

Among Ghosts and Tigers

The Chinese in the Russian Far East, 1917-1920

Yuexin Rachel Lin

St Antony's College

University of Oxford

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in History

Trinity 2015

Among Ghosts and Tigers: The Chinese in the Russian Far East, 1917-1920

Yuexin Rachel Lin

St Antony's College

DPhil History

Trinity 2015

Abstract

This thesis examines the experiences of the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East during the revolutionary and Civil War period from 1917 to 1920, as well as their responses to the upheaval. Bucking the current trend towards transcultural history, the thesis argues that Chinese identity and nationalist language were of prime importance to this community. By concentrating on Chinese-language sources, the thesis re-privileges the community's internal discourses and highlights the prevalence of nationalist rhetoric across the Sino-Russian border. It also sites the Chinese community's use of nationalist language within the context of the global diaspora, for which questions of national weakness and revival were also pressing.

Going further, the thesis postulates the presence of "Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics", in which the issues surrounding Chinese nationalism as a whole were heightened. It shows that the rhetoric of "national humiliation" and victimhood were particularly immediate to the community in the Russian Far East, since it was located at one of the epicentres of imperial contestation. In practice, this led to a *modus vivendi* with the Reds and a decisive turn against the Whites. Furthermore, the chaos of the revolutions and Civil War imbued this nationalism with an opportunistic quality. The collapse of Russian state power became the

“opportunity of a thousand years” for China to redress past wrongs. This allowed the overseas community to work closely with local authorities and the Beijing government to achieve shared goals. New civil society organisations with community-wide aims were formed. Beijing extended its diplomatic reach in the form of new Far Eastern consulates. Finally, common nationalist rhetoric underpinned China’s successful attempt to re-establish its civilian and military presence on the Amur River. “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics” could be effectively harnessed to secure multi-level and cross-border cooperation.

Among Ghosts and Tigers: The Chinese in the Russian Far East, 1917-1920

Yuexin Rachel Lin

St Antony's College

DPhil History

Trinity 2015

Departmental Abstract

Scholars of the Russian imperial periphery, including those studying the Russian Far East, have recently adopted the analytical frameworks of “transnationalism” and “transculturalism”. Under these frameworks, identities, cultural practices and ways of life in such peripheral areas are said to undergo a process of adaptation and convergence, transcending borders and concepts of nationhood. However, this framework focuses overwhelmingly on the experiences of Russian migrants, colonisers and administrators, and the Russian-language sources they produced. It is extremely problematic when applied to the overseas Chinese community, despite some scholars' attempts to do so.

This thesis examines the experiences of the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East during the revolutionary and Civil War period from 1917 to 1920, as well as their responses to the upheaval. In doing so, the thesis argues for the presence of “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics”, which combined Chinese historical narratives of “national humiliation” with a sense of unprecedented opportunity.

Both of these aspects were particularly pronounced in this region and during the Civil War. Geographically speaking, the Russian Far East was a deeply contested frontier. Studies of Sino-Russian diplomatic and imperial history have emphasised how the eastward expansion of tsarist Russia, beginning in the 1850s, led to a string of Chinese defeats and the loss of vast swathes of territory from the Qing empire. The first capitulation was the Aigun Treaty of 1858, under which the Qing empire ceded all its lands north of the Amur River, some 600,000 square kilometres, to Russia. Two years later, the Treaty of Peking confirmed the Aigun provisions and granted the lands east of the Ussuri to Russia. In the 1870s a Muslim rebellion in Xinjiang opened the door to a Russian occupation of the Ili valley in Central Asia. The Russians threatened war when the Chinese reconquered Xinjiang, although a peaceful resolution was achieved in 1881. Then, beginning in the 1890s, the construction of the China Eastern Railway and the establishment of a Russian administration in the railway zone raised the spectre of a Russian colony in China. The climax came when the Russians took advantage of anti-foreigner violence during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion to station troops in Manchuria. Until the Russo-Japanese War, they declined to honour their commitment to withdraw these forces. And although Russia was only one of the countries to impose an indemnity on the Chinese for the Boxer Rebellion, it claimed the largest share - almost 30% - of this indemnity. Moreover, the Russian administrators of the newly acquired Far Eastern territories did not shrink from adding insult to injury with racist laws, such as the ban on "yellow labour" instituted in 1910.

This was diplomacy at the barrel of a gun, a series of capitulations that have been described as "psychological devastation" for the Chinese, who had previously considered themselves a superior civilisation. Several researchers have argued that

China's losses led to the creation of a series of discursive myths to explain these defeats and justify redress. These myths are all centred around sovereignty and the border. For example, by reframing the lost territories as integral parts of Chinese territory, China could push for the restoration of these borderlands. Linked to this is the idea that the Chinese empire was somehow more "moderate" and peaceful than the Russian, allowing China to see itself as the "innocent victim of the predations of rapacious foreigners". This language of victimhood, which carried over into the Republican period, became part and parcel of a wider nationalist discourse that had widespread appeal both in China proper and among the global Chinese diaspora.

Located, as they were, along the contested Sino-Russian frontier, the Chinese diaspora in the Russian Far East lived and worked at the epicentre of imperial conflict. The region was claimed by both the Russian and Chinese geo-bodies. By the late 19th century, it had also become the object of Japan's imperial ambitions. For this particular diaspora community, therefore, memories and narratives of national victimhood were particularly fresh. These narratives characterised the Chinese response not only to tsarist expansion, but to the Russian revolutions and Civil War as well. By examining hitherto little-used Chinese-language sources, the thesis argues that nationalist and ethnic identity was very much alive and well among the overseas Chinese during this period. The sources show that the language of national prestige [*guoti*] and sovereignty [*zhuquan*] was absolutely pervasive among the Chinese. They identified themselves as *huaqiao*, or *overseas Chinese*, part of a community in Russia separate from the Russians. They adamantly maintained that they were no different from their compatriots back home. In fact, in their balance sheet against the Russians, the overseas Chinese considered themselves more sinned against than sinning. They saw themselves as victims of tsarist rapacity, anti-

Chinese legislation and the depredation of both Reds and Whites. Rather than abandoning concepts of countries and borders, these “transcultural characters” persisted in maintaining an image of China that was not only sovereign but also imperial, taking in frontier territories such as Mongolia and Xinjiang. They remained preoccupied with borders and treaties, since these same borders and treaties were seen as symbols of national humiliation. Throughout the Civil War, therefore, the Chinese tended to sympathise with whichever side in the conflict that promised to honour China’s territorial sovereignty, or at least pose the least threat to its geo-body. In practice, this meant a temporary concordat with the Reds and a decisive turn against the Whites. After all, the Reds disseminated their official rhetoric of anti-imperialism, which was calculated to appeal to Chinese sentiment. The Whites, on the other hand, were seen as the inheritors of tsarist greed and the stalking horses of Japanese expansionism.

The second pillar of “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics” was opportunism. This thesis argues that Chinese nationalism was not just a static, but also an expansive one. The logic of the victimhood narrative demanded that China wipe away its past humiliations. Prior to the 1917 revolutions and Civil War, China’s efforts to stem the tide of Russian expansion had yielded few results. Now the collapse of Russian state power brought unprecedented possibilities. China was weak, but Russia gripped by war and revolution was weaker. This proved irresistible to the Chinese on both sides of the Sino-Russian border and across several social groups. In the eyes of Chinese officialdom, warlord-governors in Manchuria and overseas Chinese merchants, the disorder in Russia was the “opportunity of a thousand years” to redress old grievances and make new gains. They were keen to

take advantage of this unprecedented chance to recover rights which they had “lost” to the Russians.

The thesis shows that the language of nationalist opportunism, which pervaded large swathes of the diaspora community, went beyond mere rhetoric. Nationalist opportunism proved to be a robust link between the overseas Chinese, Manchurian authorities and the government in Beijing. The Chinese government had come relatively late to the idea that its overseas citizens could be a policy-making asset but, by the 20th century, the Republican regime used the overseas Chinese as a weapon in their diplomatic arsenal. On the other hand, the overseas Chinese themselves took the initiative to organise and agitate for their own interests.

Two key thrusts of Chinese opportunism are examined in this thesis. The first combined diplomatic and civil society initiatives. As a power vacuum emerged in Russia, the Beijing government, urged on by Chinese merchants and students, established a network of Far Eastern consulates for the protection of its citizens. These institutions had previously been blocked by tsarist officials and Beijing’s deliberations on the consulate issue showed a keen desire to present the Russians with a *fait accompli*. By the end of 1920, most of the five new consuls and vice-consuls had made strides in advancing Chinese goals, such as the lifting of anti-Chinese legislation. The re-establishment of Russian authority under the Reds was unable to dislodge the new consulates, at least in the short term.

For their part, the Chinese diaspora in Russia began to form new organisations, namely the Overseas Chinese Associations. These were not the first organisations to be found within the overseas Chinese community. Chambers of commerce had

already existed before 1917 and became important channels of communication between the overseas Chinese and the state, providing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information on the situation in Russia. However, the Associations became the foundation for a new kind of inter-estate cooperation, linking officials, merchants and, to a lesser extent, workers. A prototype Association was established first in Petrograd, followed by a branch in Moscow. Other such organisations sprang up in the cities of the Far East with a large Chinese population, including Blagoveshchensk, Nerchinsk and Chita. These combined self-defence with a keen sense of patriotic duty and national prestige, as reflected in many of their founding documents. The Petrograd association, for example, was closely linked to the repatriation of Chinese workers who, having been recruited in Russia's war effort, were cast adrift by the collapse of the front. Like the consulates, the Associations did not seek Russian approval. They framed their activities in nationalist terms, negotiating with the Russian authorities to protect Chinese interests and collaborating closely with Chinese officials.

The second issue demonstrating the dynamic power of nationalist opportunism is the question of Amur shipping. Prior to 1917, the Russians had managed to edge the Chinese out of the Amur River. The Chinese, in turn, considered Amur shipping one of their "lost rights". They viewed the outbreak of the Civil War as a golden opportunity to recover this right. Through this period, Manchurian governors worked hand in glove with Chinese merchants and chambers of commerce to buy Russian ships. Heilongjiang warlord Bao Guiqing encouraged the establishment of the Wu Tong Shipping Company, whose board members included top power brokers in the Beijing government. Provincial authorities negotiated with the Reds to draw up regulations on Amur shipping. Wu Tong itself played a critical role in pushing the

limits of Russian tolerance and eventually managed to re-establish Chinese merchant steamers on the Amur, even going so far as to sail to the mouth of the river. Finally, when an emboldened China sought to launch not just merchant ships, but also military craft up the Amur, merchants provided both intelligence and supplies to the flotilla. The new consuls negotiated tirelessly with the Russian authorities to secure the flotilla's safe passage. By the end of 1920, even this goal had been achieved and a Chinese military presence was established on the Sungari. From Beijing to Blagoveshchensk, the language of opportunism suffused multiple sectors of the Chinese community. It allowed multiple actors to work coherently towards a shared nationalist goal. The shipping issue, therefore, clearly illustrates the effectiveness of "Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics".

For all its transcultural aspects, therefore, the overseas Chinese community was critical to the nationalist effort. In many cases, they spoke the same nationalist language as their compatriots and officials back home. Hence, this thesis argues that it is impossible to consider the overseas Chinese community - cosmopolitan and adaptive as it was - without due attention to nationalism. It maintains that the emphasis on "transcultural characters", while a useful antidote to a state-centric model of imperial rivalry, does not do justice to the motivations and self-identification of the overseas Chinese. Furthermore, it grounds the Chinese in the Russian Far East firmly within the context of Chinese nationalism in general, especially among the global diaspora. This is amply illuminated by the community's response to the disintegration of Russian state power, which was overwhelmingly informed by the language of national humiliation and prestige. Nationalist rhetoric shaped and directed the Chinese reaction to this power vacuum, imbuing the pressing need for self-defence with an opportunism that transcended borders and estates. This proved

an effective strategy, as the Associations, consulates and Amur shipping issue clearly demonstrate. Nationalism became the discursive centre of gravity for the Chinese community. It tempered the phenomenon of Chinese warlordism and contrasted sharply with the uncertain rhetoric of the White movement. "Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics" was a strategy which united the community across the Sino-Russian border and made possible a certain coherence of action. By putting the Chinese internal narrative front and centre, this thesis balances out the framework of transculturalism and offers a new perspective on the impact of both the community itself and of the Russian Civil War.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
A Note on Transliteration, Dates and Terms	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Among Ghosts and Tigers	34
Chapter 2: “They Woke Up and Joined Forces”	115
Chapter 3: Taming the Black Dragon	190
Conclusion	268
Appendix A: Dramatis Personae	277
Appendix B: The Harbin Strike Pamphlet	283
Appendix C: Bao Guiqing’s 1919 Military Plan	284
Appendix D: The Navy Ministry’s Map of the Amur River	285
Appendix E: Ship Sales to the Guang Xin Company	286
Appendix F: Guoji Xiebao Articles on the Flotilla Incident	287
Appendix G: Russian Article on the Flotilla Incident	289
Bibliography	290

Acknowledgements

Many debts were incurred in the writing of this thesis. My heartfelt thanks, first of all, to my supervisor, Professor Catherine Andreyev, whose patience, rigour and good humour guided me through the entire process. Without her insight into matters both scholarly and secular this work would not have been possible. Other debts are to Professor David Priestland and Professor Stephen Smith, who have offered incisive advice on this project since its inception. Professor Mark Gamsa, Associate Professor Sergei Glebov and Professor Natalia Khisamutdinova kindly shared their wide-ranging research into the cultural exchanges on both sides of the Sino-Russian frontier. Dr Erik Landis and Professor Jonathan Smele were extremely forthcoming with their knowledge about Siberia and the Russian Civil War. Professor Rana Mitter provided critical input on Chinese nationalism, and Professor Alexander Morrison's perspectives on another imperial periphery were very illuminating.

Deepest thanks also to the archive staff at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica. My gratitude goes especially to Dr Yu Miin-ling, who answered my queries about the archives.

Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the support of my parents, who educated me in the ways of the diaspora, and my brother Matthew. Although my interest in things Russian has often left them bewildered, they have stood by me regardless. I am indebted also to Edward Luper, who has tolerated the tumultuous course to the completion of this project. This road would have been much longer and rockier without his encouragement. If a thesis may have a dedication, it is to my grandparents, whom I can only cherish from afar. When I first departed for the UK,

my now-late grandfather left me with some advice: "Do not forget your roots." This thesis is perhaps my way of showing him that nothing is forgotten.

A Note on Transliteration, Dates and Terms

Transliterations from Cyrillic adopt the Library of Congress system. For Chinese, the pinyin romanisation system has been used, except where names are better known in alternative romanisations, for example Aigun instead of *Aihun*. Throughout the footnotes, “China Eastern Railway” is abbreviated as “CER”.

In October 1917, Chinese premier Duan Qirui created a special military committee under his direct control, termed the *Canlu Bangong Chu*, which brought together the heads of the General Staff and Army Ministry. Since the name of this committee has not been adequately translated into English, it appears in this thesis as “Canlu”.

All Russian dates are in New Style. Some difficulty arises due to inconsistencies in the calendar system used in the Chinese documents, and it is not always clear if a writer is using the traditional lunisolar calendar or the Gregorian one. Where possible, all dates have been rendered in the Gregorian calendar. Chinese year names, which follow a 60-year calendrical cycle, have also been converted into their western counterparts: *xinhai nian* into 1911, for example. The same has been done with regnal years: For example, *Guangxu 32* has been rendered as 1906, or *Minguo* (Republic) 7 as 1918.

The Chinese were not always consistent in the terms they used to refer to the various Russian factions. On the whole, the Reds were christened the *guojidang* (extremist party), *xindang* (new party) or *duoshudang* (majoritarians). Less frequently used are the terms *hongdang* (Reds) or *hongjun* (Red Army). The word *pai* (faction) could also be substituted for *dang*. Usage in the sources suggests that the Chinese did not

always differentiate between the bolsheviks and other left-wing groups, often lumping them together as “extremists” or “majoritarians”. Where the term occurs in the sources, therefore, I have chosen the more expansive translation of “Reds” rather than “bolsheviks”. On the other hand, the anti-bolsheviks were termed *jiudang* (old party), *baidang* (Whites) or *hasake* (cossacks), for which the translation “Whites” seems appropriate.

Introduction

Liu Wenzhi's nightmare began on 30 October 1919. That afternoon, 400 White Cossack cavalymen entered the gold mining town of Gorbitsa, north of Sretensk, where Liu had run a shop for many years. Entering the shop, the White commander demanded all the money in the cash registers and an inventory of Liu's goods. Not satisfied with robbery, the Cossacks led the terrified Liu into an inner room, forced him to undress and lashed him with a whip, all the time accusing him of hiding weapons for the Reds. Liu protested his innocence and the Cossacks eventually released him, but not before stealing his clothes, goods from his shop, even the whip they had used to beat him.

Shaken by this, Liu's brother advised him over dinner to wind up the business and return to China. Liu told his brother not to be disheartened, but his confidence was short-lived. Later that night, he heard the frantic sound of horses' hooves in the streets. In the moonlight he saw that his neighbour's house was full of Russian soldiers. Liu naturally feared the worst. Fleeing his home, he took refuge in a cowshed where, for an hour, he heard intermittent gunfire. When the shooting died down, Liu escaped the shed and hid in the cellar of a fellow Chinese, Tan Kecai.

Russians were Liu's tormentors - and his saviours. The next morning the Cossacks came to search Tan's house, but because he had a Russian wife, Tan was spared any rough handling. After the troops had left, Tan discovered Liu in the cellar and the dismal truth emerged:

Tan...came to the cellar and, when he saw me inside, he said I was very lucky. The Russian troops had searched everywhere

but did not open the cellar. He said merchants had been harmed... Just as we were talking, someone jumped in. It was my brother in a great panic. Our chief cashier had been beaten to death by Russian soldiers and he did not know where the bookkeeper had gone. He was lucky to escape with his life.

Tan's house was too hot to hold him, so Liu took refuge with a Russian family. For the next four days he stayed in hiding, a virtual prisoner in the family's cellar. The woman of the house brought him food. At great personal risk, she concealed him when the troops suspected her of harbouring someone. In the meantime, the cossacks ransacked the town's Chinese homes, plundered all their gold and money and loaded Chinese merchants' goods onto sleds. Claiming that the Chinese had helped the Reds, the Whites killed them indiscriminately. The bodies of 30 men lay on the streets of Gorbitsa. Others were gunned down while fleeing or perished of cold and hunger in the surrounding forest.

By 7 November Liu's rescuers judged that it was safe for him to come out of the cellar, but at midnight White soldiers barged into the house and recognised Liu, demanding that he be arrested and killed. Thinking quickly, the woman of the house said that Liu was one of their assistants and sent for the village chief to corroborate her story:

The village chief and six other Russians came and told the officer that I was a petty cashier, not the manager of a Chinese shop. The officer would not budge. The village chief then said that if I were killed for my money, how would they be able to explain this to the Chinese? The officer had no choice but to let it go and I was unharmed. The village chief's goodwill must never be forgotten.

The next day, the village chief advised Liu to leave Russia and come back when peace had returned, giving him money for his journey back to China. He also gave Liu the name and address of the White commander who had led the attack, so that

Liu could make a report. Together with his brother and other refugees, Liu hired a sled and commenced the wintry six-day journey home. Seeing China again, he said, was “like seeing my family”. He asked the Chinese authorities to call the Russians to account, and to demand that the Russians compensate him and his compatriots in Gorbitsa for their losses to life and property. This, Liu said, would “ease the suffering of tens of thousands of overseas Chinese”.

