Korea.126 They refrained from joining the Korean War and chose to remain in China to aid in the reconstruction of Yanbian as Chinese citizens and demonstrate support for the “Resist America, Aid Korea” campaign. They also harbored a real fear that America would use Korea as a springboard for invading Manchuria, just as the Japanese had done. When, in November 1950, American forces approached the Yalu River and American planes flew over Yanbian’s skies, their fears became realized. Im Hyowŏn, captured the feeling among the Chosŏnjok in the following poem:

Give this hand a gun.  
If not, a grenade. 
Do not worry that I am old. 
This hand must grasp a gun!

Bloodthirsty enemy,  
Invaded our sky  
And murdered my grandson,  
An innocent, laughing child, raised without worries. 
Threw a grenade into his snowy heart  
Tore him apart and left him to die.

No, that is not all!  
Storming our neighbor Chosŏn’s land,  
Thousands, tens of thousands grandchildren’s hearts  
Snatched with brandishing spears. 
Our countless sons and wives,  
Hanging, beating, burning them was not enough.

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125 Shu Guang Zhang, p. 248.
By burying them alive, cleaned them off.

How can you tell me to disregard the matter?
How dare you tell this old man to hold back his tears!

Into this gnarled hand place a gun.
Let this chest embrace a grenade.
This body will fight until its last drop of blood.

On the burning Chosŏn land,
With brothers who have forgotten tears,
I will, by all means, shoot dead
Those filthy animals’ black lungs.
Then crush them to pieces and chew them up.¹²⁷

When China decided to join the Korean War in November 1950, the Chosŏnjok openly joined in the fighting. About 5,000 Yanbian youths signed up for the Chinese army and by December 1950, the first 1,400 left their hometowns and were deployed across the border to fight on the peninsula. Another 5,740 Chosŏnjok served as translators, medical personnel, drivers, and other auxiliary forces. Among the civilians, efforts were undertaken to gather food supplies for the military. On December 13, 1950, the farmers of Yanbian’s five counties contributed 17,000 tons of food. They also provided food and relief provisions to refugees in North Korea throughout the course of the war. By the war’s end, Yanbian’s death toll amounted to 6,981, of whom 98% were Chosŏnjok.¹²⁸

The Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture

In 1952, the Chosŏnjok were rewarded by the PRC for their loyalty to the PRC with an “autonomous prefecture,” and they adjusted themselves to life as a minority

group in the PRC. The PRC’s policy toward its ethnic minorities was part of a larger plan to mobilize the minority peoples within its borders into a new nation-state. To avoid ethnic tensions that would fragment the fledgling state, ethnic minorities were permitted to use their minority languages and cultures and the larger ethnic groups were given limited self-rule. However, at the same time, the CCP trained minority cadres and established large-scale socialist institutions that would bind the minorities to the PRC state structure and the CCP’s political goals. This gradualist approach was developed from the Marxist definition of nationalism which saw economic ties (rather than differences in language, customs or history) as the determining factor for citizenship in a large nation. Under this proposition, it was expected that when class differences had disappeared, the ethnic minorities would voluntarily become integrated into a common proletarian culture. In reality, given the huge Han majority in China’s population, the resulting proletarian culture would ultimately involve the sinification of China’s ethnic minorities.

There are two schools of thought about the PRC’s ethnic minorities program. The optimistic view is that of a “unified multi-national state” where ethnic minorities enjoy some privileges that the Han do not such as: a larger permissible family size, linguistic accommodation in education and book production, and some government subsidies. Furthermore, limited political autonomy is granted to those areas dominated by minority peoples in the form of autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures (of which Yanbian is one), 117 autonomous counties, and 3000 autonomous cities. According to this view, the PRC emphasizes a shared notion of nationhood and citizenship which

overlays ethnic boundaries.

In contrast, a pessimistic view posits the PRC as carrying forward the Confucian imperial policy of building national unity through assimilative policies designed to submerge local ethnic identities into the Han identity. Ever since the Ming Dynasty, the Chinese state has carried out “civilizing” projects which aimed to transform the ethnic peoples in its periphery and to bring about their ideological conversion into the Han center. Such civilizing projects involved a process of “internal orientalism” which labeled the ethnic peoples as primitive, barbarians, childlike, or feminine, in order to assert the superiority of the Han race and culture. In a similar manner, the PRC’s ethnic minorities program imposed various imprecise classification systems which distorted the social realities of the ethnic groups.