Liu’s account, which he had recorded in his diary, was passed to a representative of the overseas Chinese in Gorbitsa, Wang Dechun. Wang included it in his own lengthy report on the Gorbitsa affair to the Chinese border garrison at Zhu’ergan, and added his own appeal:

We have traded here for several years and are well known. Each of us has tens of thousands of rubles in capital. What is more, we do not have weapons, so how can we be helping the Reds? Now the Whites have carried this out. They have no humanity. Such cruelty to the Chinese is wrong... All the residents have elected me as a representative to ask for serious negotiations to avenge this injustice, so that those who were killed can have retribution, those who are dispossessed can have compensation, and to protect our national sovereignty.

Tao Guang, the commander at Zhu’ergan, sent this on to Sun Liechen, military governor of the border province of Heilongjiang and one of the *de facto* warlords of Manchuria. Like Wang, Tao made his own comment on the report:

So many overseas Chinese have been harmed in Russia. Since they are in a foreign country, China should have sent troops to protect them long ago, using this to enhance national prestige and give the Chinese some succour... Us soldiers see overseas Chinese fleeing their homes, abandoning their families, losing their livelihoods, leaving all their possessions. The sound of their weeping can be heard everywhere and those of us who hear it are filled with pity. The cruelty of the Russian troops is obvious to everyone and known to all. The Russian villagers cannot bear to stand aloof and have questioned us many times.

Finally, Sun sent the entire report to the Foreign Ministry in Beijing, asking for stern negotiations with the Russian ambassador N.A. Kudashev. “When this matter first occurred I called for an investigation,” Sun wrote. “The overseas Chinese who were killed were honest merchants and workers who had no connection to the Reds. China should negotiate to safeguard overseas Chinese lives and protect national sovereignty.”¹

A single thread runs through the many layers of authority that accompanied the Gorbitsa report. Outrage at the Whites’ brutality was, of course, paramount. But undergirding and channelling this outrage was a keen sense that the attack was not just an attack on the town’s Chinese residents. Rather, the merchants and officials perceived it as an affront to the overseas Chinese in Russia as a whole and a threat to Chinese prestige, even to its *sovereignty*. Interpreted in this way, Gorbitsa became a flashpoint around which Chinese nationalist feeling could coalesce. The Chinese had to seek redress because this was a nationalist issue, one in which the country itself was at stake.

The Chinese response to the events at Gorbitsa was not new. Although the Russian Civil War in the Far East furnished many and varied incidents of arbitrary lawlessness, the overseas Chinese and their officials on the ground filtered them all through the same nationalist lens. This thesis explores how nationalist rhetoric dominated the overseas Chinese approach to the Russian Civil War. Merchants, consuls and warlords alike persisted in seeing the Civil War as a threat to the Chinese nation and an opportunity for its revival. In doing so, they mirrored a wider

¹ “Letter from Sun Liechen, 4 Feb 1920”. T. Guo, Y. Wang, Y. Tao and J. Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe, Minguo jiunian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1968), pp 25-30

discourse on nationalism taking place within China itself and among the Chinese diaspora elsewhere.

This thesis breaks new ground on two fronts: geographical and historiographical. First, although other diaspora Chinese communities have been studied in the context of Chinese nationalism, it is surprising that the overseas Chinese in *Russia* have not been included in the scholarship. By focusing on the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East during the Civil War, therefore, the thesis highlights the importance of nationalist sentiment in a hitherto unexplored Chinese community. Second, the thesis serves as a useful corrective to those studies of the Chinese community in Russia that *do* exist. These works argue for the presence of a “transcultural” or “cosmopolitan” Chinese community, even going so far as to downplay the importance of ethnic or territorial boundaries. Unfortunately, they tend to rely heavily (sometimes exclusively) on Russian or western sources, obscuring the internal narratives of the Chinese themselves, which are overwhelmingly nationalist. This thesis aims to redress the balance by putting Chinese-language sources front and centre, thereby qualifying the validity of the “cosmopolitan” school of thought.²

In sum, by synthesising new geographical and historiographical approaches, the thesis will site the Chinese community in the Russian Far East firmly within the context of Chinese diaspora nationalism. What emerges is not solely a “transcultural” community, but rather “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics”, in which nationalist discourse was shaped and harnessed by the politics of a contested frontier. The events of the Russian Civil War, the collapse of tsarist state power, the rise of cossack warlords and the Allied Intervention in Siberia all combined to throw

² See pages 30-32 for a discussion of the sources.

these characteristics into sharp relief. Finally, the shifting dynamics of the Civil War allowed overseas Chinese nationalism to play a critical strategic role, coordinating and directing Chinese efforts to take advantage of Russian weakness.

Cosmopolitanism and its discontents

To begin with, it is important to consider the existing historiography of the Sino-Russian frontier and of the overseas Chinese in Russia. The “transcultural” or “cosmopolitan” approach has proven popular despite its relatively recent vintage, and it is not difficult to see why. The migration of large numbers of Chinese across the border into Russia and the expansion of Russian imperial power into Manchuria is seen as creating new economic, social and cultural fields that cut across state borders.³ The economy of the Russian Far East was linked more to the markets and manpower of Manchuria than to European Russia, while the interaction of Russian and Chinese migrants led to the development of a Sino-Russian “frontier culture”. Recent scholarship has therefore moved towards a more integrated study of the frontier and its people, emphasising cross-border exchange and region-wide developments. Willard Sunderland’s work on the White leader Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, for example, characterises the Baron as a “toxic cosmopolitan” drawing eclectically from Baltic, Russian, Turkic and Mongol influences.⁴ Benjamin Isitt’s *On the Borders of Bolshevism*, a study of the Canadian expedition to Vladivostok, also

³ N. Ryzhova, “Informal Economy of Translocations. The Case of the Twin City of Blagoveshchensk-Heihe”. *Inner Asia* 10 (2008), p 325

⁴ W. Sunderland, *Baron Ungern, Toxic Cosmopolitan*. (Washington, DC: National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Title VIII Program, 2005), p 3. Sunderland also poses the question of whether links can be drawn between cossack and Chinese “warlord style” in the context of two collapsing empires. W. Sunderland, “The Last of the White Moustaches: Recent Books on the Anti-Bolshevik Commanders of the East”, *Kritika* 9(3) (2007), p 600. Ungern-Sternberg seems to embody the cosmopolitan concept very well and James Palmer has given this a more popular treatment. J. Palmer, *The Bloody White Baron* (London: Faber, 2008).

takes a cosmopolitan approach, deliberately placing the Russian Far East at the focal point of contested imperial borderlands. In doing so, Isitt emphasises the cross-cultural interactions between Canadian soldiers and local migrant workers, many of whom had come from China.⁵

The hybrid-culture approach is particularly associated with studies on Russia's Manchurian possessions. David Wolff's *To the Harbin Station* emphasises the cosmopolitan nature of the city and its atmosphere of relative liberalism not found in Russia proper. Approaching Harbin from the Chinese angle, James Carter examines how local officials and intelligentsia began to assert the city's Chinese identity in the 1910s, but still maintained the need to modernise in cooperation with foreigners. Many of the advocates of a Chinese Harbin, Carter emphasises, were themselves trained abroad and exposed to international influences.⁶ Blaine Chiasson's *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule*, in studying the Chinese administrative takeover of Harbin in the 1920s, also underscores the ethnically diverse and desegregated nature of Harbin life. Even the White leader A.V. Kolchak remarked on the cross-cultural tensions in post-1917 Harbin.⁷

⁵ B. Isitt, "On the Borders of Bolshevism: Class, Race, and the Social Relations of Occupied Vladivostok, 1918-19", *Comparativ* 22 (2012), pp 73-74.

⁶ J. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp 3-5. A similar point is made by Joanna Waley-Cohen in a more general study of Chinese cosmopolitanism. J. Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), pp 167, 170-173.

⁷ Kolchak had spent time in Harbin attempting to develop the White movement and was not impressed. "The Chinese already felt themselves masters of the situation. I noticed an abrupt change from the excellent relations [of before]; at the time I came to Harbin they had assumed a totally different tone and tendency." This "abrupt change" included Chinese beating up Russian policemen. E. Varneck, *The Testimony of Kolchak and other Siberian Materials*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p 118, 136

A few Russian scholars have also adopted the language of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. Ulyana Shipitko, in her work on Russian imperial expansion, calls for the integration of the Far Eastern provinces into a Northeast Asian region and the investigation of how a “mental geography” of the region was formed. Maps and scientific exploration, for instance, brought different cultures into contact. It consolidated the idea of the frontier and allowed multiple imperial boundaries to coalesce.⁸ Zooming in, Tatyana Sorokina has shown how regional trade in liquor and opium became mainstays of the border economy and defied St Petersburg’s - or even regional governors’ - efforts at control.⁹

As fruitful as such enquiries have been in re-privileging the regional over the national, they have focused overwhelmingly on the experiences of Russian migrants, colonisers and administrators. Only in a few cases has the large cross-border Chinese community been allowed to speak for itself.¹⁰ As mentioned above, this is due to the relative neglect of the Chinese-language artefacts and sources generated by the Chinese in the Russian Far East. There has therefore been a corresponding over-emphasis on the creation of transnational and cosmopolitan spaces and the downplaying of national and ethnic boundaries.

⁸ U. Shipitko, “Rediscovering Russia in Northeast Asia”. *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies* 9 (2010), pp 226-227

⁹ T. Sorokina, “Liquor and Opium: Joint Efforts to Control Contraband Along the Russia-China Border at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century”. *Inner Asia* 16 (2014), pp 145-148

¹⁰ Regarding the size of the Chinese community and its transient character, Benton has estimated that there were 300,000 Chinese in the Russian Far East and along the Trans-Siberian Railway by the 1910s, two-thirds of whom did not live there permanently. Subsequently the Russians recruited 30-150,000 for the war effort. G. Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp 20-21. See also V.G. Datsyshen, “Problemy kitaiskoi migratsii v Sibiri na sovremennom etape razvitiia Rossii”, *Mezhdunarodnye issledovaniia: obshchestvo, politika, ekonomika* 1(1) (2009), p 128.

One example is Soren Urbansky's "*Vasily*" of *China and his Russian Friends*, an exploration of cross-border contraband networks that emphasises the cultural eclecticism of the smugglers involved. While Urbansky presents an interesting picture of adaptive "smuggler culture" - which was almost an imperative in the Sino-Russian "contact zone" - he goes further to say that people with transcultural biographies "did not care much about concepts of the nation-state". Reflecting on a Russian police dossier, Urbansky notes that "the documents reveal close contacts between Chinese and Russians, in which cultural barriers and national feelings are not evident". Later, however, Urbansky concedes that "transcultural characters" such as the Chinese smugglers in the police files may not have had "transcultural identities", because "the sources do not reveal how people like 'Vasily' from China and Mr lanechek defined *themselves* [emphasis in original]".¹¹

It is indeed possible to examine how grey-market traders such as 'Vasily' may have defined themselves, though perhaps not through the Russian-language sources consulted by Urbansky for his paper. Urbansky is right in defining Chinese smugglers - many of whom combined legal and illegal trade - as "transcultural characters", in that such individuals adapted to Russian language, dress, social customs and so on. But a quick glance at the *Chinese* accounts of the Gorbitsa incident, for example, puts paid to Urbansky's theory that these "transcultural characters" cared little for national feeling. After all, "transcultural characters" abound in the Gorbitsa narrative: A Russian family was critical in saving Liu's life and a Russian wife saved Tan's. Liu's description of his time in the Russian family's house, which includes snippets of conversation overheard while in the cellar as well as the exchange between the

¹¹ S. Urbansky, "'Vasily' of China and his Russian Friends: Smugglers and their Transcultural Identities", in D. Ben-Canaan, F. Gruner and I. Prodohl (eds.), *Entangled Histories: The Transcultural Past of Northeast China* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), pp 17, 31-32

White officer and the village chief, shows an understanding of the Russian language. But Urbansky would be inaccurate to conclude that, due to their transcultural biographies, Tan and Liu did not care much about concepts of the nation-state - unless, of course, Urbansky's smugglers can be said to be more meaningfully "transcultural" than legitimate traders. Instead, as we have seen from Liu's diary, he linked the idea of China with "family" and felt moved to write on behalf of the other overseas Chinese - "tens of thousands", not just those in Gorbitsa - who had been targeted by the Russians. The Russian family who had helped him, to say nothing of the village elder, were not mentioned further. Wang, the Gorbitsa merchant elected to present their case to the garrison, was even more strident, combining his outrage with a call to "protect our national sovereignty". This language was repeated all the way up the chain of authority, first by garrison commander Tao and then by military governor Sun. It was a discourse that linked overseas Chinese merchants, local authorities and even that most fractious of demographics, regional warlords. It was an idiom that carried weight all the way up to Beijing.

Careful examination of the Chinese sources shows that the Gorbitsa report and all those who contributed to it were not alone. Instead, the language of national prestige [*guoti*] and sovereignty [*guoquan*] was pervasive among the overseas Chinese in Russia throughout the 1917 revolutions and the Russian Civil War. The overseas Chinese identified themselves as *huaqiao* - a term often translated as "Chinese sojourners" - marking themselves out as a community in Russia separate from the Russians. They adamantly maintained that they were no different from their compatriots back home. In fact, in their balance sheet against the Russians, the overseas Chinese considered themselves more sinned against than sinning. They saw themselves as victims of tsarist imperial expansion, anti-Chinese legislation and

the depredation of both Reds and Whites. Rather than abandoning concepts of countries and borders, these “transcultural characters” persisted in maintaining an image of China that was not only sovereign but also imperial, taking in frontier territories such as Mongolia and Xinjiang. They remained preoccupied with borders and treaties, since these same borders and treaties were seen as symbols of national humiliation. Moreover, this was not just a static nationalism but also an expansive one, demanding that China take “the opportunity of a thousand years” of the Russian Civil War to redress old grievances against the Russians and restore the country. The overseas Chinese combined their transnational biographies with a heady dose of old-fashioned ethnic and political nationalism.

Hence, this thesis argues that the current focus on transnational, transcultural or cosmopolitan history requires balance. Although a useful antidote to a state-centric model of imperial rivalry, such a focus does not do justice to the motivations and self-identification of the overseas Chinese. Conclusions drawn regarding the overseas Chinese community cannot neglect the words of the overseas Chinese themselves. If we place the self-perception of the overseas Chinese front and centre, then, we find that ethnic and national identities continued to be of prime importance even as they crossed and recrossed the Sino-Russian border.

The roots of diaspora nationalism

Where did this nationalist sentiment come from? To answer this question, one must turn to the growing body of scholarship on Chinese nationalism, with a particular emphasis on nationalism among the diaspora Chinese. Philip Kuhn, in his study of Chinese emigration, argues that foreign imperialism and economic competition were

the immediate triggers for nationalist identification, in the modern sense of the term.¹² By the 19th century, the high noon of imperial expansion, Qing China was increasingly unable to defend itself against foreign encroachment. Britain, France, Germany, Japan - and Russia - all scrambled for a piece of the Chinese pie, claiming their own territorial concessions and implementing economic controls. Although China still maintained sovereignty over the vast majority of its territory and was recognised internationally as a sovereign state, “a variety of nations gradually elaborated a dense thicket of semicolonial arrangements” in the country.¹³ Neither were these efforts subtle. The Opium Wars were used to open China up to foreign trade, while the Sino-French war of 1884-1885 allowed the French to oust the Qing from their sphere of influence in Indochina. The war with Japan led to a humiliating treaty in 1895 in which China ceded Taiwan to the Japanese, guaranteed the independence of Korea and agreed to a hefty indemnity. This was particularly painful to a community that had hitherto seen itself as culturally superior, “surrounded by concentric circles of ever more uncivilised barbarians.”¹⁴

S.C.M. Paine, in her seminal work *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and their Disputed Frontier*, argues that China’s losses led to the creation of a series of discursive myths

¹² P. Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), pp 171, 174-175. On the interaction between nationalist sentiment and political crisis, see also P. Nyiri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia: A Middleman Minority in a Transnational Era* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p 37; A. Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China’s Turning Point, 1924-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp 9-10.

¹³ B. Goodman, “Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community”. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59(4) (2000), pp 889, 917

¹⁴ S.C.M. Paine. *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and their Disputed Frontier*. (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp 9, 51. On Chinese notions of cultural superiority, see also J. Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism”, in J. Unger (ed.) *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996) pp 8-9; A. Li, “The Miscellany and Mixed: The War and Chinese Nationalism”, in D. Wolff, S. Marks, B. Menning, D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, J. Steinberg and S. Yokote (eds.) *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero, Volume II* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp 497-498.

to explain these defeats and justify redress. These myths were all centred around sovereignty and the border. For example, by reframing the lost territories as integral parts of Chinese geo-body, China could push for the restoration of these borderlands.¹⁵ Linked to this was the idea that the Chinese empire was somehow more “moderate” and peaceful than others, allowing China to see itself as the “innocent victim of the predations of rapacious foreigners and never an aggressor itself”.¹⁶ These myths and rubrics resulted in a narrative of national humiliation and a yearning for revival, which were inherited by the faction-ridden Republican government that succeeded the Qing after 1911. Rosemary Quesed, in her study of Sino-Russian Relations, emphasises that the language of nationalism persisted despite a fragmented political environment: “Divided China might be, but it was a cardinal object of any Chinese regime however weak to resist encroachment of foreigners in so far as this was possible.”¹⁷

The sense of crisis stoked nationalist sentiment not just in China itself, but among the diaspora as well. Pal Nyiri, James Townsend and Prasenjit Duara have emphasised that Chinese national sentiment cannot be strictly confined to the territorial limits of the state, since Chinese culture - regardless of territorial boundaries - continued to be a potential source of loyalty. Hence the overseas Chinese, as more-or-less conscious bearers of this culture, could be moved to identify with the Chinese national project.¹⁸

¹⁵ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, p 5; Nyiri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia*, p 40

¹⁶ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, pp 8-9

¹⁷ R.K.I. Quesed, *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History* (Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1984), p 92.

¹⁸ On Chinese culture - as distinct from ethnicity or the nation-state - as a focus of loyalty, see Unger (ed.) *Chinese Nationalism*, pp xii-xiii; Townsend, “Chinese Nationalism”, pp 11-15, 27-30; Nyiri, *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia*, p 47, P. Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp 11, 30.