The PRC’s classification system ranked minority groups according to a time line of socialist progress: primitive communism, slave ownership, feudalism, capitalism, and state socialism, with many minority groups placed in the lower categories. The PRC further classified its minorities using the Soviet Union’s “four commons” model of ethnic identity which looked for: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common culture. These methods were used to conclude in 1955 that China had 56 officially recognized ethnic groups (minzu) with the Han as the majority group at 91% of the population. The remaining 55 minority groups (shaoshu minzu) were created out of the over 400 minority groups that petitioned for ethnic recognition by the state. Some of these ethnic minorities had foisted upon them

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arbitrary and state-imposed labels. For example, numerous peoples across southern China who spoke mutually unintelligible dialects were officially labeled “Miao” (which some consider a derogatory term meaning “barbarian”).

Over time, China’s ethnic minorities have come to accept their state-imposed names and official descriptions, so it appears that the PRC has succeeded in controlling the minority groups by fitting them into state-accepted categories of ethnicity. However, the state’s categorization and delineation into ethnic cells does not mean that the state is firmly in control. Ethnic groups are not only formed by external labeling, but also as the consequence of individual agency. PRC-created ethnic groupings, such as the Hui and Yao, have taken on lives of their own, and by taking charge of their own unique cultural identities and expressing them through religion, history, and language, they have been able to circumscribe the state’s control over their ethnic identities.

The Chosŏnjkok, unlike some other minority groups in the PRC, had a relatively easy time in adjusting to the PRC’s ethnic minorities policy. The Chosŏnjkok could easily be classified as a single ethnic group and were seen by the PRC as being on par with the Han Chinese given the Chosŏnjkok’s long Communist history. The Chosŏnjkok played up their role as bastions of communism in Manchuria in order to enhance their legitimacy with the state, despite the fact that the Chosŏnjkok’s communist history contained unique perspectives which related specifically to Yanbian and subverted the institutionalized narratives of the CCP. The Chosŏnjkok’s experiences with various rulers over the

previous fifty years had given them the ability to be adaptive to the PRC’s system, the
skills to build rapport with the new government, and the assertiveness to protect their
local and ethnic interests. Their deportment during the Korean War showed them to be
loyal Chinese citizens as they refrained from participating in the Korean War until they
had the Chinese government’s approval, at which time they fought on the side of China.

When the PRC made efforts to present itself as a multi-ethnic nation by
delineating autonomous regions, the Chosŏnjok took advantage of their majority status in
Yanbian to build political and administrative frameworks to advance their local power
and to develop their ethnic culture. They actively participated in the political system,
managed their local finances, and organized local security forces. As the Chosŏnjok’s
position as Chinese citizens became more secure, they were able to consolidate their
ethnic boundaries and transform themselves into a Korean ethnic minority in the PRC. In
Yanbian, a Korean cultural renaissance blossomed and Korean culture was celebrated in
educational, literary, artistic, and social activities. Novels, essays, and poems written in
Korean depicted the heroic history of the Chosŏnjok’s anti-Japanese struggles, praised
the Chosŏnjok’s independent spirit, and encouraged the preservation of Korean values
and customs.

After a decade of relative peace, the PRC reversed its multi-ethnic policy and
pursued an aggressive assimilation policy during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).
Mao’s radicals took the offensive to cleanse the CCP of reactionaries and China’s youth
were mobilized into the Red Guards who took charge of destroying the Four Olds (sijiu,
四舊)—old ideas, cultures, customs, habits—which included destroying the customs,
ideas, cultures, and habits of ethnic minority groups and replacing them with the idea of a
united fatherland and ethnic unity. The Cultural Revolution also brought the *xiafang* (下放, going down) movement, in which numerous urban Han youths were sent to minority regions in order to raise productivity and living standards as well as to assimilate the minorities into the Han culture. The *xiafang* movement had the effect of making the minority populations more diffuse in their own territories and weakening their bases of power.

The Chosŏnjok were stunned by the abrupt change in the government’s policy which demolished all their enthusiastic efforts toward developing their autonomous prefecture. Yanbian’s Chosŏnjok leaders, who themselves had long careers as Communists and had led Yanbian to a high level of productivity and education, challenged the premature and reckless actions of the idealistic *xiafang* cadres and Red Guards. But the Red Guards were given a license by Mao to arrest and remove “old” leaders from power, so over three thousand Chosŏnjok died as a result of ethnic persecutions. To this day, the Chosŏnjok lament the fact that their great local heroes—who led the anti-Japanese struggle, fought to establish the PRC, and survived the bullets of the Korean War—were beaten and starved to death at the hands of Red Guard children.

The impact of the Cultural Revolution was severe in Yanbian because of the political tensions between Mao Tse-tung and Kim Il-sung at the time. Mao had called Kim “a fat revisionist pig” while Kim offended Mao by manipulating the hostile relations between China and the Soviet Union for North Korea’s benefit.\(^\text{134}\) Beijing presented the

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Chosŏnjok with an ultimatum: pledge allegiance to either Mao or Kim. As tensions reached a heated level in Yanbian, some Chosŏnjok were compelled to flee to North Korea. Along the Tumen River border, Chinese soldiers were ordered to shoot those Chosŏnjok who attempted to cross the river into North Korea. Most of the Chosŏnjok eventually settled on Mao and “hunched their shoulders under the oppression but refused to let their backs be broken.”

During the Cultural Revolution, Yanbian’s ethnically separate schools were forced to integrate. The publication of Korean language materials was severely restricted, and teachers were investigated, dismissed, demoted, or persecuted. Many were sent to farms and factories for political re-education. The personal accounts of an instructor and a student are presented below:

1. Professor Pak was a Korean Studies instructor at Yanbian University when the Cultural Revolution erupted. For a time, he was ordered to take his students out to neighboring farmlands to participate in socialist development and to write the history of the peasant struggles in the area. Later, his students were dismissed in large numbers and replaced with workers and farmers. Pak had a difficult time teaching people who lacked the basis for a college education and who claimed that history should be written by the peasants and the proletariat of China, not by the intellectuals. His new students proceeded to destroy the books in the college library and re-write the history of Yanbian as they saw fit. When Pak protested this re-invention of history, he was sent to a farm for political re-education which lasted eight years. After the Cultural Revolution, he was reinstated to his teaching position.

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135 Mr. Yun Interview: 30 June 1989.
2. Ms. Kwon, a petite, frail woman, was a sophomore at Yanbian University when she was pulled out of school and sent to work in a coal mine for two years. The damp, dark atmosphere of the mines permanently damaged her health. She overcame the hardship and later became an instructor of Korean and Chinese languages at Yanbian University.137

The Chosŏnjok I talked with generally did not like to discuss their painful memories of the Cultural Revolution. Some people took the attitude that it is better to forget the dark past and just enjoy the present. Most people laughed off the pain as they told their stories and in retrospect tried to find some humor in a decade that held so little joy.

The minorities policy during the Cultural Revolution forced the Chosŏnjok to make a difficult choice between their ethnic and political loyalties. The PRC’s hard-handed policies dampened the Chosŏnjok’s desire to accommodate the majority system, irrespective of the broad goals enunciated by the state. Once the Chosŏnjok lost their trust in the PRC state, they could no longer feel that they were full citizens of China, nor could they recapture the wholehearted enthusiasm they once had in contributing to the building of a new nation.

**Socialized Agriculture: Ethnicity Defined Through Food Production and Consumption**

The Cultural Revolution years were also hungry ones for the Chosŏnjok. This was the era of People’s Communes which were intended to increase productivity but which in reality led to huge productivity losses due to a lack of resources and leadership to maintain such large units of production. A nation-wide system of rationing for rice,
wheat, flour, meat, and bean curd was enforced. The Chosŏnjok continued to produce rice but their diet consisted mostly of cornmeal.