In fact, Kuhn argues that the overseas Chinese experienced an additional boost to national-cultural identification: Their disquiet at China's weakness was combined with racialised threats in their destination countries. Faced with the overt discrimination of the Exclusion Act, for example, the Chinese in America combined acculturation with rhetoric about ethnic solidarity and national revival. They believed that only a strong China could save the Chinese - both at home and overseas - from humiliation, maltreatment and the looming "race war". Similar fears and aspirations characterised the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.¹⁹

Although Kuhn neglects the overseas Chinese in Russia in his work, it is not difficult to extend his thesis to include this community. After all, if imperial contestation was the soil from which modern Chinese nationalism sprang, the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East were in one of the most contested regions of all. Scholars of Sino-Russian diplomatic and imperial history have emphasised how the eastward expansion of tsarist Russia, beginning in the 1850s, led to a string of Chinese defeats and the loss of vast swathes of territory from the Qing empire. The first capitulation was the Aigun Treaty of 1858, under which the Qing empire ceded all its lands north of the Amur River, some 600,000 square kilometres, to Russia. Two years later, the Treaty of Peking confirmed the Aigun provisions and granted the lands east of the Ussuri to Russia. In the 1870s a Muslim rebellion in Xinjiang opened the door to a Russian occupation of the Ili valley in Central Asia. The Russians threatened war when the Chinese reconquered Xinjiang, although a peaceful resolution was achieved in 1881. Then, beginning in the 1890s, the construction of the China Eastern Railway and the establishment of a Russian administration in the railway zone raised the spectre of a Russian colony in China. The climax came when the

¹⁹ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, pp 248-249, 261-264

Russians took advantage of anti-foreigner violence during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion to station troops in Manchuria. Until the Russo-Japanese War, they declined to honour their commitment to withdraw these forces. And although Russia was only one of the countries to impose an indemnity on the Chinese for the Boxer Rebellion, it claimed the largest share - almost 30% - of this indemnity.²⁰ Finally, the Russian administrators of the newly acquired Far Eastern territories did not shrink from adding insult to injury with racist laws, such as the ban on “yellow labour” instituted in 1910.²¹

In spite of its setback at the hands of the Japanese in 1906 and the loss of its South Manchurian possessions, therefore, the march of tsarist Russia was seen as overwhelmingly successful - and at China’s expense.²² The China Eastern Railway, taking up a thousand square kilometres of land and valued at more than half a billion gold rubles, was the largest foreign concession in China.²³ Moreover, this was diplomacy at the barrel of a gun, a series of capitulations that have been described as “psychological devastation” for the Chinese.²⁴ These territorial and economic concessions contributed to a growing sense of national insecurity and victimhood. Paine’s work, which makes extensive use of Chinese-language sources, uncovers some characteristic terms used to describe Russia’s actions: It had “evil intentions”,

²⁰ The total sum owed by China to the foreign powers as a result of the Boxer indemnity came to \$700 million. Russia’s share of the Indemnity was 28.97 per cent. B. Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1927* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), pp 144-145. On the march of Russian imperialism in Xinjiang, see Quedstedt, *Sino-Russian Relations*, pp 80-81, 88; I. Hsü, *The Ili Crisis: A Study of Sino-Russian Diplomacy 1871-1881* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp 2-4, 18, 34

²¹ L. Siegelbaum, “Another Yellow Peril: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917”, *Modern Asian Studies* 12(2) (1978), p 323; Y. Li, “Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun”, *Jindaishi yanjiu* 38 (1979), pp 220-224.

²² D. Wolff, *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp 42-43.

²³ Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception*, p 115

²⁴ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, p 9

“gnawing away like a silkworm” on Chinese lands and “gobbling up” territory. A favourite slogan was “avenge shame and recover the nation”.²⁵ The overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East were not immune to the use of such language, as this thesis will show.

This thesis will show that the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East were animated by a strong sense of “national humiliation” as a direct result of the legacy of foreign imperialism. In fact, it argues that the same factors that led to the rise of Chinese nationalism were heightened among this community. Its presence along the heavily contested Sino-Russian border placed it in a unique position on the front lines of the nationalist question, even more than the communities in China proper, America or Southeast Asia. The overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East resided in territories directly claimed by the Chinese geo-body, in which the legacy of victimhood seemed close at hand. The shorter distance between the Sino-Russian frontier and China itself also meant that most overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East returned frequently to the mainland, another factor linking them to the nationalist concerns of home.²⁶ Finally, the chaos and violence of the Russian Civil War upset the balance of power and spurred nationalist sentiment further. The *atamanshchina* heightened the perception of ethno-national antagonism, while the collapse of tsarist state power opened the door to national revival. The immediacy of foreign imperialism, accompanied by the new fears and opportunities of the Civil War: This was “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics”.

²⁵ Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, pp 10-11. On the persistence of such terms in modern Chinese historiography, see S. Clausen, *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p 28

²⁶ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, 250-255

Nationalism as rhetoric and strategy

Nevertheless, it is possible to take nationalist rhetoric uncritically, especially when there are incentives to err on the side of nationalism.²⁷ This can be seen in modern Chinese-language historiography of the imperial and Republican periods. Take, for example, the theme of “frontier studies” in China, which takes as its subject contentious peripheral territories such as Xinjiang, Mongolia and Manchuria which are still claimed by the Chinese geo-body.²⁸ Ma Dazheng, of the Academy of Social Sciences in China and a leading proponent of frontier studies, sums up the philosophy behind his discipline in nationalist language:

The frontier is an inseparable part of national territory. Its long history has left us two major legacies: one is a unified and multi-ethnic China, and the other is a Chinese nation of plural origins. These legacies are incomparably unique in the whole world... In frontier regions, humans (local Chinese citizens) and land (territory) are quite inseparable. The frontier is indivisible from territorial sovereignty and is crucial to promoting patriotism.²⁹

Ma’s approach is characteristic of many Chinese-language studies of the Sino-Russian frontier. Take, for example, Chinese historian Lü Yiran’s study of the historiography of Sino-Russian relations, which characterises history writing as an essentially patriotic exercise:

Tsarist Russia’s maniacal partition and occupation of China’s territory shook the Qing court and the people. A few officials and intellectuals, concerned about their fatherland’s destiny, with grief and indignation at their suffering country’s ruin, devoted themselves to studying the Sino-Russian border question.³⁰

²⁷ On the ideological and institutional control over history writing in China, see Clausen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, pp xiii, 199-218

²⁸ D. Ma and P.F. Shan, “Frontier History in China: A Scholarly Dialogue Across the Pacific Ocean”, *The Chinese Historical Review* 19(1) (2012), pp 73-75.

²⁹ Ma and Shan, “Frontier History in China”, p 68.

³⁰ Y. Lü, “Qingdai he Minguo shiqi de Zhongguo Zhong-E guanxishi yanjiu shuping”. *Heilongjiang shehui kexue* 6 (2000), p 36

Zhao Zhongfu's *Jindai Dongsansheng yimin wenti zhi yanjiu* (*A Study of Issues related to Modern Migration to Manchuria*), published in Taiwan, describes Qing policy thus:

From 1840 onwards, Russia not only gradually and forcibly occupied the Chinese territories north of the Amur, it also planned to cast its eye on the hinterland south of the Amur... This was a critical threat to the Qing court. At the time, the Qing court had to throw its whole weight into dealing with the Taiping rebellion, and it was hard-pressed by British and French disturbances in the coastal areas... Hence, the Qing court had to swiftly consider how to safeguard its imperial homeland. The only way was migration to consolidate the border.³¹

The image is of a beleaguered Qing empire threatened on all sides, forced to undertake a policy of political consolidation. By contrast, scholars in the West have questioned the notion of Manchuria as an integral part of Chinese territory. Instead of accepting the narrative of Chinese victimhood, they have emphasised Chinese initiative. Owen Lattimore's *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* agrees that the Qing government reversed its prohibition on migration to Manchuria in response to a Russian threat, but frames it as a policy of active counter-colonisation.³² Robert Lee's *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History* demonstrates that the Qing pursued a deliberate policy of sinicisation and militarisation to tighten their grip over Manchuria.³³ Finally, using an economic history approach, Ralph Huenemann's study

³¹ Z. Zhao, "Jindai Dongsansheng yimin wenti zhi yanjiu", *Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 4 (2) (1974), p 26.

³² O. Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Capitol Publishing Co, 1951), pp 138-140

³³ R.H.G. Lee, *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp 103, 113-115, 127-130. See also T.R. Gottschang and D. Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000), p 2; F.P. Shan, *The Development of the North Manchuria Frontier, 1900-1931*. PhD, McMaster University (2003), pp 6-7, 17-18; Zhao, "Jindai Dongsansheng yimin wenti zhi yanjiu", pp 26, 34, 52.

of the Manchurian railways casts doubt on the zero-sum-game rhetoric that has accompanied the discourse over the China Eastern Railway, showing that the Chinese economy could indeed have benefited from the new transport links.³⁴

Moving beyond Qing colonial policy to the issue of the overseas Chinese in Russia, Chinese scholars are even more vituperative, criticising the Russians in no uncertain terms. Here, China's victimhood and the suffering of its citizens is emphasised, often emotively.³⁵ Xie Qingming, who has published several detailed studies on the Chinese community in Russia based on Chinese-language archival and newspaper sources, wrote the following in *Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu* (*The Beiyang Government's Consular Protection of Chinese Residents in Russia Before and After the October Revolution*, co-authored with Li Zhixue):

After the October Revolution, the situation facing Chinese workers grew even worse. The various Russian factions vied among themselves to maltreat Chinese workers. In the areas reached by the White troops, 'in many the bodies of overseas Chinese were exposed, that either bore bullet or knife wounds or had been stripped of their clothes, death resulting from cold and hunger'... Because all Chinese merchants had a certain amount of property, not a few Russian troops openly recruited

³⁴ R.W. Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse: The Economics of Railroads in China, 1876-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1984), pp 220-228, 232-239

³⁵ Z. Hou, "Beijing zhengfu chubing Xiboliya yu Zhong-Ri waijiao jiaoshe zaiyanjiu". *Shixue yuekan* 10 (2011), *passim*; N. Li, "Haluan yu Zhongdong tielu", *Jindai lishi yanjiusuo jikan* 9 (1980), pp 356-357; Z. Chen "Zhongdonglu Hulujun Silingbu ji Dongsheng Tequ zhi Sheli", in Guo, J. (ed), *Zhongdonglu yu Zhongdonglu shijian* (Liaoning: Liaoning People's Press, 2010), p 18; Lü, "Qingdai he Minguo shiqi de Zhongguo Zhong-E guanxishi yanjiu shuping", p 36; X. Wang, "Eluosiren zai Dongbei: bange shiji de qiaomin licheng", in G. Guan and J. Luan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi de lishi yu xianshi (di'er ji)*. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009), *passim*.

bandits, 'giving them free rein to plunder, extort and divide the spoils'.³⁶

Chinese scholars are also virtually silent on the seedier side of the overseas Chinese in Russia, which has been extensively explored by Russian historians. A.G. Larin, perhaps one of the foremost experts on the history of Chinese migrants in Russia, describes how these migrants disregarded Russian authority, forming their own organisations which usurped and neutralised Russian law. Mistrust and misunderstandings between Russians and the overseas Chinese was a natural result.³⁷ In *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur'e*, O.A. Timofeev mentions the illegal and semi-legal practices of Chinese migrants.³⁸ Of course, one could argue that this aspect of Russian scholarship acknowledges current fears over Chinese demographic and economic incursions into the Far East. Olga Alexeeva, for example, combines a historical survey of Chinese migration with current trends.³⁹ V.G. Datsyshen's numerous works on the diaspora in Russia emphasise the Chinese community's historical inability to assimilate to Russian culture, and his more recent works examine the controversial nature of contemporary Chinese migrant labour.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that Chinese scholarship steers clear of inconvenient narratives which could mar the image of overseas Chinese victimhood.

³⁶ Z. Li and Q. Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", *Nanjing zhengzhi xueyuan xuebao* 164 (2012), p 82. The phrases in quotation marks were taken from newspaper reports of the time.

³⁷ A.G. Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s", *Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 24 (1995), pp 853-856

³⁸ O.A. Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur'e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv.* [Online.] Available at the Mezhdunarodnyi institut gumanitarno-politicheskikh issledovaniï, http://www.igpi.ru/center/lib/hist_tradit/east/china/timofeev1.html [Accessed 31 October 2014]

³⁹ O. Alexeeva, "Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East: A Historical and Sociodemographic Analysis", *China Perspectives* 2008/3 (2008), p 21.

⁴⁰ See, for example, V.G. Datsyshen, "Historical and Contemporary Trends of Chinese Labor Migration into Siberia", in F.B. Chang and S.T. Rucker-Chang (eds.) *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp 21-23, 30, 32-33

This may seem like a blunt-instrument approach, but the language of victimhood is part and parcel of a wider modern nationalist discourse that has come to characterise the Chinese historical narrative, as we have seen. It shows that the myth of the Chinese as innocent victims extends not just to imperial threats to China proper, but to the position of the Chinese overseas as well. The image of the overseas Chinese as martyrs becomes a metaphor for China as martyr.

That is not to say that “victimhood nationalism” was nothing more than a rhetorical device. Defending, exploiting and potentially enlarging Russia’s presence in the Far East were indeed high on the tsarist agenda. Stephen Kotkin, in *Rediscovering Russia in Asia*, has described the organised colonialism of the late tsarist period, spearheaded by S.Iu. Witte, which brought about new strategic relationships with China and Japan. These efforts included such mainstays of colonial policy as a systematic programme of settlement, the creation of transport networks and the rationalisation of how the Far Eastern provinces were administered.⁴¹ Moving beyond the tsarist period, Bruce Elleman’s study of Sino-Soviet diplomacy examines the conflict between China and the Soviets over such imperialist prizes as the China Eastern Railway. Soviet Russia is very much described as the inheritor of tsarist

⁴¹ S. Kotkin and D. Wolff (eds.) *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), p 3, 6-7. The specific colonial policies are taken from chapter by S. Marks, “Conquering the Great East: Kulomzin, Peasant Resettlement and the Creation of Modern Siberia”, pp 23-25. See also B. Elleman and S. Kotkin (eds.) *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), p xiv; A. Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), pp 9-14, 22-27; R.K.I. Quedsted, “*Matey*” *Imperialists? The Tsarist Russians in Manchuria, 1895-1917*. (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1982), *passim*; V.I. Shishkin, “State Administration of Siberia from the End of the Nineteenth through the first Third of the Twentieth Centuries”, in K. Matsuzato (ed.), *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World, Towards a Discipline of “Regionology”* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, 2000), pp 104-107; Siegelbaum, “Another Yellow Peril” pp 308-311.

imperialist aspirations, despite its statements to the contrary.⁴² A similar argument is advanced in Peter Tang's *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia 1911-1931*.⁴³ Elleman and Tang, in turn, build on earlier works on Sino-Soviet relations by Sow-Theng Leong and Alan Whiting, both of whom also emphasise the expansive ambitions of imperial and soviet Russia.⁴⁴

While acknowledging the reality of imperial rivalry, however, it is also critical not to take the rhetoric of "victimhood nationalism" at face value. This thesis shows that nationalism among the overseas Chinese did not preclude other forms of identification, corruption, profit-seeking or self-interest. Rana Mitter states that "to be a nationalist is not to abandon other loyalties to region, family, or workplace. Nor is it necessarily to be a martyr or an altruist".⁴⁵ A strong sense of identity did not necessarily preclude political cooperation with China's enemies.⁴⁶ Leaving aside the question of the authenticity of nationalist feeling, therefore, the thesis argues that Chinese nationalism was a response to imperial contestation, as well as a *strategy by which this contest could be won*. The discourse of national humiliation created a remarkable unity of purpose among officials, warlords, merchants and, to some

⁴² Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception*, p 115.

⁴³ P.S.H. Tang, *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911-1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1959), pp 137-142.

⁴⁴ These works are S. Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1926*. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), and A.S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China, 1917-1924*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954).

⁴⁵ R. Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p 7. James Sheridan argues that because the capture of Beijing was seen as the pinnacle of achievement for the northern warlords, they had an interest in keeping the regime and the nation unified. J. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949* (New York: Free Press, 1975), p 96. On the discourse of national unification, see also H. Chi, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp 191, 206, 232-233.

⁴⁶ M. Gamsa, *The Russian-Chinese Encounter in Harbin, Manchuria, 1898-1932*. DPhil, Oxford University (2003), p 61

extent, workers. It was a rhetoric that lay behind almost every communique, whether stemming from a Gorbitsa shopkeeper, an overseas Chinese Association, or from a border official, linking the cross-border Chinese community to their leaders and compatriots back home. The language of nationalism allowed for consistency of action and collaboration.

Nowhere is the concept of nationalism-as-strategy more evident than in the 1917 revolutions and the Russian Civil War. Prior to this, China's efforts to stem the tide of Russian expansion had yielded few results. As mentioned above, however, the collapse of Russian state power now brought unprecedented possibilities. China was weak, but Russia gripped by war and revolution was weaker. The discourse of national humiliation provided a powerful impetus to take advantage of these possibilities. In the eyes of Chinese officialdom, warlord-governors in Manchuria and the overseas Chinese, the disorder in Russia was the "opportunity of a thousand years" to redress old grievances and make new gains.⁴⁷

For all their "transcultural biographies", therefore, nationalist rhetoric gave the overseas Chinese community in Russia a strong animus. This thesis shows how, in the changed atmosphere of the Russian Civil War, the community began to organise, chiefly out of self-protection but also with an eye to winning the "economic war" in Russia. Chambers of commerce had already existed before 1917 and became important channels of communication between the overseas Chinese and the state,

⁴⁷ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' General Chamber of Commerce, 23 April 1919". Y. Wang, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, *Minguo liunian zhi banian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960), pp 191-192

providing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with information on the situation in Russia.⁴⁸ Further, they became the foundation for a new kind of inter-estate cooperation: the Overseas Chinese Association, linking officials, merchants and, to a lesser extent, workers.⁴⁹ A prototype for this was established first in Petrograd, followed by a branch in Moscow and another in Kiev. Other such organisations sprang up in the cities of the Far East with a large Chinese population, including Blagoveshchensk, Nerchinsk and Chita. These combined self-defence with a keen sense of patriotic duty and national prestige, as reflected in many of their founding documents.

Nationalist discourse also proved to be a robust link between the overseas Chinese and the government in Beijing. The Chinese government had come relatively late to the idea that its overseas citizens could be a policy-making asset but, by the 20th century, the Republican regime used the overseas Chinese as a weapon in their diplomatic arsenal.⁵⁰ This thesis shows that as a power vacuum emerged in Russia, the Beijing government, urged on by Chinese merchants and workers, established a network of Siberian consulates ostensibly for the protection of its citizens. These institutions had previously been blocked by the Russians.⁵¹ Serious talks between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese military took place on the issue of

⁴⁸ In his study of the Lower Yangtze chambers of commerce, Chen Zhongping argues that, galvanised by foreign intrusion, these chambers fostered “tripartite interactions among their elite merchants, the general public and the governments [which] produced strong dynamics for sociopolitical change... including long-term transformation of the society-state relationship in modern China”. Z. Chen, *Modern China's Network Revolution: Chambers of Commerce and Sociopolitical Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p 13.

⁴⁹ Q. Xie, “Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu”, *Jiangnan xueshu* 33(2) (2014), pp 115-116.

⁵⁰ C. Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), pp xiv-xv, 154-155, 274; Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, pp 240, 243-244, 265

⁵¹ Li and Xie, “Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu”, p 81

sending troops into Russia independent of the Allied intervention, also under the pretext of protecting Chinese citizens. For their part, Manchurian governors worked hand in glove with overseas Chinese chambers of commerce to buy Russian ships, establish a shipping company and draw up regulations to reclaim navigation rights on the Amur, which they had lost to the tsar. Finally, when an emboldened China sought to sail not just merchant ships, but also military craft up the Amur, merchants provided both intelligence and supplies to the flotilla.

An instructive contrast can be made with the anarchic violence of the White Russian atamans. Scholars of both Russia and China - such as Norman Pereira and Arthur Waldron, respectively - have drawn parallels between the East Siberian warlords and their Chinese counterparts.⁵² These studies have attributed to both groups a self-interested anti-statism that brought suffering to their subject populations and destabilised any attempt at institutional construction. Chinese warlords are often held accountable for the failure of the Republican government after 1911, since they diverted vast resources away from the centre into their personal armies and misgoverned their territories.⁵³ Similarly, much of the failure of the Kolchak government in Omsk is attributed to its inability to extend its power into the Far East,

⁵² N.G.O. Pereira, "Siberian Atamanshchina: Warlordism in the Russian Civil War", in V.N. Brovkin (ed.), *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: The Revolution and the Civil Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), p 129; A. Waldron, "The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism", *The American Historical Review* 96(4) (1991), pp 1086-1087.