When socialized agriculture was first implemented in the PRC in the early 1950s, the Chosŏnjok quickly adapted to communal farming since their traditional Korean agricultural practices encouraged the sharing of tools, manpower and capital. Moreover, they had lived in village concentrations during the Manchukuo period and had shared their meager resources during the lean years of the civil war and the Korean War. So when the CCP promoted agricultural collectivization, the Chosŏnjok willingly organized themselves into cooperatives in 1952, well before cooperatives were made official throughout China between 1953-1954. In fact, the Chosŏnjok take credit for having introduced the idea of the cooperative to the Beijing government.\(^\text{138}\) The cooperatives then merged into larger collectives called Agricultural People’s Collectives and afterwards aggregated into People’s Communes. The Chosŏnjok, eager to prove themselves as good citizens, joined into 757 Agricultural People’s Collectives in 1956 and later into 96 People’s Communes.\(^\text{139}\) The Chosŏnjok were recognized by the government for showing initiative in developing socialized agriculture, and in 1961, the government popularized the following story praising them:

Commune members in Yanbian noticed that the type of plow favored by the Han made deep furrows in the soil but damaged the earth. The plow used by Koreans made only a superficial cut in the earth and did no damage to the soil. Commune members talked over the problem and decided to combine the best features of the two plows. They came up with a design that permitted deep plowing without damage to the soil and named it the ‘unity plow.’\(^\text{140}\)

\(^{138}\) Changwuk Pak Interview: 21 July 1989.
^{139} Yŏnbyŏn Chosŏnjok Chachi’ju Kaehwang, p. 138.
Despite such stories in the press, ethnic relations in Yanbian were not very harmonious. When the *xiang* movement brought Han youth to Yanbian, the mingling of ethnic groups in agricultural production led to some conflicts and bitter feelings among the Chosŏnjok because of the inequitable division of labor. At the Changbai People's Commune, in the suburbs of Yanji, the influx of Han youths meant more mouths to feed at a time when other areas were unwilling or unable to supply the increased demand for food. The Chosŏnjok, who were experiencing food shortages themselves, could only meet the increased demand for food by expanding their paddy agriculture. This labor-intensive task was dumped onto the Chosŏnjok's shoulders because the commune system practiced labor segregation, with the Chosŏnjok raising rice in the paddy fields and the Han raising other grains on dry land. The Chosŏnjok farmers felt bitter at having to carry the burden of feeding a people who were part of a movement to persecute them, destroy their regional autonomy, and implement assimilation policies.\(^{141}\)

In addition to the ethnic conflicts in the Yanbian communes, the Chosŏnjok faced economic pressures to meet unattainable production quotas during the Cultural Revolution. Beijing wanted to promote the myth that commune agriculture was successful at a time when it was failing miserably. The government pressured commune officials to increase production yearly and report the improvements, while fearful officials lied in their production reports. Newspapers published photos of bountiful harvests with unbelievably optimistic captions such as, “One Hectare Yields 50,000 Kilograms of Produce!”\(^ {142}\) In Yanbian, the Chosŏnjok farmers wanted to demonstrate

\(^{140}\) Dreyer, p. 187.
\(^{141}\) Tsurushima (1979), p. 98.
\(^{142}\) Changwuk Pak Interview: 7 August 1989.
their loyalty as Chinese citizens and increase production, especially in light of the China-North Korea dispute, but they could not meet the unattainable government standards. The turmoil of the Cultural Revolution made Yanbian’s situation more akin to the description provided in the short story, “Flower Blossom Time”:

I approach the entrance of Ch’opukkol Village, my hometown...Dark, grey, the rotting thatched roofs sink under their own weight. Spider webs tremble on the pillars which are green with mold. In the field, rice stalks for cattle feed, still unthreshed, protrude from the ground like cat’s whiskers...The reality is entirely different from the ‘ten years of bountiful harvest’ proclaimed in the newspapers.  

By the 1970s it was clear even to the Beijing leadership that the communes were performing well below expectations. In 1978, when Deng Xiaoping became the leader of China, Beijing changed its agricultural policy to dismantle the Communes and to permit individual farmers to engage in small-scale private agriculture. Such economic changes, together with the political and social liberalization policy called Kaifang (開放, Openness), opened a new chapter for the Chosŏnjok.