⁵³ E.A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp 309-313; K. Marten, "Warlordism in Comparative Perspective", *International Security* 31(3) (2006-2007), pp 50-52. James Sheridan titles his book on the Republican period *China in Disintegration*.

where the cossack warlords withheld vital recruits and supplies and eroded White legitimacy with their brutality.⁵⁴

However, such a straightforward comparison ignores the cohesive power of nationalism in the Chinese context. As we have seen with Sun Liechen, warlords were not immune to the language of nationalism. Another Manchurian potentate, Bao Guiqing, cooperated with merchants to foster trade and wipe away national “shame”, and was one of the prime movers behind the Amur shipping issue. It was with Bao’s help that Chinese merchant steamships made their first forays along the Amur to the Pacific. Neither was the Beijing government held entirely hostage to the warlords, particularly in the field of foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs extended its diplomatic reach as far as Omsk and worked with the warlords to maintain Chinese security along the border. And despite their autonomy in domestic and military affairs, during this period the Manchurian warlords were dependent on Beijing to some extent for funding, expertise and military reinforcements.⁵⁵ Since Beijing was the government recognised by foreign powers, formal negotiations over such issues as military intervention or shipping had to pass through ministry channels. Unlike the chiefly destructive nature of the White Terror, therefore, the ideological landscape

⁵⁴ J. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 191; R.M. Connaughton, *The Republic of the Ushakovka: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-1920*. (London: Routledge, 1990), p 121; J.A. White, *The Siberian intervention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p 118.

⁵⁵ A significant proportion of the communiques sent by the Manchurian warlords to the Foreign Ministry contained requests for money and manpower. As large numbers of armed Whites fled into China with Semenov’s defeat, for example, Heilongjiang’s resources were stretched thin and its military governor appealed to Beijing for help. “Telegram from Sun Liechen, 11 May 1920”, “Telegram from Sun Liechen to the Foreign Ministry, 14 November 1920”. T. Guo, Y. Wang, Y. Tao and J. Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian, Minguo jinian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1968), pp 295-296, 741-742

was much less fragmented among the Chinese, allowing them to turn the revolutionary chaos to constructive ends.⁵⁶

This thesis is divided into three parts. The first chapter analyses the situation facing the overseas Chinese before 1917, then traces its development through the crises that emerged between the March 1917 revolution and the decisive downfall of the Siberian White movement in late 1920. The account comes to a close at the end of 1920 as Red power began to stabilise in the Far East and the Chinese turned their attention to receiving the soviets' diplomatic forays. Instead of exploiting the chaos of the Civil War, Chinese efforts focused on extracting potential advantages out of an ideologically-motivated, consolidating foreign power.

An initial exploratory approach is necessary as the area has hitherto received scant attention. Western historiography on revolutionary Russia and the Civil War has tended to focus on the capitals, and even where scholars have taken a more "local" approach, the spotlight remains on European Russia.⁵⁷ A few exceptions exist:

⁵⁶ James Carter argues that in these cases, warlords acted as "official nationalists" on behalf of Beijing. Zhang Zuolin, foremost of the Manchurian warlords, "extended and solidified" national sovereignty with the "consent and approval" of Beijing and was recognised as doing so by foreign powers. Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, p 80. Gavan McCormack's pioneering study of Zhang Zuolin shows Zhang to be torn between a growing recognition of the power of Chinese nationalism and his need to appease Japanese interests: "He stood firmly for the unity and integrity of China and was prepared only for the most unavoidable tactical compromises with the Japanese or with the Chinese proponents of an independent Northeast." G. McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), p 254

⁵⁷ A recent survey of works on the Russian localities in the revolution, for example, mentioned studies on Saratov, Tver, the Volga region, Viatka and other regions west of the Urals, with Siberia lagging behind. R. Wade, "The Revolution at Ninety-(One): Anglo-American Historiography of the Russian Revolution of 1917", *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography* 1 (2008), pp 29-30. The exception to this is the large body of work devoted to the Allied military intervention in Siberia. Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, pp 4-5.

Jonathan Smele and Norman Pereira have written extensively on the Civil War in Siberia, especially on the Kolchak regime in Omsk.⁵⁸ Jamie Bisher's *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian*, on the other hand, concentrates on the military campaigns and violence of the Transbaikalian *atamanshchina*, while Canfield Smith's *Vladivostok under Red and White* deals with the changing political and diplomatic climate in Vladivostok. However, the situation on the Sino-Russian border - to say nothing of the overseas Chinese experience of the upheavals - has remained under-examined.

Therefore, it is critical at the outset to establish the position of the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East during the Civil War, in order to determine the nature of threats and opportunities facing the community. This first chapter sets the scene by outlining some of the characteristics of the Chinese community during the period, including the dramatic growth of Chinese labour and the expansion of cross-border business interests as the Russian economy broke down. It will analyse the effects of the collapse of tsarist power and the resulting White Terror on the Chinese in Russia. Geographically, the thesis covers the Sino-Russian border regions of the Transbaikalian, Amur and Maritime Provinces on the Russian side, and Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces on the Chinese. It will also include observations on the Chinese community in Omsk, which grew under the Kolchak regime, as well as the issue of Chinese wartime labour. Where appropriate, remarks will be made on interactions across the Xinjiang-Turkestan border, or on the activities of the overseas Chinese in European Russia.

⁵⁸ Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, and N.G.O. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

The next two chapters develop the theory of “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics”, examining the remarkable rhetorical unity within the community in an environment in flux. The second chapter of the thesis looks into the community’s civil society organisations, namely the chambers of commerce and the newly formed Overseas Chinese Associations. The chambers of commerce were primarily merchants’ organisations, whereas the Associations, although still mostly dominated by merchants, made an attempt to broaden their remit. It will also study their interaction with the new consulates set up by the Beijing government in the Russian Far East. This chapter will show how the language of national sovereignty and prestige was repeatedly used by chambers of commerce and associations not only to justify their requests to officials, but also in their founding documents. The new consuls, too, framed their responsibilities in nationalist terms.

The third chapter explores the case study of the Wu Tong shipping company and the Sungari (Songhua in Chinese) flotilla, an example where the cohesive power of nationalism resulted in concrete gains for the Chinese. This chapter examines the collaboration between cross-border merchants, Manchurian warlords, local officials and the Beijing government to reclaim shipping rights on the Amur, including the formation of a small river defence fleet. Again, nationalist rhetoric was critical throughout the enterprise. Merchants and warlords cooperated to set up the Wu Tong company, which eventually counted top government officials as board members. Negotiations with the Russians over ship purchases - which had been strictly curtailed under tsarist law - involved consuls, merchants, warlords and local authorities. The Songhua flotilla, a project of the Naval Department, literally tested the waters by defying Russian instructions against sailing upriver from Nikolaevsk.

The Whites' bombardment of the ships stirred nationalist sentiment even further and arguably led to the death of ataman I.P. Kalmykov.

This thesis represents the first scholarly study in the English language of the Chinese associations and consulates in the Russian Far East, as well as the first study of the Amur shipping issue. By examining these hitherto unexplored spheres of activity among the overseas Chinese, it becomes impossible to consider the community - cosmopolitan and transnational as it was - without due attention to nationalism. The overseas Chinese response to the disintegration of Russian state power, which was overwhelmingly informed by the language of national humiliation and revival, clearly illustrates this. Nationalist rhetoric shaped and directed the Chinese reaction to the Russian power vacuum, imbuing the pressing need for self-defence with an opportunism that transcended borders and estates. This proved an effective strategy, since nationalism became the discursive centre of gravity for the Chinese community, tempering the phenomenon of Chinese warlordism and contrasting sharply with the uncertain rhetoric of the White movement.⁵⁹

The thesis relies on Chinese-language archival sources, specifically the 1917-1920 correspondence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Waijiaobu*). Those documents which broadly deal with Sino-Russian diplomacy were assembled and published in the 1960s in several volumes, titled *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao* (*Historical Materials on Sino-Russian Relations*), by the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. The volumes are arranged by year and the total amount of material covered runs into several thousand pages. They cover ministerial correspondence, reports from overseas diplomats, commercial contracts, letters from chambers of commerce and

⁵⁹ Pereira, "Siberian Atamanshchina", pp 123, 133; Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp 60-61

other public associations as well as from private individuals. In general, they demonstrate a keen interest in the situation in Russia, as well as a willingness to engage with the Russian combatants, both White and Red. Most notable is the vast number of reports and telegrams from the Manchurian warlords, particularly from the border regions of Heilongjiang and Jilin. They show close contact between warlords and the Ministry, with the former frequently asking Beijing to negotiate with foreign diplomats on their behalf or for reinforcements to be sent to the border against White incursions. The warlords, in turn, took diplomatic directives from Beijing, including instructions on how to deal with Allied troops and on neutrality in the Russian Civil War. In this sphere at least, Foreign Ministry was able to maintain a notable degree of central control despite domestic political instability.

Having described the issue of Chinese historiography and nationalism at length, it is necessary to address the problem of sources. Many Chinese works, including those quoted above, have made extensive use of these Foreign Ministry documents. Clearly, the Foreign Ministry archives can and have been interpreted in highly nationalist ways. According to the Modern History archives in Academia Sinica, these documents did not undergo pre-selection before publication and all their Foreign Ministry material is included in the volumes consulted for this work.⁶⁰ However, it is uncertain whether the Foreign Ministry had itself edited the material before passing it on to the archives. Neither is there much information on how the Ministry - which, being part of the Republican government, was re-established in Taiwan after the 1949 communist victory in China - transferred its documents across the straits. What is known is that the Ministry gave the documents to the Institute in two successive

⁶⁰ Personal communication from M. Yu, associate research fellow, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, dated 9 June 2014.

lots, the first in October and December 1955 and the second in March 1984.⁶¹ Given the publication dates of *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao*, the Sino-Russian documents must have been part of the first lot. It is not known if the second lot contains further, unpublished material on Sino-Russian relations. Given that the issue of the Sino-Russian border is still very much a sensitive one, it is conceivable that the documents may have been subject to some editing by the Ministry to reflect a more nationalist agenda. Western and Russian works give grounds for optimism, since scholars such as Larin, Leong and Elleman have produced highly nuanced analyses using the Foreign Ministry documents as their chief sources.

Nevertheless, further research is needed on the provenance of the Foreign Ministry archive. Future work should also examine local Russian archival sources, which were not used in this thesis.

There would be no resolution to the Gorbitsa ordeal. The Foreign Ministry in Beijing received Sun's full report in February 1920, which included Liu's diary, Wang's letter and Tao's comment, together with a preliminary list of victims and damages. This was promptly sent to Kudashev, the Russian ambassador, with a note that China would request compensation for the losses. But by then Kudashev was a lame duck ambassador for a long-dead regime, and he could only reply that the matter would be dealt with when a proper Russian government had been set up and recognised by the Chinese. Fed up with the lack of response, the Sretensk Overseas Chinese Association wrote to the Manzhouli Chamber of Commerce, which was right on the

⁶¹ Z. Jiang, *Danganguan waijiaodang zhong zhi huaqiao ziliao*. [Online.] Available: <http://archives.sinica.edu.tw/wp-content/uploads/f10.pdf>. [Accessed 25 April 2013]

Sino-Russian border, in December. Both the Association and the Manzhouli Chamber had investigated the killings and robberies at Gorbitsa. “The Russians kill Chinese like insects,” the Association’s letter said. “They have no regard for law, abusing Chinese citizens and insulting our national prestige.” Their frustration was copied to the Foreign Ministry.⁶²

All those involved in the Gorbitsa affair were not alone in speaking the language of nationalism. The Sretensk Association, of which many Gorbitsa merchants were a part, sang the same tune. This was echoed by the Manzhouli chamber of commerce hundreds of miles away. It was endorsed, in turn, by Sun Liechen and his Manchurian colleagues, top advisors in Beijing, ministers and warlords alike. In a world swept up by revolution, war and violence, the rhetoric of nationalism provided an anchor in the storm. It is to this upheaval that we now turn.

⁶² “Letter from the Manzhouli Chamber of Commerce, 26 Dec 1920.” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 379-380

Chapter 1: Among Ghosts and Tigers

Even before the tumultuous events of 1917, the Russian Far East was a flashpoint for Chinese national sentiment. After all, if foreign imperialism had been the immediate trigger for modern Chinese nationalism, the changing status of the Russian Far East was one of the most compelling symbols of tsarist ambition. The narrative of victimhood was particularly stark here, as the memory of imperial Russia's territorial expansion was still fresh. Worse still, Japan threatened to further destabilise the region. For the Chinese living in the Russian Far East, therefore, the issue of national prestige and sovereignty had particular relevance and immediacy.

The revolutions of 1917 and the resulting Civil War raised the stakes higher still. This time, the collapse of the Russian state and the power vacuum that ensued created new threats and opportunities. Cossack warlords were free to act with impunity and make a special target of the Chinese. Russian officials were no longer able to exert their authority over peripheral territories. The Reds were willing to pay for Chinese support with concessions. Finally, Japan seemed ready to swoop in and sweep up the remnants of Russian imperial power. Chinese nationalism had already been energised over the battle with tsarist Russia. The upheaval of the Russian Civil War only added fuel to the flames.

The experiences of the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East during the Civil War have not yet been studied. This chapter argues that the community, positioned as it was at the epicentre of imperial contestation and revolutionary turbulence, was keenly aware of these new threats and opportunities. Their response was shot through with nationalist language. The primary question throughout the entire Civil

War was how China should use the chaos in Russia to its best advantage. As a result, Chinese strategy towards the Reds and Whites was deeply influenced by nationalist considerations.

Prologue: Imperial competition and the origins of the Chinese diaspora

The history of the Russian Far East is the history of a contested frontier. Norman Pereira, in his work on the Civil War in Siberia, traces the beginning of Russian colonisation of the region in the 16th century to the consolidation of administrative control in the 19th. Under the Aigun Treaty of 1858 and the Peking Treaty two years later, Russia acquired all the lands north of the Amur River as well as the lands on the Pacific Coast between the mouth of the Amur and Korea. Territorial acquisition was swiftly followed by colonising initiatives, led by the highest levels of government. They were motivated by both economic and security concerns.⁶³ The government thus became the prime mover in constructing the developmental infrastructure - railways, roads, mines, schools, hospitals, local administration and so on - that allowed this “colonised borderland” to be “solidly integrated into the Russian state” and “an organic part of its regional (territorial) structure”.⁶⁴

It was critical to integrate the far eastern territories into the Russian state precisely because the region was contested. On the one hand, Russia had to ensure that its gains could be insulated from the “imputed revanchism” of China, especially since the Chinese had undertaken an extensive programme of political and military

⁶³ Pereira, “Siberian Atamanshchina”, pp 12-14

⁶⁴ Shishkin, “State Administration of Siberia from the End of the Nineteenth through the first Third of the Twentieth Centuries”, pp 102, 104, 106-107

reforms.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the territories also had to be defended against Japan, which also harboured imperial ambitions. Russia's defeat by Japan in 1905 resulted in the Treaty of Portsmouth, which brought Korea and southern Manchuria under Japanese control. However, there was a widespread perception among the Japanese elite that this had not gone far enough. Dunscomb and Dickinson, in their studies of Japanese imperialism, have emphasised the practical and philosophical dimensions of Japan's expansionist drive. They combined economic imperatives with an anti-western bias, existential fears and a sense of historic mission. The Russian Far East was seen as a potential source of raw materials and an outlet for Japan's surplus population. When revolution and civil war erupted in Russia in 1917, Japanese hawks began to "speak publicly of the possibility of a unilateral intervention to extend Japanese power and influence in Siberia, and privately of incorporating these territories into the empire".⁶⁶ A Tokyo University ethnographer argued that Siberian tribes were of the "same blood" as the Japanese and Japan therefore had the duty to liberate them from the "alien" Russian yoke.⁶⁷ The Japanese were also eyeing Outer Mongolia, which China considered to be part of its own territory. Needless to say, China was also well aware of Japan's designs on the region.

⁶⁵ Marks, "Conquering the Great East", p 24; M. Asada, "The China-Russia-Japan Military Balance in Manchuria, 1906-1918" *Modern Asian Studies* 44(6) (2010), pp 12-13; S. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), pp 35-39, 42; Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904*, pp 20-24

⁶⁶ P.E. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: 'A Great Disobedience Against the People'*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), p 36-39; F.R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919*. (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p 183

⁶⁷ E. Stolberg, "The Siberian frontier between 'White Mission' and 'Yellow Peril,' 1890s-1920s", *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 32(1) (2004), p 175

This three-cornered fight made it absolutely imperative for Russia to tighten its grip on the region. The colonising process was initially spearheaded by S.Iu. Witte, who saw in Russia's eastward expansion the key to the empire's survival and success. It dovetailed with intellectual currents emphasising Russia's Eurasian destiny and its duty to civilise the Wild East.⁶⁸ Beginning with the construction of the strategic port of Vladivostok, the development of Russian infrastructure reached a climax in the 1890s with the Trans-Siberian Railway. At the same time the discovery of gold in the Amur region led to the establishment of an extensive mining system critical to the generation of capital for the Russian treasury.⁶⁹ Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War added a new urgency to the consolidation effort, with a special committee formed under the leadership of P.A. Stolypin dedicated to the issue. Further measures included the construction of the difficult Amur branch of the Trans-Siberian and strengthening the naval facilities in Vladivostok.⁷⁰

For this a large influx of labour was critical. Although the preference was for Russians to provide the necessary manpower, internal migration did not reach sufficient levels to avoid reliance on foreign labour.⁷¹ On the other hand, overcrowding and poverty in the northern Chinese provinces of Zhili and Shandong presented the Russians with a

⁶⁸ S.C.M. Paine, "The China Eastern Railway from the First Sino-Japanese War until the Russo-Japanese War", in B. Elleman and S. Kotkin (eds.) *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), pp 13-15; C.Y. Hsu, "A Tale of Two Railroads: 'Yellow Labor', Agrarian Colonization, and the Making of Russianness at the Far Eastern Frontier, 1890s-1910s" *Ab Imperio* 3 (2006), pp 225, 229-230

⁶⁹ Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*. [Online.] Available at E shangwu zhinan: Kommercheskii, http://www.swzn.ru/ns_detail.asp?id=500074&nowmenuid=500025 [Accessed 31 October 2014]; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 213, 218

⁷⁰ Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur'e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv.*

⁷¹ Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril", pp 309-312; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s", pp 848-849; Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", p 112

large pool of workers who could be imported cheaply and employed at three-fifths of a Russian worker's wage. To the Shandong worker, seasonal migration in search of work had become an established practice and the prospect of earning two to three times their home salaries was a powerful driving force.⁷² War and natural disasters in China only added to the pool of available labour, as the pressure to emigrate intensified. At the same time, the Qing dynasty's own policy of internal colonisation led to the development of transport infrastructure in the border provinces of Manchuria, as well as large-scale Han settlement there. This resulted in a wave of internal migration, known as *chuang guandong* (the Manchurian rush). In 1900, 122,000 Chinese left the Northern Chinese ports for Manchuria; in 1902 the number reached 213,000. The influx continued into the post-1911 Republican period and the Sino-Russian frontier thus became a significant catchment area for migrant workers taking advantage of new railways and steamships.⁷³

Russian and Chinese colonial consolidation, therefore, created an immense demand for labour on one side of the border - and a similarly immense supply of workers on the other. This turned the trickle of Chinese migrants in the Russian Far East into a flood. According to the Chief Administration of Eastern Siberia, there were only 6,300 settled and 2-3,000 transient Chinese in the Amur and Maritime provinces between 1858 and 1860. These were mostly petty farmers, hunters, gold miners, diggers of the ginseng herb, runaways and exiles, few of whom settled permanently on Russian

⁷² Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, pp 2-8, 43-58; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 850; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", p 213; "Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 250-253. It seems that both merchants and workers came from the same provinces. An investigation into merchants killed during the White massacre in Gorbitsa revealed that the majority of the victims were from Shandong, Shanxi and Hebei. "Letter from the General Staff, 10 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 82-84