Under Deng Xiaoping, Beijing adopted a pragmatic and conciliatory attitude toward minority nationalities because it wanted to reduce the pent-up tensions in minority areas and redress the enormous injustices and humiliations inflicted upon the minorities during the Cultural Revolution. It restored the use of minority languages, provided additional funds for the construction of minority schools, developed textbooks in minority languages, and paid more attention the training of minority cadres and teachers. In the late 1980s, Beijing recognized the ethnic minorities as culturally distinct, but

politically common, members of the Chinese state and issued a new national currency picturing various ethnic groups and projecting an image of a heterogeneous China. The Chosŏn-jok are pictured on the two jiao (角, cent) bill.

Katfang permitted the Chosŏn-jok to regain the self-confidence and enthusiasm necessary to rebuild their culture and economy. Yanbian’s farmers, no longer restricted to commune agriculture, were able to sell their agricultural products for personal profit. Between 1979 and 1987, the gross national product of Yanbian increased an average of 16% yearly and farmers’ wages rose from 177 yuan to 545 yuan.\(^{144}\) There was a dramatic rise in the purchase of consumer goods such as clothing, watches, cassette players, and televisions. Privately-owned restaurants and shops opened in Yanbian’s communities.

The economic and cultural prosperity was reflected in the Chosŏn-jok’s rituals and celebrations. At weddings, guests were no longer limited to sharing a few sticks of candy as was the case during the Cultural Revolution. When I conducted research in Yanbian in 1989, weddings were grand affairs with cakes, fruits, meats, wine, and the ceremonial chicken covering the bridal table. The bride traveled to the groom’s house in an automobile, and afterwards, the wedding party went to the bride’s house for more feasting. Another ceremony I witnessed was the hwan’gap (한갑, 還甲, 60\(^{\text{th}}\) birthday celebration) in which relatives and neighbors honored the elder for having lived a long life by presenting cups of wine and kowtows. During the autumn moon festival (ch’usŏk, 추석), Chosŏn-jok families dressed in traditional costumes (hanbok, 襦服) as they

ate traditional festival foods such as glutinous rice cakes (chalttôk, 찌떡). These celebrations were important in fostering Chosŏnjok ethnicity because they perpetuated the Korean rituals of solidarity, reaffirmed the people’s dedication to their ethnic traditions, and revealed the people’s minjoksim.

By the late 1980s, there were two major developments which affected the Chosŏnjok ethnic identity. First, the shifting demographics of Yanbian towards a Han-dominated area affected political and economic power relations and created some ethnic tensions. In 1988, Yanbian’s 1.7 million population consisted of 58% Han Chinese and 40% Chosŏnjok. The Han and Chosŏnjok increasingly competed for finite amounts of political influence and material resources. Yet because the Chosŏnjok had been long entrenched in Yanbian, they held more leadership positions than their proportion of the population warranted: 57% of the posts in the regional and country governments were held by Chosŏnjok. The Chosŏnjok also held greater economic power in the region through their positions as upper-level managers in government-run industries and in numerous small business operations. As the Han in Yanbian did not generally try to learn the Korean language, the Chosŏnjok increasingly spoke Mandarin, although Yanbian’s Korean schools continued to teach Korean to the younger generation.

Second, increased contact with the outside world since Kaifang resulted in the rapid modernization and westernization of the populace, in particular among the younger generation who favored the more upwardly-mobile Han and capitalistic values over the Korean and Communist ones. In Yanji, the Chosŏnjok worked toward modernization by completely demolishing the old thatched roof houses and erecting new apartment buildings and department stores. Factories were also established during the 1980s to
build machinery, televisions, and radios, as well as to brew beer. As for westernization, many of the young people saw Mickey Mouse, American pop music, and blue jeans as positive status symbols; wanted to dress and live like the characters in Hong Kong shows that were broadcast on television; and own the latest advertised commodities such as refrigerators and motorcycles. To attain these possessions, they sought high paying jobs outside Yanji and desired to learn English and Japanese, the languages of contemporary capitalistic success. However, the capitalist ambition to acquire wealth and social success was viewed by some Yanbian elders as values that challenged the cohesion of the Chosŏnjok ethnic group.