⁷³ Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, pp 48-64; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 214-216

territory.⁷⁴ By the late 19th century, however, this had changed entirely. In this initial stage of “free employment”, thousands of unskilled Chinese labourers were brought in to work on Russia’s infrastructure projects, often using the sub-contractor hiring system that characterised Chinese labour migration elsewhere.⁷⁵ They travelled either over land or by sea via Vladivostok, with 70,000 Chinese landing in the port in 1907 alone. In railway construction, the Chinese became the largest non-Russian contingent of workers on the Trans-Siberian, especially on the Ussuri line. Others found work in the Vladivostok shipyards or as servants.⁷⁶ A significant proportion of Chinese migrants were attracted to the gold mines, where they mostly worked as “free diggers”, turning over their gold to mine owners but also smuggling and selling it illegally to Chinese merchants.⁷⁷ In fact by 1910, Chinese miners vastly outnumbered their Russian counterparts in the Amur gold mines, as the following table shows:

⁷⁴ Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, pp 847-849; Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur’e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv.*; Y. Li, “Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun”, p 214

⁷⁵ Siegelbaum, “Another Yellow Peril”, pp 312-313; Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, pp 59-63; Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp 36-41

⁷⁶ Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, p 64; Marks, *Road to Power*, p 181; Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s”, pp 849-851; Siegelbaum, “Another Yellow Peril”, pp 311-317; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*

⁷⁷ Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur’e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv.*; Siegelbaum, “Another Yellow Peril”, pp 314-316

Table 1: Ratio of Chinese workers in the Amur gold mines, in percentages⁷⁸

Location/ Year	Zeya system	Bureya system	Upper Amur system	Far East total
1906	14	19	45	19
1907	22	30	65	31
1908	40	31	67	47
1909	49	65	81	61
1910	80	87	88	82
1911	-	-	-	76
1912	72	83	85	67

As urban centres developed in the Russian Far East, they also generated economic demands which Chinese merchants could fill. Food was one of the most critical, with large amounts of grain - as well as vegetables, peanuts, eggs and so on - transported to Russia by rail or by ship. The Russians were also dependent on supplies of cloth and household articles from China.⁷⁹ This, as well as the silk and tea trade, led to a growing Chinese retail sector dominated by petty traders, but also including a small proportion of wealthy merchants. By keeping salaries low, smuggling goods from China and evading tax, such businesses were extremely competitive.⁸⁰ Chinese quarters also sprang up in the towns, providing needed

⁷⁸ Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur'e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv*

⁷⁹ Shan, *The Development of the North Manchuria Frontier*, pp 103-105; Urbansky, "'Vasily' of China and his Russian Friends", p 19; "Letter from Wu Yong, 4 Jun 1917." R. Deng, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1), Minguo liunian zhi banian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960), p 29; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 15 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 352-369

⁸⁰ Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", pp 850, 855; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 82

infrastructure to new migrants.⁸¹ According to A.G. Larin, by 1910 the Chinese had 8,300 trade and industrial establishments in the Far Eastern regions, while the Russians had 12,300.⁸² The Chinese made their way west of the Urals as well. In 1914 some 100,000 were living mostly in Moscow and St Petersburg: mostly urban labourers but also merchants who owned restaurants, laundries, hide factories and general shops.⁸³

The result was an exponential growth in the number of Chinese in the region. According to the 1897 census there were 57,000 Chinese in Russia, of whom 41,000 were in the Russian Far East. In 1910 the number reached over 115,000 in the Far East alone. These statistics must be treated with caution, as the Chinese migrant population was still highly transient and it is not certain if the census distinguishes between seasonal and settled migrants. Li Yongchang quotes Russian customs figures showing that 13,000 more Chinese arrived than left between 1907 and 1911. In 1914, the corresponding number reached 19,000. Given the ambiguities in the data, Gregor Benton estimates that the 1910 census figure reflects those Chinese who stayed in Russia on a more permanent basis. If the number of transient workers is added, the figure could double or triple depending on the season. Given that the total population of Russia at the time was 1.2 million, Larin estimates that the Chinese would have made up a minority of 10-12%, with a significantly higher proportion in the Far Eastern regions.⁸⁴ Urban centres with high concentrations of

⁸¹ Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril", p 316

⁸² A.G. Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia (The Contribution of Chinese Immigrants to Russia's Far East)", *Jindai zhongguoshi yanjiu tongxun* 16 (1993), p 169

⁸³ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 21

⁸⁴ Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, pp 20-21; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 850

Chinese migrants included Irkutsk, Blagoveshchensk, Manzhouli, Chita, Khabarovsk, Nikolaevsk, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and, of course, Vladivostok.⁸⁵

The economic clout of Chinese merchants can be seen in a letter from Dong He Hong and more than 20 other Harbin firms. The mainstay of Harbin trade was grain, especially soybean and wheat. Wheat in particular was sold in Russia to the tune of 10m *pud* (164,000 tonnes) a year, at 12 rubles a *pud* in winter 1917. In fact nearly all the wheat grown in the region was destined for the Russian market, since the Manchurian locals consumed mostly millet, corn and sorghum (for brewing).⁸⁶ Binjiang *daoyin* (circuit intendant) Li Jia'ao confirmed this. In a telegram to the Foreign Ministry, Li wrote that the wheat grown in Northern Manchuria exceeded demand and vast amounts were sold in Russia every year, which formed the bulk of its food exports and the main source of local revenue. This was corroborated by Guo Zongxi, governor of Jilin province. Farther east, Vladivostok consul Shao Hengjun reported that the city's Chinese merchants had goods worth 45 million rubles, not counting their cash reserves. Nikolsk-Ussuriisk had 200 Chinese households worth 18 million.⁸⁷ The extent of cross-border trade in the Far East can also be gauged from the spread of Russian currency, which had become widespread currency

⁸⁵ "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 19 Apr 1919", "Discussion of the Foreign Ministry advisory council, 21 Apr 1919." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 156-159, 160-161

⁸⁶ "Letter from the Customs Department, 11 May 1918." Y. Wang, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (1), *Minguo liunian zhi banian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960), pp 366-369

⁸⁷ The Binjiang *daoyin* was in charge of administering the Chinese section of Harbin. "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 10 Oct 1918." "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 21 Oct 1918." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe* (1), pp 540, 552-555; "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 25 Mar 1918." N. Li, Z. Li, S. Xu, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya, Minguo liunian zhi banian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1984), p 49

throughout the Chinese border provinces. In fact in Heihe, just across the Amur river from Blagoveshchensk, the ruble was preferred over Chinese currencies.⁸⁸

Russia's efforts to consolidate the Far East, therefore, were a double-edged sword. Although cheap manpower and economic development were critical to the colonisation effort, the Russian Far East risked being "colonised" itself. The "question of yellow labour" and economic activity became ever more strident, raising the prospect of Russian territory being swamped by the Chinese. The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 seemed to confirm the Russians' fears. In 1907-1908 Amur governor-general P.F. Unterberger, having declared "I'd rather see our lands go empty than have them occupied by the yellow element", discussed in Vladivostok the issue of limiting Chinese migration. This culminated in the Council of Ministers' approval of a series of laws restricting certain groups of Chinese - such as the elderly or crippled - from entering Russia.⁸⁹ A law was passed in June 1910 prohibiting the employment of Chinese or Korean workers in any state enterprise or state-subsidised project in the Amur, Maritime or Transbaikal regions. Unterberger's successor N.L. Gondatti proceeded, in an even more draconian fashion, to order the expelling of all illegal aliens who had not been able to secure work permits by 1912. Finally, in April 1912, the Russian consuls in Fengtian province and Yantai, Shandong informed the Chinese government of a new permit regime. Chinese arriving in Russia had to

⁸⁸ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 1 Nov 1917." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 171-172. So closely linked were Heihe/Aigun and Blagoveshchensk that in the Chinese documents, Blagoveshchensk was sometimes still referred to as "north-bank Heihe". However, the preference for the ruble could also be due to the proliferation of currencies in China at the time, which complicated commerce and were not always credible. T. Gottschang, *Currencies, Identities, Free Banking, and Growth in Early Twentieth Century Manchuria* [Online.] Available at College of the Holy Cross Economics Department Working Papers, http://crossworks.holycross.edu/econ_working_papers/97 [Accessed 4 June 2015]

⁸⁹ Timofeev, *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnoshenia v Priamur'e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv*; W. Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak: A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p 96

obtain a residence permit within a month, together with a medical certificate. Other foreigners were allowed to wait six months and pay lower permit fees. Chinese crossing the Amur river for short visits had to buy a 3-day permit. Fees were imposed at every step of the administration process, including for the permit itself, for the printing of the permit, for the taking of photographs and so on. The new rules were enforced with an extensive table of fines.⁹⁰

Such policies did not last long. From the beginning, they were resented by Russian enterprises - especially the gold mines - that were heavily dependent on Chinese labour.⁹¹ With the outbreak of WWI, however, Russia's labour shortage assumed a critical dimension. Not only was the law of June 1910 prohibiting Chinese labour lifted, the state itself began to take a proactive policy in obtaining Chinese workers, with the involvement of its consuls in China. Recruitment began in 1915 on a massive scale, reaching a peak in 1916 and outnumbering the labour contingents hired by France or Britain. As before, the majority of the workers recruited came from Shandong, but now Russian employers extended their reach to Manchuria, Liaoning, Shanghai and Xinjiang. The workers' destinations, too, took them far beyond their traditional boundaries of the Far Eastern regions. Some were sent to the front to serve in construction brigades. Others went to Murmansk to build the railway, Smolensk to fell trees or to the coal mines of the Donbas.⁹² The Chinese Republican

⁹⁰ Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril", pp 322-324; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 220-223; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*

⁹¹ Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", p 223; Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril", pp 324-327

⁹² Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 224-225; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", pp 856-857

government, eager to gain diplomatic advantage by cooperating with the Allies, was only too happy to assist.⁹³

Wartime recruitment took two major forms. The first, of a clearly illegal nature, was undertaken by private recruiters without following proper procedure. A Russian employer or Chinese middleman gathered groups of Chinese workers and took them across the border. Since there were no contracts, the workers lacked any guarantees regarding salary, working conditions or even their destination. This was tacitly approved by the Russian government, since it stipulated that permission from the Chinese government was not necessary for recruitment, only the agreement of the Russian consul. The second, official form of recruitment required the employer to draw up a contract regarding the number of workers to be hired, where recruitment was to take place, the destination of these workers and their proposed jobs. This would then be submitted to the Chinese Foreign Ministry for approval. Again, while this more legitimate procedure involved contracts, employers often violated them by recruiting more than the approved number of workers, or conducting recruitment in different areas. Worse still, some employers defied the Chinese government's instructions and sent their labourers to the front, where more than 7,000 died.⁹⁴ Due to the prevalence of unofficial recruitment and contract violations, it is difficult to establish the number of Chinese wartime workers employed by Russia. The Chinese

⁹³ G. Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp 10-16; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 230-231

⁹⁴ Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 82; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", pp 857-860

embassy in Russia estimated it at 100,000 in 1916, when wartime recruitment was at its peak. Chinese historians quote the figure as 400,000 or even 450,000.⁹⁵

The example of the largest Russian recruitment drive amply illustrates these problems. The recruitment was contracted for in 1916 by an official with the China Eastern Railway company, E.V. Daniel, who in this case represented the Russian Raw Materials Procurement Bureau. The actual recruitment was carried out by Yi Cheng, a Chinese firm in Changchun, Fengtian province. Before the recruitment contract had been signed China's ambassador to Russia, Liu Jingren, warned the Foreign Ministry about Daniel's project and advised that it should be stopped. However, Daniel and the Russian consul in Fengtian received the approval of Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin, and on May 1916 the recruitment began. Although the contract stipulated that Yi Cheng could only recruit 5,000 workers per month over a period of four months, in actual fact workers continued to be hired until the end of October. Recruitment was to take place in only five areas - Changchun, Fengtian, Andong, Shanhaiguan and Harbin - but Yi Cheng scattered its recruiting agents throughout all three Manchurian provinces. A July report from Fengtian suggests that Yi Cheng recruiters were present in 15 different places and had already hired several thousand workers each. One recruiter was even arrested, confessing that he had overshot his quota by 8,000 workers. Because of this, Li Yongchang estimates the actual number of workers recruited under the Daniel-Yi Cheng contract to be 40,000,

⁹⁵ Siegelbaum, "Another Yellow Peril", pp 327-328; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", pp 856, 859; Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 21; Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", p 112; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*. The Foreign Ministry consistently maintained its figure of 100,000. See, for example, "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 May 1917." "Draft from the Foreign Ministry to the President, 8 Jun 1917." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 103-104, 111-112

double its permitted quota. So widespread were the violations that Zhang Zuolin repented of his approval and called for Russian recruitment to be curtailed.⁹⁶

This brought a new dimension to Sino-Russian relations. The Republican government in Beijing, which replaced the Qing dynasty in 1912, was no longer willing to maintain a position of benign neglect towards its citizens abroad. Rather, this was now seen as an issue of national credibility and prestige.⁹⁷ Hence, the problem of wartime workers who had been maltreated became particularly pressing, because it brought to light severe deficiencies in the Chinese government's ability to protect its own citizens. Lacking a sufficient network of overseas representatives, Beijing was unable to keep track of the conditions facing Chinese workers or enforce contractual obligations. Where recruitment agreements were violated, the Foreign Ministry was unable to call those involved into account.⁹⁸ Ambassador Liu described the situation in Petrograd in February 1917:

Those arriving at the embassy to ask for permits, in order to exchange them for identity cards at the police station, have crowded and blocked up the doorways. Every day one may count a hundred of them. The whole lot are shabby, filthy and look like beggars, causing a spectacle and inciting laughter in the passers-by... Because of the distances involved it is hard to keep track of the workers. Chinese are mining coal in Perm, building the railway in Murmansk, felling trees in Vitebsk and Pskov. Some are suffering from hunger and cold, others oppressed by those in power, their situations are all different. It

⁹⁶ Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 226-227; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 82

⁹⁷ Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, pp 240, 243-244, 265

⁹⁸ Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", p 231-233; Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 21; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 83. An analogous situation arose among Chinese labourers recruited by the western Allies, for which see Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, pp 106-107, 113-117, 121-122

is even harder to find out if they have been hired to perform military service.⁹⁹

To Liu, the plight of Chinese workers was an image problem, not just a humanitarian one. In response, he proposed an exhaustive recruitment contract specifying working locations, conditions, salaries, medical care, welfare and repatriation. He drew up a list of procedures that should be followed when conducting recruitment, including careful scrutiny of the employment contracts by Chinese officials. A copy of the contract should be given to workers and its important points explained. Unfortunately, this was too little too late. Liu's suggestions had not been implemented by the time the February Revolution intervened.¹⁰⁰

At this point, however, a caveat is necessary. It would be a mistake to cast the overseas Chinese in Russia as nothing more than an exploited and victimised minority. Certainly, maltreatment of Chinese, especially wartime workers, did take place. Yet the Chinese community was not free of its share of abuses. Larin points out that the Chinese formed their own organisations - from chambers of commerce to secret societies - which circumvented Russian authority. Legal cases, for example, were not taken to Russian courts but instead settled within the community. Of course, such organisations were a strategy for mutual protection and assistance, especially in an alien environment. They were more sensitive to Chinese custom than the Russian authorities.¹⁰¹ But they also became alternative sources of power, promoting economic collusion and corruption and enjoying an autonomy that the Russians

⁹⁹ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 15 Feb 1917." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 25

¹⁰⁰ Y. Li, "Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun", pp 232-233

¹⁰¹ Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", pp 114-115; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 85

considered “extraterritoriality”. Smuggling of gold and consumer goods was rampant. There was widespread Chinese abuse of the permit system, with Chinese middlemen selling expired or counterfeit permits to unsuspecting workers, or workers exchanging permits among themselves.¹⁰² Even the shady hiring practices so decried by the Beijing authorities were frequently conducted by Chinese *shetou* (snakeheads), or human traffickers. Others exploited their fellow Chinese by posing as interpreters and using this position manipulatively.¹⁰³

Although these social ills are often glossed over by Chinese-language historians, they are necessary to present a nuanced picture of the community. A 1917 report from the Chinese consul in Irkutsk, Wei Bo, describes his initial meetings with Russian authorities upon arriving at his post in September that year. They revealed that the coal mines in the area employed several thousand Chinese workers, many of whom did not have permits or follow mine regulations, causing accidents. Robbery and murder were not unheard of. Opium and gambling dens had been set up and there was a brisk trade in counterfeit work permits, which sold for several times the price of official permits. Expired permits from the Qing era could be purchased and the photographs changed. Wei, for his part, explained that most workers did not understand Russian, which was the cause of much misunderstanding. The sheer number of workers also meant that some black sheep were bound to be in the flock.

¹⁰² Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, pp 854-856; Urbansky, “‘Vasily’ of China and his Russian Friends”, pp 20-24; Alexeeva, “Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East”, p 21; Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia (The Contribution of Chinese Immigrants to Russia’s Far East)”, pp 169-170

¹⁰³ Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, p 857; Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 21; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*. “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 22 May 1918.” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 16 Jun 1918.” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 149, 187

The solution was for the consulate to participate in administration, giving the Chinese a stake in protecting legal workers and reducing crime.¹⁰⁴

Finally, there is evidence that Chinese merchants profited from Russia's wartime economic dislocation. In October 1917 ambassador Liu informed Beijing that thousands of Chinese merchants were still trading in Petrograd and Moscow and were eager to take advantage of the shortage of basic goods, especially when Russian merchants were "extremely weak". Two Chinese merchants in Moscow reported that since the beginning of the war economic competition had intensified and their fellow traders were "ten times more numerous than before".¹⁰⁵ In Irkutsk, consul Wei said that Chinese merchants had been trading there for more than 20 years, but their number had been increasing recently due to the "good profits that can be made". One of their leaders, named Jin, had been in Irkutsk for a long time and had wealth of more than 1 million rubles; another, Tang, was a manager of the Guang Tai company, with a capitalisation of 3-4 million and branches in Shanghai, Hankou and Guangdong.¹⁰⁶

Such was the situation of the overseas Chinese community on the eve of the 1917 revolutions. In both their numerical size and wealth, they were the direct result of Russian and Chinese imperial policy that stressed the settling and development of frontier lands. They displayed many transnational characteristics, either travelling to

¹⁰⁴ "Letter from Wei Bo, 26 Dec 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 193-197. Opium and gambling dens had also become a sore point in Vladivostok. See "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 138-140

¹⁰⁵ "Telegram from the Embassy in Russia, 12 Nov 1917" "Power of attorney from the overseas Chinese in Moscow, 30 Nov 1918." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 173-174, 582-583

¹⁰⁶ "Letter from Wei Bo, 19 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, 573-574

Russia for seasonal work or conducting trade across the Sino-Russian border.

Benton sees them as a relatively mature community, including some Chinese who had been brought up in Russia and were familiar enough with Russian institutions to act as a bridge between Chinese workers and Russian activists.¹⁰⁷ But for the most part, the overseas Chinese in Russia formed an autonomous and transient community.

Most importantly, the Chinese in the Russian Far East were at the nerve centre of imperial competition. All the ingredients that had inspired nationalist sentiment in China itself, as well as among the diaspora, were present in spades. The region they inhabited was claimed by both the Russian and Chinese geo-bodies, as well as the expansionist ambitions of Japan. Russia's attempt to consolidate its hold on the frontier led to large-scale Chinese migration, which in turn sparked off Russian fears of a "yellow threat". As in America, the result was a slew of discriminatory policies aimed specifically at the Chinese. The Chinese community in the Russian Far East thus combined memories of foreign imperialism with continuing tensions over anti-Chinese legislation. Images of Gondatti and other symbols of Russian heavy-handedness were still fresh. The residence and river-crossing permits had yet to be lifted. The First World War only compounded this problem by scattering hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers throughout the Russian empire.