A key factor in the transformation of Yanbian into a modern society was the expansion of communications, travel, and media. The Chosŏnjok were particularly curious about South Korea, which had gained international recognition for its industrial prowess and for hosting the 1988 Olympic Games. They were also curious about other Korean diaspora groups which lived different lifestyles yet shared similar struggles as ethnic minorities. After decades of focusing on building their identity as an ethnic minority in the PRC, the Chosŏnjok began to conceive of South Korea as a “homeland” and also attached themselves to the global phenomenon of the Korean diaspora. Once again, the Chosŏnjok were re-working their ethnic boundaries, but this time expanding to embrace a larger, more transnational conception of Korean identity.
Conclusion: Transnational Identities (1992-present)

In 1992, after four decades of angry silence, the PRC and South Korea normalized diplomatic relations. South Korean tourists, students, businessmen, and cultural media began pouring into Yanbian. These transnational activities greatly impacted the Chosŏnjok's sense of ethnic identity which until this time had been locally constructed based on a history of pioneer rice farming, anti-Japanese resistance, and as an ethnic minority in the PRC. The Chosŏnjok now began to build strong emotional bridges toward South Korea. Their secondary ethnic boundary was cast broadly at a transnational level and they began to construct an ethnic identity that was deeply influenced by their encounter with the South Koreans.

The Chosŏnjok also now had the freedom to travel to South Korea and visit this "homeland" they had heard so much about. They went with high expectations, hoping to connect with long-lost relatives and to feel welcome as fellow Koreans. However, their actual encounters with the South Koreans often led to disappointment as the two groups of Koreans found each other to be surprisingly different. Both groups of Koreans have since had to readjust their conceptions of what it is to be "Korean" in light of their transnational contacts.

South Korean Influence in Yanbian

The normalization of relations resulted in an economic boom for Yanbian as the result of South Korean capital investments into this primarily agricultural region. Within a decade after normalization, over 1,200 South Koreans had invested about USD 600 million in business ventures in Yanbian such as restaurants, textiles, Chinese medicine,
and construction materials. Moreover, every summer over 120,000 tourists arrived to climb Paektu Mountain and energized the economy with tourist dollars. The tourist dollars together with remittances by Chosŏnjok working in South Korea amounted to about USD 80 million a year.\textsuperscript{145} South Korean organizations also channeled funds into everything from universities to traditional Korean art and helped to fuel a renaissance of Korean culture in Yanbian (although with a South Korean twist). These activities contributed to a strong sense among the Chosŏnjok of "symbolic ethnicity," a feeling that they were ethnically similar to the South Koreans despite having been born and raised in China.

Symbolic ethnicity is a manifestation of ethnicity used by diaspora groups that have been separated from their homeland by distance and generations. Since the diaspora's ethnicity has become weakened by a loss of the institutional and social organizations which would normally anchor their ethnicity, they rely heavily on the use of cultural symbols (e.g. festivals, ethnic foods, nationalist movements in their homeland, the homeland itself) as the main means of perpetuating their ethnicity. Symbolic ethnicity is considered a weak form of ethnicity because it is primarily an expressive form that allows people to declare their ethnic pride in intermittent ways without having to change their daily lives or everyday behavior. At the same time, symbolic ethnicity has the power to persist for generations as long as the cultural symbols hold a visible and clear in meaning to large numbers of the diaspora.\textsuperscript{146}

Symbolic ethnicity has always been present among the Chosŏnjok due to their ethnic schools and associations which provided constant opportunities for the Chosŏnjok to discover, express, and experience behavior that was understood to represent a distinctive Korean culture. However, the influx of South Korean tourists, capital and media pushed the direction of their symbolic ethnicity toward a strong affinity with the culture of South Korea. As a result, Yanbian’s capital, Yanji, transformed in many ways to become a clone of a South Korean metropolis: billboards featured the latest in South Korean fashions and cars, satellite antennas dotted rooftops to catch South Korean television, and the Chosŏnjok eagerly consumed products and ideas imported from South Korea. The strength of these symbolic ethnic ties even motivated over 300,000 Chosŏnjok to migrate to South Korea. For the Chosŏnjok remaining in Yanbian, the strength of their symbolic ethnic ties to South Korea caused them to de-emphasize their Chinese national consciousness. This behavior prompted the Chinese state to reprimand the Chosŏnjok and to downgrade them from their high status as a model minority to one of the recalcitrant minority groups that threatened the unity of the Chinese nation.\textsuperscript{147}

\textit{Chosŏnjok Migrate to South Korea}

During the Cold War years, the Chosŏnjok had contact with North Korea but not with South Korea. At the time of the Cultural Revolution, the Chosŏnjok envied the relative prosperity of North Koreans. However, by the 1980s, the Chosŏnjok knew that their living conditions were much better than that of North Korea so they preferred to stay in China and consider Yanbian their "homeland" rather than identify with North

\textsuperscript{147} Hyun Ok Park, p. 237.
Korea. When I was in Yanbian in 1989, the Chosŏnjok expressed a longing to make South Korea the center of their discourse about their “Korean homeland” because they had heard about the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the economic success of South Korea, and they expressed a desire to see for themselves this bright and modern Korea. As soon as South Korea and China normalized relations in 1992, the global forces of commerce, contact, and communication played strong roles in causing the Chosŏnjok to construct powerful transnational identities that transcended local loyalties and affiliations, and inspired many to leave Yanbian and migrate to South Korea to visit, to become wives, to study, and to find jobs.

In an odd twist of fate, the Chosŏnjok who lived for over a century in the borderland of Kando found that upon their arrival at their longed-for homeland of South Korea, they still remained a border people. They expected signs of inclusion and acceptance from the South Koreans but were instead met with “othering” discourses which discounted and ridiculed their claims of common Koreanness. Some South Koreans labeled the Chosŏnjok as second-rate citizens, humble beggars, con-artists, ruthless outlaws, and even “reds” who came to Korea through illegal routes and with illegal intentions. This came as a shock to the Chosŏnjok who were used being well-regarded in China for their high socio-economic and educational status, long Communist affiliation, and connection to the highly respected modernity of South Korea. In this sense, globalization had a disillusioning effect on the Chosŏnjok migrants who faced negative attitudes and discrimination in South Korea.

The Chosŏnjok migrants were not granted permanent residence by the South
Korean government and generally ended up working illegally in the “3-D Jobs” (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) under poor working conditions, without health insurance, and without job security. In early 2004, the 300,000 Chosŏnjok constituted about 60% of the foreign workforce in South Korea. While the Chosŏnjok workers did not seem to suffer any more than other foreign workers, their anger was more pronounced since it stemmed from thwarted expectations of camaraderie based on a shared ethnicity.

The Chosŏnjok migrants also found that the more they endeavored to present themselves as ethnic Koreans, the more they found it impossible to be equal to South Koreans in all aspects of history, institutional status, and culture. For those who endured prejudice in South Korea, the discrimination made them oscillate between their yearning to be recognized as true Koreans and their desire to renounce their Korean identity. Some concluded that they were more Chinese than Korean, and while living in Korea sought solace in bonding with others who shared their “Chinese” identity. Others sought to create a sense of communal social cohesion around a “Yanbian” culture in which their specialties of food, drink, and entertainment were featured.

The unfavorable evaluations which many Chosŏnjok migrants developed about South Korea were quite a contrast to perceptions they had in China before migration, where the positive image of Koreanness they had received through globalization was the basis of their feelings of transnational ethnic commonality with the South Koreans.

Whether the negative attitudes will inhibit the Chosŏnjok from settling in South Korea is

149 Hyun Ok Park, p. 235.
unknown at this point. For some, their main goal is to earn a higher wage and save money to return to China. Others seek find a spouse or good job in South Korea so that they can settle down there. Whether the Chosŏnjok receptively embrace a transnational consciousness, or experience a strengthening of local identity in opposition to the global, depends very much on whether global forces have positive or negative meanings for them.

**South Korean Perceptions of Chosŏnjok**

On the South Korean side, the arrival of 300,000 Chosŏnjok created a small shock wave. The South Koreans saw how culturally different their ethnic brethren were, and although on one level they realized that cultural differences were natural, they somehow felt that the Chosŏnjok were not “Korean.” The official government line was that all overseas Koreans were members of the same Korean people, but governmental policies made it clear that overseas Koreans were foreigners, especially those from less economically developed regions such as China and the former USSR. Korean scholars and media proffered that Chosŏnjok would contribute to South Korea by helping to resolve the nation’s workforce shortage, but this approach only saw the Chosŏnjok as mere tools and did not address the underlying discrimination prevalent in South Korean society.