This situation would have endured had it not been for the 1917 revolutions and the Civil War that followed. As long as tsarist Russia was able to exert its authority over the Far Eastern frontier, Chinese attempts to address the grievances of their overseas citizens - to say nothing of the overall imperial balance - could be thwarted.

¹⁰⁷ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 29; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", pp 85-86

When Chinese merchants petitioned Beijing regarding anti-Chinese legislation, for instance, the Foreign Ministry attempted to negotiate with the Russians but was unable to make any headway.¹⁰⁸ The collapse of Russian state power, however, unleashed new forces that intensified the conflict in the region. All of a sudden, the danger of national subjugation seemed even more imminent and the chance for national revival even more immediate.

Act One: Revolution

News of the first revolution reached the Foreign Ministry on 15 March 1917. In a telegram to Beijing, ambassador Liu described the events as a “people’s uprising” supported by the army and navy. On 18 March, Bi Guifang, military governor of the border province of Heilongjiang, passed on a report from Chinese troops in Heihe. Blagoveshchensk, just across the Amur from Heihe, had been in an uproar the entire night at the news of the tsar’s abdication. Loud shouts could be heard even on the Chinese side of the river. In Vladivostok, consul Lu Shiyuan wrote that a committee of public safety had been set up. Gondatti, then governor-general of the Maritime Province, had been arrested in Khabarovsk. In Irkutsk a provisional administration was set up to great public acclaim and a commissar appointed.¹⁰⁹

For the time being, it was business as usual. Since the Provisional Government received Allied recognition and pledged to honour its foreign policy obligations, there was no question of the legitimacy of Russia’s diplomatic representatives or of the

¹⁰⁸ Y. Li, “Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun”, pp 230-233; Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, p 852

¹⁰⁹ “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 15 Mar 1917” “Telegram from Bi Guifang, 18 Mar 1917” “Telegram from Lu Shiyuan, 26 Mar 1917” “Letter from Guan Shangping, 11 Apr 1917” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 49, 52, 58, 80-81

regime itself.¹¹⁰ The Provisional Government also endorsed Russia's administrators on the China Eastern Railway, although there was some opposition in Harbin to the longstanding tsarist general manager D.L. Horvath.¹¹¹ The disorder was confined to European Russia, where Chinese workers poured in from the disintegrating front and compounded the already pressing welfare issue.¹¹² Nevertheless, economic life seems to have continued and perhaps even thrived after the March Revolution. In fact, the Provisional Government recognised the far eastern region's reliance on imports from China. When trade restrictions were introduced in August to stabilise Russian currency, among the list of exempted items were Chinese grain, wheat, beans, vegetables, salt, sugar, meat, fish, animal feed, fertiliser and other raw materials.¹¹³

The detente extended beyond economic affairs. Ambassador Liu noted a new "spirit of egalitarianism" among the Russians, who were beginning to show genuine concern for the plight of Chinese workers. Consul Wei's meetings with the Irkutsk authorities in September were also unprecedented. Since the consulate opened two years ago, Wei wrote, the Russians had refused to hold discussions with the Chinese. Their sudden cordiality was "the first such honourable event in the history of

¹¹⁰ Ambassador N.A. Kudashev met with the Foreign Minister on 19 March. In a friendly exchange the Minister revealed that he had personally met Nicholas II in Hong Kong several decades ago, during the tsar's tour of the Far East. He also approved of the appointment of P.N. Miliukov, comparing him to President Woodrow Wilson. "Minutes of meeting between Kudashev and the Foreign Minister, 19 Mar 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 52-53

¹¹¹ "Telegram from Li Hongmo, 28 Mar 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 64-65

¹¹² "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 25 Sept 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 142-144

¹¹³ "Letter from the Russian Embassy, 11 Aug 1917" "Letter from the Russian Embassy, 3 Sept 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 32-33, 36-37

this consulate". In fact, the Russians even apologised to Wei for the export of opium to China. Together, Wei and the Russians instituted a new permit system to curb illegal Chinese labour and established cooperative procedures to deal with crime within the Chinese community.¹¹⁴

Throughout this period, the real unrest was taking place in China itself. Since the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China's Republican regime had been on shaky ground. The fragmentation of military and financial power resulted in the rise of warlords with independent sources of authority. For a short while, the Beijing government was held together by president Yuan Shikai through military clout and force of personality. But Yuan's attempt to revive the monarchy - with himself as emperor - and his death in 1915 touched off a profound political crisis. Things came to a head in early 1917 when rival political factions clashed over the issue of supporting the Allies in WWI: premier Duan Qirui was in favour, but Yuan's successor Li Yuanhong disagreed and dismissed Duan on 23 May. Duan responded by calling on his warlord allies for help, whereupon Li panicked and appealed to another militarist, Zhang Xun. Zhang Xun promptly attempted to restore the Qing emperor in July, allowing Duan and his allies to topple Li on the basis of "protecting the constitution".

The result was a prolonged period of instability which split China among the various warlord factions, as well as between North and South. Duan resumed his post, but his attempt to subdue the southern warlords, who resented his coup, touched off a two-year war. To finance the war, Duan secretly negotiated a 145 million yen loan with the Japanese in September 1917. In exchange, he offered the Japanese Germany's concessions in Shandong. Duan's failure to wage a swift and successful

¹¹⁴ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 11 May 1917" "Letter from Wei Bo, 26 Dec 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 95, 193-197

campaign in the south led to his resignation in November, but the loans had given him immense military resources. He was brought back as Minister for War in December and eventually reinstated as premier in March 1918.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, in Manchuria, warlord Zhang Zuolin was consolidating his power. Having been appointed civil and military governor of Fengtian province by Yuan Shikai, he proceeded to tighten his grip on the other two Manchurian provinces: Heilongjiang and Jilin. In July 1917 Bi Guifang, the aforementioned civil and military governor of Heilongjiang, was replaced by Bao Guiqing, a Zhang loyalist and relative by marriage. Jilin, however, proved a harder nut to crack. Unlike in Fengtian and Heilongjiang, the positions of civilian and military governor in Jilin were held by different officials. The civil governor, Guo Zongxi, was already a dependent of Zhang's. But the military governor, Meng Enyuan, was a protege of Yuan's and had risen independently through the ranks to become commander of all the Jilin armies in 1913. For the time being, Meng was able to hold out against Zhang.¹¹⁶

Given the domestic upheaval, it is unsurprising that many Chinese saw their own country, not Russia, as being in crisis. Internal conflict sapped China's financial and military strength. An all-China chamber-of-commerce congress adopted a resolution that reflected merchants' sentiments:

In these past years China has experienced floods and drought, famine and war. The merchants have been the first to suffer. These wounds have not healed... The first demand put forward

¹¹⁵ McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, pp 247-266; Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, pp 59-65; McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China*, p 37, 45-49

¹¹⁶ McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China*, pp 27-43; Li, "Haluan yu Zhongdong tielu", p 367, Y. Jiang, *State Building, Capitalism, and Development: State-Run Industrial Enterprises in Fengtian, 1920-1931*. PhD, University of Minnesota (2010), p 18

by this congress is that peace should be maintained in this country.¹¹⁷

The dust from China's restoration crisis was only just settling when the bolsheviks swept into power in November 1917. From the beginning, the Chinese recognised that this revolution was very different from that of March. In March the transfer of power had been relatively painless and Allied recognition had come as a matter of course. This time, the bolsheviks faced determined opposition both domestically and internationally. On 8 November, ambassador Liu reported that the "extremists" had seized power in Petrograd, detailing their strong-arm tactics in subsequent telegrams.¹¹⁸ In Irkutsk fighting between the government and revolutionaries lasted eight days, with the Whites using poison gas. More than 2,000 Reds were killed and over 1,000 wounded. Eight Chinese were killed by accident, 30-40 Chinese businesses were robbed and the consulate was searched by the Reds. Chinese losses were estimated at 100,000 rubles.¹¹⁹ According to an intelligence report commissioned by the Chinese State Council:

All the glass windows in the city have been broken, half of the main thoroughfare has been destroyed by fire, including the Angara bridge... Food is scarce in the city as prices are low and peasants are hoarding... Many Chinese and Russians have committed suicide in the river. There are fears that the

¹¹⁷ "Letter from the National Association of Chambers of Commerce, 4 May 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 121

¹¹⁸ "Telegram from the Embassy in Russia, 12 Nov 1917" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 27 Nov 1917" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 Nov 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 173-175, 180-181, 182

¹¹⁹ All figures quoted by merchants should be treated with caution, since they were well aware of the value of inflating losses whenever there was the possibility of seeking compensation. Examples of creative accounting included manipulating prices, including foregone revenue in the estimates, or attempting to claim for losses unrelated to the effects of the Civil War, such as cloth burnt by careless train drivers. See "Letter from the Bureau for Overseas Chinese Workers, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 212-215; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 15 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 352-369

bolsheviks hate the Chinese... Most of the larger merchants have employed cossacks for protection.¹²⁰

The bolsheviks only gained control of Irkutsk on 4 January 1918. Farther east, conflict broke out in Blagoveshchensk in January and February 1918. Soldiers arrested their officers and order was lost, shaking up the entire city. Armed “extremists” robbed a bank and the Russian manager crossed the river to ask the Chinese to help guard it. Although a temporary ceasefire resulted in a power-sharing arrangement between the bolsheviks and other socialists, the Reds took the offensive again in March. They succeeded in capturing the city after seven days’ fighting. The city was burnt and looted and some Chinese were wounded in the crossfire.¹²¹

In Vladivostok, the bolsheviks made a bid for power on 18 November 1917, but the Allied presence meant that they had to share it with the city дума and the zemstvo.¹²² This was a fragile and uneasy truce. Consul Lu reported that soldiers were no longer obeying their officers. Workers had risen up against the “capitalists”, causing great anxiety among the townspeople. There was widespread fear that the

¹²⁰ The State Council was the equivalent of a cabinet. “Telegram from Wei Bo, 7 Jan 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 212. See also “Letter from the State Council, 18 Feb 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 75-77

¹²¹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 14 Mar 1918” “Telegram from Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzheng, 14 Mar 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 108, 109-110

¹²² J. Bisher, *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian* (London: Routledge, 2005), p 42

poor would go on a rampage and, in desperation, Russian merchants had even come to the Chinese consulate asking for protection.¹²³ He summed up the situation:

After the Russian revolution, autocracy was overturned and order was lost. The people misunderstood the meaning of freedom and disregarded the law. Factions have arisen to struggle for power, abusing the public for their personal gain. There is no government to speak of. Moreover three years of painful war have impoverished the people... The chamber of commerce wrote saying that that the soldiers and workers will carry out another revolution due to the impending separate peace talks with Germany. Rumours are rife and there is general panic.¹²⁴

In Siberia and the Far East, the “factional conflict” began to coalesce around a handful of anti-bolshevik forces. A dizzying array of opposition governments, including the Provisional Siberian Government under P.Ia. Derber, attempted to make contact with the Chinese government and obtain its support. Most, however, received only scant attention from either Beijing or the Manchurian authorities.¹²⁵ More noteworthy was the cossack leader G.M. Semenov, who had formed an anti-bolshevik army in Manzhouli, on the Sino-Russian border, in December 1917.¹²⁶ Anti-bolshevik leaders also fled across the border to Harbin, where resistance was led by

¹²³ “Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 27 Nov 1917” “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 20 Feb 1918” “Telegram from Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng, 22 Feb 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 1-3, 16-17, 18; “Telegram from Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng, 19 Jan 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 62-63

¹²⁴ “Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 12 Dec 1917” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 3-4

¹²⁵ “Telegram from the leaders of the Russian Extraordinary Congress leaders Derber, Moravskii etc, 3 Feb 1918” “Meeting between Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang and UK ambassador John Jordan, 4 Feb 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 236, 237-238

¹²⁶ “Letter from Liu Jingren, 28 Feb 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 268-269; “Letter from the State Council, 7 Feb 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 69-71

Horvath, his chief-of-staff M.M. Pleshkov and the future leader of the Omsk regime, A.V. Kolchak.¹²⁷

The collapse of state power and the rise of anti-bolshevik forces posed an immediate threat to the overseas Chinese community and to the security of the border. But it was the bolshevik policy of a separate peace that proved most fateful, since it brought the Allies into the crisis. On 28 November 1917, ambassador Liu wrote that peace talks were to be conducted with Germany and that Trotsky had begun publishing secret treaties.¹²⁸ Later, Trotsky issued a notice to representatives of Allied and neutral countries regarding the Decree on Peace, which called for an immediate armistice on all fronts, peace without annexations or indemnities and an end to secret diplomacy.¹²⁹

This was a slap in the face to the Allies. The prospect of a separate peace with Germany directly threatened the Allied war effort and raised the spectre of vast numbers of German troops being redeployed from Russia. A weakened Russia could provide the Central Powers with much-needed resources, from grain reserves to oil, threatening the success of the Allied blockade of Germany. An added complication was the thousands of German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war in Siberia. The

¹²⁷ Varneck, *The Testimony of Kolchak and other Siberian Materials*, pp 233-234

¹²⁸ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 28 Nov 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 181

¹²⁹ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 13 Dec 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 188-189. Liu noted that although the announcement to Allied representatives was not addressed to either the Japanese or the Chinese - a puzzling omission, considering that both countries were members of the wartime Allies - the notice to neutral countries contained a Chinese translation. Despite this gaffe, Trotsky's early diplomatic overtures show that the bolsheviks clearly had a Chinese audience in mind, not only in providing the translation but also by including a document which played to Chinese fears of Japanese colonialism in their first lot of published correspondence. This was a 1916 message to the Russian ambassador in France on driving Germany out of Chinese markets with the help of the Japanese.

Allies were convinced that these prisoners were becoming highly disciplined and effective shock troops for the Red Army. Little wonder, then, that the Allies “fell prey to the nightmare vision of German troops looking out over the Golden Horn of Vladivostok”.¹³⁰ They refused to recognise the Lenin government. When the separate peace became a reality with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, the Allies proceeded first to cast about for representatives who would oppose the Bolsheviks. Later, they undertook military intervention on a large scale.¹³¹

This proved to be the tipping point not only in the Russian Civil War, but in the conflict over the Sino-Russian frontier as a whole. Allied involvement entrenched the chaotic political landscape in the Far East by sustaining independent anti-bolshevik warlords. Semenov, Horvath and Kolchak all actively courted the Allies, seeking military and diplomatic support. The Allies were more than willing to oblige, channelling large amounts of money and war materiel to the White forces. But such aid was a poisoned chalice. Semenov, I.P. Kalmykov, S.N. Rozanov and other cossack militarists became dependent not on political legitimacy or good governance but on Japanese largesse. It became easier to receive Japanese aid in exchange for mines and fisheries than to muster Russian support or harness local resources. Pereira describes the resulting period of warlord rule, or *atamanshchina*, as “anarchic militarism” which left a “trail of havoc and devastation”.¹³² More importantly, however, this intensified Chinese fears of Japan’s imperial ambitions. Whereas the previous tsarist government had attempted, at the very least, to stave off Japanese

¹³⁰ Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention*, p 33.

¹³¹ “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 30 Nov 1917” “Letter from Liu Jingren, 13 Dec 1917” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 183-184, 188-189. E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008), p 46

¹³² Pereira, “Siberian Atamanshchina”, pp 128-129

expansionism, its White warlord successors seemed to be acting as the advance guard of the Japanese army.

Allied military intervention, which began in earnest after the Czech uprising in May 1918, only made this worse, for it placed large numbers of Japanese troops right in the heart of the frontier zone. Of all the foreign troops in the Siberian Intervention the Japanese were by far the most numerous, reaching a peak of 72,000 men and far exceeding other Allied troops even in other parts of Russia.¹³³ Japanese soldiers and officers were omnipresent in the cossack warlord armies, providing manpower and “advisors”. This struck at the heart of Chinese concerns. Imperial ambitions interlocked with political fragmentation as the Japanese troops aided the anti-bolshevik cossack armies in exchange for economic concessions.¹³⁴ As these armies ran riot on the Sino-Russian border, the Chinese saw a triumphant Japan behind them, poised to take over where the tsar had left off.

The Civil War and the *atamanshchina* that followed was China’s nightmare come true. For the Allies, the Siberian Intervention was a struggle against the bolshevik regime. For the Chinese, however, it was a national conflict. The atamans’ violent rule deeply affected the overseas Chinese community and harked back to the bad old days of tsarist power. They projected Japanese ambitions into the heart of a

¹³³ By contrast, the Czech Legion numbered 40,000. The British had 3,000 men in the largest anti-Bolshevik operation in North Russia, the French had fewer than 3,000 in Odessa, while the American contingent in Siberia numbered just above 8,000. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, pp 156, 49; J.K. Munholland, “The French army and intervention in Southern Russia, 1918-1919”. *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 22(1) (1981), p 50; Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention*, pp 67-68

¹³⁴ T. Hara, “Japan Moves North: The Japanese Occupation of Northern Sakhalin (1920s)”, in Kotkin and Wolff (eds.) *Rediscovering Russia in Asia*, pp 62-63

contested region. All of a sudden, it seemed that the Chinese nation was in mortal danger.

As we shall see, the overseas Chinese responded to the crisis in nationalist terms. They employed the rhetoric of national sovereignty and prestige in making sense of the Civil War. These considerations, in turn, fundamentally shaped the Chinese approach to the Civil War. Since it was a member of the wartime Allies, China was diplomatically obligated to aid the Whites. Once the Whites had become thoroughly trained with imperialist associations, however, Chinese aid turned to hostility. The overseas Chinese and their officials came to view the atamans with an unprecedented degree of vituperative hatred. Chinese sympathies were increasingly strained until, in 1920, they vanished altogether.

Act Two: A concordat with the Reds, November 1917-August 1918

The first threat to the overseas Chinese seemed to come from the Reds and, in the beginning, there was no love lost between them. In Petrograd and Vladivostok, ambassador Liu and consul Lu characterised the Reds as “extremist”, “impoverished” elements who were “unreasonable and domineering”, “killing each other and endangering the fatherland”.¹³⁵ Shao Hengjun, who replaced Lu in Vladivostok in February 1918, reported:

The soldiers and workers are running riot, Russian officials have lost their power and Chinese workers are either squeezed out and lose their jobs, or are forced to join the Reds. There is a shortage of food and many incidences of robbery and murder... The workers and soldiers cannot be relied upon, conflict is growing, they aim to take over financial and policing authority...