South Korean state policies have not been favorable to the Chosŏnjok. The *Law on Overseas Koreans* (1999) granted overseas Koreans the right to invest capital, own property, and work in the private and public sectors. However, the definition of “overseas Koreans” only recognized those persons who once lived in South Korea as
citizens and their descendants. This definition effectively excluded overseas Koreans from China, Russia, and Japan who lost contact with their relatives during the colonial period or whose families were from North Korea. The Chosŏnjok living in South Korea protested this discrimination and filed a lawsuit, whereupon the supreme court declared the law unconstitutional and ordered a revision. The revised law now establishes the family register (hojŏk, 호적, 戶籍) as the criterion for national membership and limits the definition of “overseas Koreans” to two generations—those who left Korea and their children.\footnote{Hyun Ok Park, p. 235.} This new criterion for national membership continues to exclude most overseas Koreans from China, Russia, and Japan, since many have been separated from their Korean roots for more than two generations and would not be listed in Korean family registers.

The South Koreans have found that their initial curiosity about the Chosŏnjok has waned and have since settled on the view that they are “others” rather than “one of us.” The Chosŏnjok, as ethnic anomalies, have disrupted the South Koreans’ assumed correlation between race and culture that is the foundation for their ethno-national identity. They have also forced South Korean society to gradually expand the concept of Koreanness to include those who are of Korean racial descent but are culturally different. Certainly, the South Koreans will need to develop a more inclusive attitude and less discriminatory laws toward overseas Koreans, since there exist over 6,000,000 Korean diaspora worldwide. Furthermore, North Korean refugees are entering South Korea in increasing numbers and it is expected that a future normalization of North-South relations will bring millions of North Koreans—who have also developed cultural and ideological
differences to South Korea.

**Conclusion: Ethnic Identities in an Era of Globalization**

Global migration can be seen as a form of resistance against the nation-state because it enables individuals to escape the fixed spaces and disciplining surveillance of the state. From the time that the first Korean pioneers surreptitiously crossed the river into China, the Koreans situated themselves in a global context. As a diaspora, the Chosŏnjok have often challenged the efforts of various nation-states to keep them confined to a territorial boundary and to discipline them into obedient subjects. Some scholars, such as Arjun Appadurai, have argued that globalization produces new forms of transnational allegiance based on technology, science, media, mass participation in politics, and higher education which make people more cosmopolitan, such that primordial forms of identity—such as ethnic identity—will become less important. Yet the interesting feature of the Chosŏnjok ethnicity is that this fundamentally primordial attribute has become empowered by globalization and succeeds in fueling increased ethnic awareness by making them more cognizant of alien ethnic groups as well as more conscious of those who share their identity. Thus, in counter-position to Appadurai’s claim, the Chosŏnjok have actively used their ethnic identity to center their community and assert local loyalties. The life of this community has been maintained for over seven generations by the primordial force of their *minjoksim* which reinforced their ethnic boundaries in times of trouble, gave them courage to engage in acts of resistance against despotic rulers, and rallied them when they needed to mobilize.

Over the course of their history, the shape of the Chosŏnjok’s ethnic boundaries
has changed many times as they reworked their ethnic identities and redefined their cultural repertoire to accommodate or resist the larger global influences. Japan’s intrusion in Manchuria made the Chosŏnjok into Chinese-Japanese-Koreans, the rise of the PRC made them into Communist cadres, and the recent influence of South Korea has caused them to create a “Korean” identity with a South Korean twist. Depending on the socio-political situation, their ethnic boundaries have been stronger or weaker, and expressions of their ethnic identity have ranged from strong to symbolic. In their diaspora life, each generation of Chosŏnjok sustained and nurtured their ethnic identity in different forms than the previous generation. Yet at the same time, their actions have created a historically-specific “Chosŏnjok” identity. Thus, ultimately, the nation at the center of the Chosŏnjok discourses about the Korean homeland is their very own “Yanbian Korea.”

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