¹³⁵ “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 Nov 1917” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 182; “Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 27 Nov 1917” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 1-3

The Reds speak in extreme terms, their plans are radical and they are like wild beasts.¹³⁶

The Reds' modus operandi was simple: Requisition goods, milk Chinese merchants of their money, expel Chinese workers and recruit them into the Red movement. Chinese gold miners in Ust-Kara near Sretensk were robbed, driven away from the mines and more than 70 were murdered.¹³⁷ In Irkutsk, where fighting between bolsheviks and their opponents had been intense, merchants' goods, houses, property, ships and cash were confiscated and exports restricted. To begin with, a "revolutionary donation" of 4-5,000 rubles was requested. Then a "special tax" was levied on Chinese businesses, totalling 200,000 rubles. Many merchants left for China.¹³⁸ The chairman of the Irkutsk soviet, Ia.D. Yanson, also engaged in some diplomatic brinkmanship, threatening to expel 150,000 Chinese workers if the Allied embargo on food exports to Russia was not lifted.¹³⁹ Consul Wei summarised the Red regime as "robbery in the name of equality". Chinese residents lost wealth and property estimated at 10 million rubles, including losses from trade.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 7 Mar 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 29

¹³⁷ "Letter from the Bureau for Overseas Chinese Workers, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 212-215

¹³⁸ In October 1918 there were still 300 Chinese shops in Irkutsk. "Telegram from Wei Bo, 20 Mar 1918" "Letter from the State Council copying a letter from Bao Guiqing, 28 Feb 1918" "Letter from Irkutsk attache Wu Mingjun, 14 May 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 271-274, 309, 373-374; "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 31 Oct 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 406-407

¹³⁹ "Telegram from Wei Bo, 19 Apr 1918" Telegram from Wei Bo, 26 Apr 1918" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to the Revenue and Customs Department, 29 Apr 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 341, 351, 354-355

¹⁴⁰ "Telegram from Wei Bo, 16 Mar 1918" "Telegram from Wei Bo, 12 Nov 1918" "Letter from Meng Enyuan, 15 Jun 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 299, 413-415, 566-567

The situation in Vladivostok was equally dire. As the city descended into lawlessness, robberies, murders and fraud involving Chinese residents went unresolved.¹⁴¹

Russian workers demanded higher wages and the eight-hour day, but employers replaced them with Chinese who were willing to accept lower pay and longer hours. The resulting competition led the Reds, who were initially conciliatory, to retain and exacerbate tsarist policies towards “yellow labour”. Workers gathered in large groups outside bakeries to force Chinese staff to leave, threatening to beat up their employers if they refused. Factories had to hire Chinese on the sly and, if found out, the owners were subject to mob violence.¹⁴² Residence permit fees and fines were increased several times, with heavier fines for Chinese than for other foreigners. In some cases the permits were confiscated outright with the help of crooked Chinese interpreters.¹⁴³

The Chinese response to the Red threat was overwhelmingly couched in nationalist terms. Consul Shao, harking back to the bad old days of tsarist arrogance, compared the Reds to “the abusive administration of Gondatti, who clearly set the Chinese apart from other nationalities”.¹⁴⁴ The Vladivostok chamber of commerce repeatedly called for a warship to be sent as a demonstration of Chinese power:

¹⁴¹ “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 22 May 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 138-140, 148-149

¹⁴² “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 2 Apr 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 4 Apr 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 7 Apr 1918” “Report from Foreign Ministry commissioner Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 61-62, 65-66, 73, 258

¹⁴³ “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 22 May 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 138-140, 149-151

¹⁴⁴ “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 139

The Reds are brutal and look down on the overseas Chinese, who have no ship to protect them. They insult and mistreat the Chinese, unresolved cases are piling up, protests are growing daily and the situation is very difficult. In this sense Russian officials are oppressing the Chinese more every day... China must make a show of force so that the Russians will restrain themselves.¹⁴⁵

Shao approved this appeal. Chinese bandits were running riot and he hoped not only to protect the overseas merchants from the disorder in Russia, but also to forcibly repatriate the less savoury elements of the Chinese community.¹⁴⁶ The warship, the *Hai Rong*, arrived on 16 April 1918 to great jubilation; two days later a separate passenger ship left Vladivostok evacuating 1,165 Chinese, most of whom were workers.¹⁴⁷

Shao and the Vladivostok traders were not alone. The chambers of commerce in Grodekovo and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk also sounded the alarm.¹⁴⁸ All across the Russian Far East, the call for protection was couched in nationalist terms, whether by merchants or Manchurian warlords. In January 1918, warlord Meng in Jilin put his troops on alert, emphasising that he had done so because of *Japan's* designs on the neighbouring Maritime Province.¹⁴⁹ In August, the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce

¹⁴⁵ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 21 Mar 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 46

¹⁴⁶ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Apr 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 84-85

¹⁴⁷ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 17 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 18 Apr 1918" "Letter from the Naval Ministry, 20 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 24 Apr 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 92, 93, 97, 113

¹⁴⁸ "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 15 Jul 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 205-207

¹⁴⁹ "Telegram from Meng Enyuan and Guo Zongxi, 19 Jan 1918" "Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 8 Feb 1918" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Meng Enyuan, 16 Feb 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 11-12, 13-14, 15

asked for more troops by appealing to the humiliation of China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War:

Ever since the Reds gained control of this country, they have paid no attention to maintaining order and arbitrarily enforced equality of property. The people's lives were at stake... A Japanese warship has entered Nikolaevsk and they may take the opportunity to intervene, which would recreate the Korean tragedy. China may benefit from this conflict, but at the same time the overseas Chinese do not wish to see Japan reaping the gains.¹⁵⁰

And in Blagoveshchensk, where fighting had been the most prolonged and merchants' ships had been confiscated, the Overseas Chinese Association was even more emphatic. The Association's call for help was completely unambiguous in identifying with China:

The Chinese have been harassed and harmed by the Reds and cannot survive. We have repeatedly asked the Heilongjiang commander to send troops but he says he has no orders and dares not usurp authority. Even though the overseas Chinese live and work in Russian territory, we are still Chinese citizens one and the same, Russia is separated from Heihe by only a river... The president and premier love the people like their own sons. If they permit [the sending of troops], it would be as good as rescuing the overseas Chinese from peril.¹⁵¹

Heilongjiang military governor Bao Guiqing had in fact sent a cavalry battalion to Heihe in response. Fearing a misunderstanding, however, Bao did not dispatch them across the river into Russian territory - especially since a Japanese militia had already formed there.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ "Letter from the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce, 29 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 303

¹⁵¹ "Telegram from the Blagoveshchensk Overseas Chinese Association, 12 Mar 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 33

¹⁵² "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 20 Feb 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 16-17

The Reds' hostility was partly due to their suspicion - correct, as it turns out - that the Chinese were giving shelter to Semenov.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, their diplomatic isolation and their anti-imperialist stance meant that, for the time being at least, they were willing to negotiate with the Chinese. Already in January 1918, embassy secretary Li Shizhong met E.D. Polivanov, head of the Eastern section of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. Polivanov promised Li that the Soviets planned to abolish extraterritoriality, consular courts and the Russian police force in China, all of which had been seen by the Chinese as instruments of colonial humiliation.¹⁵⁴ Going further, in February 1918, the Soviets informed ambassador Liu that if China could show friendship to the new regime, they would abolish the Boxer Indemnity payments.¹⁵⁵

Red leaders in the localities were even more willing to parlay with the Chinese, especially when the food crisis and Allied military intervention threatened their grip on power. In Irkutsk, the supply committee worked out a compromise with consul Wei, under which Chinese merchants would obtain consular permits to import grain. The Soviet then dropped its ultimatum to expel the 20,000 Chinese workers in the nearby gold mines and the 18,000 workers in Irkutsk itself - much to the relief of the Foreign Ministry in Beijing.¹⁵⁶ On the controversial residence permits issue, Shao in

¹⁵³ "Letter from the State Council, 22 Feb 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 471-473

¹⁵⁴ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 28 Feb 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 266-271

¹⁵⁵ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 20 Feb 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 252

¹⁵⁶ "Telegram from Wei Bo, 26 Apr 1918" "Telegram from the Foreign Ministry to Wei Bo, 16 May 1918" "Telegram from the Foreign Ministry to Wei Bo, 25 May 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 351, 378, 395

Vladivostok asked for the increase in permit fees to be abolished, and for Chinese to receive treatment equal to other foreigners. After a lengthy dispute and despite the roaring business in fees, the Reds agreed and announced this in the newspapers. Shao promptly informed the chamber of commerce to start paying the same permit fees as other foreigners.¹⁵⁷

Similarly, when the Reds finally gained control of Blagoveshchensk, they sent a message to the Heihe circuit intendant promising to protect Chinese residents, prohibiting “even the slightest harm” to their interests. A commission was set up to investigate Chinese losses. For their part, Russian soldiers would not be allowed to enter Chinese territory and those who had fired shots towards the Chinese bank during the fighting would be punished.¹⁵⁸ When the Foreign Ministry sent Wu Peiguang, one of its department heads, on a fact-finding mission of the Russian Far East, he met with the Blagoveshchensk chamber of commerce. According to Wu, “They said that the Reds are still treating the overseas Chinese very well and all of the harsh laws of the past which restricted Chinese trade are gradually being abolished.”¹⁵⁹

At this early stage, therefore, Red interests could still coincide with China’s push to restore national sovereignty and prestige, despite their initial high-handedness. By contrast, the Whites were far less compromising from the start. In March 1918

¹⁵⁷ “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 15 Jul 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 205-207

¹⁵⁸ “Telegram from Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng, 21 Mar 1918” “Letter from the State Council copying a report from the Customs Department, 20 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 114-115, 366-367

¹⁵⁹ “Report from Foreign Ministry commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 376

Semenov's forces in Manzhouli received a large shipment of aid from the Allies, including 15 wagonloads of weapons: machine guns from Japan, artillery pieces from Britain and France. These were shipped to him via China, with the government's approval.¹⁶⁰ The Manchurian governors, however, had a dim view of Semenov's capabilities. He had been losing battle after battle against the Reds after his first offensive in January 1918. As the cossacks retreated back to Manzhouli, Heilongjiang warlord Bao feared that the Civil War would be taken into Chinese territory. Bao asked that Semenov's forces be disarmed. At the same time, the commander of the Manzhouli garrison was instructed to reach an understanding with the Red commander S.G. Lazo.¹⁶¹ Foreign Ministry secretary Zhu Hexiang conveyed this to Kudashev:

Semenov is not strong enough... If he loses, China will find it difficult to allow him to enter China with his arms. Allowing him to enter freely would be a sign of hostility to the Reds, which would cause anger. They may then send their troops to the border, which China wishes to avoid. Semenov should be instructed not to pick a fight and to keep his weapons in the rear.¹⁶²

The Manchurian governors also protested the Whites' widespread recruiting of overseas Chinese into their armies. In April 1918, Bao reported that Semenov had drafted 700-800 Chinese and *Mongols* in Manzhouli, while Meng wrote that Kalmykov was recruiting Chinese in Grodekovo with the aid of Japanese money. In a battle at Borzia, Semenov commanded 1,600 Chinese troops dressed in Russian

¹⁶⁰ "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 16 Mar 1918" "Letter from the State Council copying a telegram from Harbin, 18 Mar 1918" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to the Army Ministry, 18 Mar 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 298, 301, 303-304

¹⁶¹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 27 Feb 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 84-85, 96

¹⁶² "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 30 Mar 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 320-321

uniforms and only 600 cossacks. Later, in July, Binjiang circuit intendant Li Jia'ao noted that Chinese workers were being recruited in Irkutsk and Mongolia, attracted by the promise of high pay. This posed a security threat, since most of the Chinese recruits were "vagrants...whose only purpose was to earn a few rubles. If they were asked to kill the enemy they could not carry it out."¹⁶³ Once given arms and training, they could easily become bandits.

The recruitment issue was also a humanitarian concern, since it placed Chinese workers directly in harm's way. Many of the victims of the skirmishes between Semenov and the Reds were Chinese recruits. At the aforementioned battle in Borzia, it was no surprise that two-thirds of the casualties were Chinese. Neither were the Whites particularly accommodating commanders:

Semenov has recruited 800 Chinese soldiers who are stationed in Manzhouli. On the 18th, because of insufficient rations, a conflict arose in the western barracks between the Russian officers and Chinese soldiers. Two Chinese ringleaders were restrained and sent to the military prison, but were rescued by the Chinese troops. Russian officers opened fire and the unarmed troops ran off... There have been repeated attempts to prevent the Russians from recruiting Chinese and negotiations have been undertaken with Horvath, but they have not heeded this advice.¹⁶⁴

When Foreign Ministry official Wu toured Manzhouli, he reported that:

Semenov...has begun secretly recruiting Japanese as reinforcements and Chinese as his frontline soldiers. The Reds know about this and also hire Chinese as frontline troops.

¹⁶³ The Reds recruited overseas Chinese as well. "Letter from the State Council, 6 Apr 1918." "Letter from the State Council, 13 Apr 1918" "Letter from the State Council, 25 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 5 Jul 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 141-142, 153-154, 173-174, 260

¹⁶⁴ "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 22 Apr 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 169

Hence no matter who wins or loses on either side, most of those killed are Chinese. During the initial stage these troops were enticed into joining, but once they were recruited they were not given rations or pay. If they are defeated and retreat when fighting breaks out, they are paid in gunfire. Hence if they do not die on the front, they die in the rear.¹⁶⁵

Concerns regarding White recruitment reached the highest levels of government¹⁶⁶ and the Foreign Minister was again instructed to issue a protest with Kudashev:

There are more than 100,000 Chinese workers in Russia who are now in dire straits. If the Chinese government has not been fair to both factions in Russia and shows signs of being biased in favour of the Whites, were the Reds to learn of this, they may oppress Chinese workers further in revenge, plunging them into misery. This is diametrically opposed to the government's desire to protect the people.¹⁶⁷

Kudashev agreed to act on Chinese requests on both the arms and recruitment issues.¹⁶⁸ However, this proved to be no more than lip service. Kudashev, Kolchak and Horvath - to say nothing of Semenov and Kalmykov - continued to insist on the necessity of recruiting Chinese soldiers, ignoring Chinese protests.¹⁶⁹ Neither was Semenov willing to be restrained. He launched another invasion of the Transbaikal in April 1918. While initially successful, the offensive ran out of steam by June and

¹⁶⁵ "Letter from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 13 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 295-296

¹⁶⁶ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 20 Apr 1918" "Letter from the State Council, 22 Apr 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 342, 347

¹⁶⁷ "Meeting between Foreign Ministry Secretary Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 22 Apr 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 347

¹⁶⁸ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 30 Mar 1918" "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 20 Apr 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 320-321, 342

¹⁶⁹ "Meeting between Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang, Kudashev, Horvath and Kolchak, 29 Apr 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 356-357; "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 4 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 184-185; "Report from Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 257-258

ended in an ignominious retreat back to China. The overseas Chinese he had recruited were routed:

Semenov has twice recruited several thousand Chinese in Dauria, led by Zhang Zhanyuan, but now that Semenov is weak, all of them lack pay and rations. Zhang has also taken the opportunity to leave for Harbin. Hearing that Zhang has left on his own, all the Chinese workers have retreated from the front and are awaiting their pay and rations.¹⁷⁰

The Manchurian governors feared that the fleeing soldiers were “desperadoes” who would then disperse through the countryside and wreak havoc.¹⁷¹ These unruly elements placed the border in imminent danger and the Chinese were obliged to negotiate with the advancing Reds.¹⁷² Unlike in January, moreover, the Chinese determined that there would be no leniency towards Semenov. He would be allowed into Chinese territory only if his troops were disarmed, by force if necessary.

The Whites were not just stubborn and duplicitous. Their association with the Japanese also tainted them from the outset. Telegram after telegram confirmed the suspicion that the Whites were the stalking horses of Japan. Already in June, before the Allies had decided on military intervention, Japanese troops were in Manzhouli aiding Semenov. Bao reported that these soldiers, dressed in Russian uniforms, were giving out Japanese flags to the cossacks and relief supplies to refugees. This was an affront to China:

¹⁷⁰ “Letter from the State Council, 22 Jun 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 236

¹⁷¹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 23 Jun 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 238

¹⁷² “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 15 Jun 1918” “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 2 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 221-222, 349-350

The presence of Japanese flags everywhere is like a guest taking over the house. The Japanese have been told to respect Chinese sovereignty... Has China been informed or consulted over this?¹⁷³

The Japanese ambassador disclaimed all knowledge of this, but Chinese digests of the Japanese newspapers in Changchun revealed that 600 volunteers had left for Manzhouli.¹⁷⁴ Worse still, Semenov's and Kalmykov's Japanese advisors interfered with border defence plans, urging their warlord clients to go on the offensive and disregard Chinese caution. Chinese attempts to disarm Semenov's troops at the border were repeatedly frustrated by his Japanese officers.¹⁷⁵ Fighting would have broken out between his cossack troops and the Chinese border garrison at Manzhouli had the Czech mutiny and Allied forces not intervened to save him.¹⁷⁶ The Reds, on the other hand, kept to their agreement with the Chinese and Bao was able to report that "from the beginning, they have not set one foot into the border".¹⁷⁷

Not only was this proof positive of growing Japanese interference, the presence of Mongol troops among the Whites was also troubling. It raised the possibility that the Russians might encourage Mongol nationalism and detach Outer Mongolia from the Chinese "fatherland". Bao, in particular, condemned White attempts to recruit

¹⁷³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 30 Jun 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 251-252

¹⁷⁴ "Meeting between Foreign Ministry secretary Shi Lüben and Japanese ambassador Hayashi, 5 Jul 1918" "Letter from Changchun negotiator Tao Bin, 5 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 260-262, 262

¹⁷⁵ "Letter from Canlu, 5 Jul 1918" "Letter from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 13 Jul 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 29 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 258-260, 296-297, 342-343

¹⁷⁶ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 16 Jun 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 23 Jun 1918" "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 19 Jun 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 222, 232, 238

¹⁷⁷ "Telegram from the Foreign Ministry to Wellington Koo, 5 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 238; "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 5 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 354

Mongols as a “insidious and crafty plot that cannot go unhindered”.¹⁷⁸ And since Semenov *et al* were seen as Japanese clients, their gains in Mongolia would ultimately benefit the Japanese.

Already by summer 1918, therefore, the Chinese made sense of the Russian Civil War in nationalist terms. Initially, when the Reds threatened the status of the overseas Chinese, the community and its officials decried them in nationalist language. This rhetoric changed as the Reds began to show a willingness to accommodate both China’s security requests as well as broader issues of national prestige. Compromise took place on many key fronts, including the permits issue, and the Reds kept to their pledge not to enter Chinese territory. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese stance towards the Reds softened.

The Whites, however, were a breed apart. Their refusal to budge on the recruitment policy directly harmed overseas Chinese workers. Semenov’s ambitious forays against the Reds gravely threatened the Chinese border, despite top-level negotiations aimed at restraining him. And, unlike the Reds, the Whites carried the stink of foreign imperialism. They embodied Russian domination over China and Mongolia, as well as Japan’s imperial ambitions. This fundamentally coloured the Chinese assessment of Red and White. Wei, who as Irkutsk consul had ample experience of Red abuses, reflected in June 1918:

The Reds are very powerful and their actions are not entirely lawful. But I recall that during the autocratic era of the past, Russia did not treat us as an equal either, for example issuing an ultimatum when we freely reclaimed Ili, or sending troops to force the government to change the officials in Heilongjiang when Russian students were detained there. Even during the

¹⁷⁸ “Letter from the State Council, 7 Feb 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 70

Republican era, when we did not want Chinese workers to go abroad because they were mistreated by the Russians, the Russian foreign ministry telegraphed to say that nobody would be permitted to go to Russia from then on. Such actions have left painful memories... If the Whites are defeated, China cannot take them in. The Irkutsk authorities should be informed of this so that Chinese property can be returned, and as a sign of friendship.¹⁷⁹

Wei's note is replete with instances of China's "humiliation" at Russian hands, which he came to associate with the Whites. Even before the excesses of the *atamanshchina*, therefore, the Whites were already linked to the imperialist arrogance of the tsarist regime. The Reds had not yet been tarred with the same brush. The discourse of nationalism and fear of imperial encroachment had already hardened Chinese attitudes by summer 1918 - and the Whites had not even tasted power yet.

Act Three: White nightmare, August 1918 to January 1920

The mutiny of the Czech Legion in late May 1918 and the arrival of Allied troops in August was the shot in the arm that the Whites needed. Well-trained, highly disciplined and occupying strategic points on the Trans-Siberian line, the Czechs were able to eject the Reds with a speed and efficiency that the Whites had not been able to muster. It gave the Allies the pretext they needed to agree to intervention. Beijing, ever anxious to gain diplomatic approval, contributed 4,000 troops to the Allied effort. These were stationed mostly in Vladivostok and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Wei's message clearly makes reference to the Chinese reconquest of Ili and Russia's objections to it. The Heilongjiang incident refers to an altercation in June 1913, in which the Russian consul in that province was fired at and the Chinese detained two Russian students in response. "Letter from Meng Enyuan, 15 Jun 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 424-425; Quested, *Sino-Russian Relations*, p 87; Quested, "Matey" *Imperialists?*, pp 241-242

¹⁸⁰ "Letter from the State Council, 22 Feb 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 471

Red power was swept away in less than two months. Omsk was taken by the Czechs in June 1918. By the end of that month, the Provisional Siberian Government established itself in the city. The Reds lost Vladivostok on 29 June, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk on 5 July and Irkutsk on 12 July. Kalmykov advanced into Russia from his stronghold in Grodekovo in July. By late August Semenov too was on the offensive, having avoided a retreat into China by the skin of his teeth. In September, Chita, Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk were taken by Allied, Czech and White forces.¹⁸¹ Where the Reds were driven out, White leaders took their place. Semenov established himself in Chita, Kalmykov in Khabarovsk. Horvath decamped from Harbin to Vladivostok, hoping to form a government there, but was eventually replaced by Rozanov. In Omsk, political instability resulted in a coup in November that placed Kolchak in the position of Supreme Ruler. Despite Kolchak's best attempts at forming a stable government, however, his authority could not extend to the Far East. There, Semenov, Kalmykov and other White *atamans* maintained themselves on plunder, violence and Japanese aid.¹⁸²

Pereira, Smele, Bisher and Sunderland have written extensively about the lawlessness that accompanied the *atamanshchina*. The cossack warlords' notions of governance was purely predatory, with minimal concern for institution-building or constructive policy. However, little has been said about the impact of cossack warlordism on the overseas Chinese. Demographically speaking, this community was the perfect target. Chinese merchants, in particular, were tempting prey for the

¹⁸¹ Bisher, *White Terror*, pp 77, 81, 90, 97, 100, 102-103. "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 6 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 264-265

¹⁸² Bisher, *White Terror*, p 105; Pereira, *White Siberia*, pp 55-56; Smele, *Civil War in Siberia*, p 605

cossack warlords because of their wealth. Some notion of the volume of Chinese trade still being conducted in the midst of the Civil War can be seen in a Vladivostok chamber of commerce report, which deals with several shipments held up by Harbin customs in the first few months of 1918. Despite the political disorder and currency fluctuations, a partial list still reads:

From the Heng Chang Zhan company - 25 wagonloads of soybean, one wagonload of lard;
 From the Yong Shun Cheng company - 500 buckets of lard, 200 cases of chickens, 50 bags of frozen chicken;
 From the Heng Long De company - 70 wagonloads of soybean cake and 30 wagonloads of soybean;
 From the De Yi Cheng company - 30 wagonloads of soybean cake;
 From the Yong Zeng Cheng company - 2 wagonloads of soybean, 1 wagonload of peas, 5 wagonloads of soybean cake, 5 wagonloads of millet, 1 wagonload of sunflower seeds;
 From the Tong Fa Xing company - 1,500 pigs, 400 bags of cow and sheep innards;
 From the Zeng Xing Long company - 10,000 cloth bags of wheat.¹⁸³

In Blagoveshchensk, the once-prosperous city had been reduced to desolation by war, but Chinese and Japanese goods had taken the place of Russian ones. There were still 5,000 Chinese merchants running 700 businesses in the city, with a wealth valued at more than 2 million yuan. To the east of the city more than 10,000 Chinese workers were still employed in the gold mines.¹⁸⁴ In Omsk, Chinese merchants were

¹⁸³ Soybean cake is used in animal feed. Ironically, some of these firms were subsequently robbed by Semenov's troops. "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 6 Jun 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 411-414. For a list of business that had fallen victim to Semenov, see "Letter from Liu Jingren, 14 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 232-236

¹⁸⁴ "Letter from the Revenue and Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918" "Report from Foreign Ministry department head Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 364, 376

doing a roaring business importing goods from Vladivostok and Harbin at 300% profit.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, as a transient community, the overseas Chinese were highly dependent on railway and river networks for travel and trade. The Manzhouli chamber of commerce, located on the Sino-Russian border, reported that countless Chinese workers and merchants passed through the station taking their earnings with them back to their home villages.¹⁸⁶ And it was precisely the critical junction of the Trans-Siberian and China Eastern railways that was controlled by Semenov in Chita, while Kalmykov held sway over the strategic waterway at Khabarovsk.

For warlords who thrived on extortion, therefore, the Chinese were a cash cow. This time, however, the robbery was not conducted in the name of equality - it was outright theft. It was arbitrary, conducted by force of arms and leaving little room for recourse or negotiation. Already in January 1918, Semenov had provided a taste of things to come by stealing 30,000 yuan from Chinese merchants in Adrianovka.¹⁸⁷ Now that the warlords were in power, their actions assumed a completely new dimension. They hit the Chinese where it hurt most: on the critical transport arteries through which trade and manpower flowed. In August 1918, Foreign Ministry department chief Wu reported that a group of armed Whites had seized a ship belonging to the Khabarovsk Overseas Chinese Association, taking 20 Chinese

¹⁸⁵ "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 5 May 1919" "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 30 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 216-217, 360-361

¹⁸⁶ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 4 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 1-3

¹⁸⁷ "Letter from State Council copying letter from Bao Guiqing, 28 Feb 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 271

hostage.¹⁸⁸ The Manzhouli chamber of commerce wrote that, beginning in November, Chinese passing through various stations on the Trans-Siberian were forced off their trains, corralled into buildings and made to open their bags. They were even strip-searched. If they were found to be carrying any money, they were forced to hand it over at gunpoint. Sometimes they were given useless notes in exchange.

From Irkutsk to Manzhouli, this abuse happens three to four times, each time lasting four to five hours. No matter how many Russians or Japanese there are on board, they are unmolested. Clearly they are abusing the overseas Chinese... The rubles which our people have earned through their hard work and thrift is whittled down. In severe cases their coffers are completely emptied, in others they are left with worthless paper. Not only will they have no money left for their families, they may not be able to avoid starvation themselves.¹⁸⁹

Similar complaints came from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association.¹⁹⁰

On the basis of such reports, Heilongjiang warlord Bao asked the Foreign Ministry to issue a protest to Kudashev. The latter replied rather lamely, asking for more information.¹⁹¹ At any rate Kudashev, ensconced in Beijing, could hardly have hoped to influence Semenov and the robberies continued unabated. By the end of January there were more than twenty incidents a week of Chinese being robbed on the railway¹⁹² and goods worth millions of rubles were stolen by the wagonload off the

¹⁸⁸ "Letter from Wu Peiguang, 14 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 358-359

¹⁸⁹ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 4 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 2

¹⁹⁰ "Letter to the State Council, 19 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 62

¹⁹¹ "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Kudashev, 20 Nov 1918" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 12 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 574-575, 588

¹⁹² "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 1 Feb 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 464-465; "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 30 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 29-30

trains.¹⁹³ A particularly virulent spate of thefts in Chita station, involving cloth bound for Irkutsk, took place in May 1919. In January 1920 a shipment of 54 wagonloads of flour en route to the same destination was confiscated by Semenov.¹⁹⁴ Chinese officials witnessed such incidents themselves:

In the seven days that the attache [from Heilongjiang] was in Chita, more than twenty Chinese shops were robbed. Yesterday, on the way back from Chita, he witnessed en route the pitiful sight of Chinese merchants being searched and robbed by Russian soldiers. It made his hair stand. He went forward to stop this, using his authority as a Chinese official, but this was not effective.¹⁹⁵

The Whites' methods extended beyond mere railway heists. Merchants on the streets of Chita and Dauria were robbed of money, watches, gold nuggets, cloth, tobacco, sugar, stockings, grain, even sausages. Their personal effects, including silver bracelets, overcoats, fur hats and cotton blankets were all fair game. Vegetable farmers were relieved of their rifles, horses, boots, clothes and small change.¹⁹⁶

Just as officials feared, the Whites' unrelenting recruitment of overseas Chinese only added to the banditry. In April 1919, consul Shao in Vladivostok passed on a report from the East Siberian Overseas Chinese Association that Semenov was still arming many Chinese in Manzhouli and Chita:

¹⁹³ "Letter from the State Council, 17 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 392

¹⁹⁴ "Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Jan 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 678-680; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 15 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 352-369

¹⁹⁵ "Letter from the Army Ministry, 6 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 41

¹⁹⁶ Some of the robberies listed had also been committed by the Reds. "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 18 Mar 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 97-106; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 15 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 352-369

Most of them are itinerant bandits, making use of their power to rob. They are cruel to their own brethren and cause pain to the merchants and workers. Please negotiate with Semenov to disperse them and so that he will not recruit any more.¹⁹⁷

Nothing came of the protest and Semenov continued to woo unemployed overseas Chinese. In the disorderly atmosphere, they promptly turned on their compatriots.¹⁹⁸

Little wonder that already in February 1919 the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association called White Siberia "a bandit's world".¹⁹⁹

The two most notorious cases of theft took place in Dauria and displayed all the classic qualities of Semenov's handiwork. The first instance involved 70 Chinese merchants who were travelling from Irkutsk to Vladivostok in December 1918. Most of them were from Vladivostok, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, Khabarovsk, Irkutsk, Manzhouli or Harbin, and carried permits issued by consul Wei in Irkutsk. When they reached Dauria on 1 January 1919, they were forced off the train by Russian and Mongol officers and gang-pressed into the barracks. Their permits were torn up and they were relieved of some 6 million rubles. One of the merchants escaped to report this.²⁰⁰ Because of the size of the sum involved, both the Beijing and Manchurian authorities were electrified. The Foreign Ministry immediately began negotiations with

¹⁹⁷ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Apr 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 497

¹⁹⁸ "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 19 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 395-396

¹⁹⁹ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 36

²⁰⁰ Initial reports from the merchants claimed that 70 merchants were involved and 10 million rubles stolen. The figure was later revised downwards upon detailed investigation. "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 9 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 11 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 22 Jan 1919" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 30 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 8, 8-9, 10, 17-18, 29-33, 46-47

Kudashev for the return of the funds. Bao, however, took a dim view of these diplomatic efforts. He argued that Kudashev no longer had any authority in Siberia. Instead he instructed the commander at Manzhouli, Che Qingyun, to begin negotiations with Semenov on the spot. Bao also advocated the sending of troops into Russia, and sent his own attache to investigate.²⁰¹ Che's intervention got the merchants released,²⁰² and when the attache went to pick them up he described the scene:

The merchants were detained in the military prison together with two Czech soldiers, all in one building. They were extremely cold and hungry, having been given only cold water and black bread. The circumstances of abuse were extremely cruel.²⁰³

Retrieving the money, however, proved more difficult. The Whites claimed that the size of the sum exceeded currency export regulations. Moreover, the money was hidden in teapots, pillows, shoes, false-bottomed suitcases and so on, which was suspicious, to say the least. In fact someone had reported that the Chinese were transporting funds for the Reds.²⁰⁴ The Chinese had their own counterarguments. They said, perhaps quite reasonably, that it made sense to hide valuables when transporting them. Given the absence of a recognised Russian government, currency laws enacted by the previous regime might not be valid. Besides, if this was a

²⁰¹ "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to the War Participation Bureau, 5 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 9 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 11 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 4-5, 8, 10-11

²⁰² "Letter from the General Staff, 17 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 15

²⁰³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 23 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 19

²⁰⁴ "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to the War Participation Bureau, 5 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 13 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 23 Jan 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 24 Jan 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 4-5, 11-12, 18-19, 21

currency export matter, why was the confiscation carried out by soldiers and not by the Russian customs? Moreover one of the merchants, who was also carrying a large sum, had his money returned when he proved that he was a partner in a Japanese firm.²⁰⁵

What ensued was a diplomatic farce. Semenov initially agreed to return the funds, but then claimed to have given them to the Russian consul in Harbin.²⁰⁶ Then he changed his tune and said that although he was still in possession of the funds, the matter had been handed over to the Chita courts and the Chinese would have to wait for a verdict. In order to prove that they were not in league with the Reds, the merchants were asked to provide documentation for these funds. This caused an uproar in the Vladivostok and Khabarovsk chambers of commerce.²⁰⁷ Beijing also lost patience. Claiming pressure from the chambers of commerce, the government withheld its Boxer Indemnity payments to Russia, which Kudashev used to fund White activities. By then even the Foreign Ministry was seriously questioning Kudashev's ability to represent anyone.²⁰⁸ The matter went as far as the National

²⁰⁵ "Letter from the General Staff, 17 Jan 1919" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Kudashev, 29 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 13 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 15, 28, 382

²⁰⁶ "Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 24 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 25 Jan 1919" "Letter to Kudashev, 18 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 22, 23, 51

²⁰⁷ "Foreign Ministry memorandum, 3 Mar 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 25 Mar 1919" "Telegram from the Vladivostok and Khabarovsk chambers of commerce, 22 Mar 1919" "Letter from Fu Jiang, 10 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 76, 113-114, 117, 143-144

²⁰⁸ Among other things, Kudashev's inability to deal with this matter led the Chinese to reject his credentials in September 1920. "Foreign Ministry memorandum, 3 Mar 1919" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Kudashev, 11 Jun 1919" "Telegram from the Foreign Ministry to Bao Guiqing, 4 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Liu Jingren and Fan Qiguang, 5 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 76, 319, 368, 370-372. On Kudashev's credentials, see "Letter to the president, 23 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 39 (tingzhi E shiling daiyu)

Assembly, where parliamentarians petitioned the Ministry regarding compensation from Russia.²⁰⁹

Eventually the Kolchak government in Omsk became involved in the fracas. It agreed to pick up the tab for Semenov if the Chinese could furnish proof that the merchants were not indeed Red agents.²¹⁰ The matter was still being discussed when the second incident occurred. Over three days in early June 1919, Semenov took another 10 million rubles from Chinese merchants in Manzhouli. The money had come from trade in Omsk and Irkutsk. The merchants carried permits for most of the sum, but Semenov again accused them of violating currency regulations and confiscated the lot.²¹¹ Commander Che, who as before was in charge of preliminary negotiations, reported that this was only a pretext. Semenov's troops had not been paid for four months and his officers were in dire need of money.²¹²

The negotiating team's journey to Semenov's headquarters in Chita was itself a tragicomedy:

When we reached Dauria, we saw Russian officials taking 2 million rubles from a Chinese merchant. Seeing this, I was

²⁰⁹ "Letter from the State Council, 31 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 283-284

²¹⁰ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 6 Jun 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 20 Jun 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 25 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 307-308, 334, 342

²¹¹ Initial reports inflated the sum to 20 million. "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Fu Jiang, 10 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to Kudashev, 12 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 14 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 15 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 21 Aug 1918" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 27 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 375, 375, 381, 383-384, 384, 461, 470

²¹² "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 21 Jul 1919" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 22 Jul 1919" "Letter from the State Council copying a General Staff report, 28 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 397-398, 400, 418-419

enraged and spoke to the Russian official, demanding that he return the money or we would resort to arms. The Russians took fright and returned the money... The confiscations were carried out by use of force, without rhyme or reason. Hence negotiating rationally is fruitless.²¹³

The news was greeted with howls of protest not only from the overseas merchants, but throughout China as well. The Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce called for determined action. They appealed to nationalist sentiment by offering to use the confiscated sums to buy back the China Eastern Railway from Russia:

From now on national prestige and our citizens' lives are even more at stake. China must show other countries that it does not neglect its overseas citizens.²¹⁴

When Omsk compensated for the first confiscation, the merchants refused, on principle, to accept it.²¹⁵ In Manzhouli, the chamber of commerce resolved that Chinese merchants in Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk and elsewhere should stop selling to Russians or transporting Russian goods.²¹⁶ Finally, the Chita consul managed to get Semenov to agree to return the funds. Once again, however, Semenov's promise proved hollow.²¹⁷ It was only after the Japanese intervened that

²¹³ "Letter from the State Council copying a General Staff report, 28 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 418-419

²¹⁴ The quote comes from "Telegram from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 24 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 412. See also "Telegram from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 25 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 415

²¹⁵ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 15 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 25 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 445, 468

²¹⁶ "Letter from the State Council copying a General Staff report, 28 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 418-419

²¹⁷ "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 29 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 13 Aug 1918" "Letter from the State Council, 21 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 420, 443, 461

7 million rubles were eventually returned. The remaining 2 million was paid out in April 1920 in worthless currency.²¹⁸

The White nightmare included murder and arbitrary behaviour. When Chinese farmers were killed in Sretensk, a representative from the Overseas Chinese Association lodged a report with the Whites. He was promptly forced to watch over the bodies and imprisoned for three days when he protested against this treatment.²¹⁹ In March 1919, a group of Japanese and White troops entered the town of Ivanovo in the Amur region, arresting many Russians and Chinese and setting fire to two Chinese general stores.²²⁰ Then, in April, when the Chita Overseas Chinese Association tried to intervene in the robbery and kidnappings conducted by Semenov's Chinese recruits, the Association's members were accused of being Reds. Its leaders were arrested, beaten up, prevented from communicating with anyone and sentenced to be shot. Only the intervention of the Japanese prevented them from being summarily executed. Another 50 Chinese workers had already been sentenced to death on the same false accusation. On reading the Association's report, consul Shao wrote, "my hair stood on end".²²¹

²¹⁸ Omsk's capitulation was not well received by the Chinese merchants. The aftermath of the Dauria confiscation is examined further in Chapter Two. "Letter from the State Council, 21 Aug 1919" "Letter from the State Council, 1 Sept 1919" "Letter from Guan Shangping, 3 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 29 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 461, 479-480, 480-481, 551; "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 15 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 213

²¹⁹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 565-566

²²⁰ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 22 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 187-188

²²¹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Apr 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 497; "Telegram from Liu Jingren, Shao Hengjun and Lin Jianzhang, 1 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 207-208

Similar arrests and accusations were taking place in Blagoveshchensk, where “much injustice” had taken place. On one occasion, more than 100 Chinese workers in the nearby gold mines were murdered.²²² Worse still, White troops sometimes entered Chinese territory, killing the residents there.²²³ One of the more serious incursions took place in May 1919, when a group of cossacks under Kalmykov crossed the Ussuri border into Dongning county on the pretext of an anti-bandit raid. Eleven farmers were killed and two wounded, and several houses were burned.²²⁴ All in all, the Chinese authorities estimated that Semenov had killed 5,000 Chinese in 1919.²²⁵

The Whites added insult to injury by introducing policies that harked back to tsarist unfairness. A poll tax was introduced at 40 kopeks for Russians, 1 ruble for British, American, French and Japanese, and 4 rubles for Chinese.²²⁶ In March 1919, P.P Ivanov-Rinov - White commander at Vladivostok and another of the cossack warlords - announced that all Russian ships bought by the Chinese would have to be

²²² “Letter from Sun Liechen, 29 Nov 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 611; “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 4 Jul 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 532

²²³ “Letter from Kudashev, 16 May 1919” “Letter to Kudashev, 20 May 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 249, 260-261

²²⁴ “Letter from the Jilin governor’s office, 3 Jun 1919” “Telegram from the Jilin military governor, 9 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 290-292, 313-314; “Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 18 May 1919” R. Deng, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, *Minguo liunian zhi banian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960), p 508

²²⁵ “Letter from the CER garrison, 7 Apr 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 189

²²⁶ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Nov 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 565-566

reclaimed by the beginning of April, or be confiscated outright. This was directly related to a tsarist-era law forbidding the sale of ships to Chinese.²²⁷

In Blagoveshchensk, not only were the river-crossing permits retained, the fees were also increased fivefold. Residence permits went up from 16 yuan to 46 yuan. When crossing the Amur, the Chinese were subject to humiliating strip-searches, petty fines and arbitrary imprisonment. On leaving, they were not allowed to take more than 500 rubles with them. These rules were not applied to other foreigners.²²⁸ Although the permit fees were eventually reduced after negotiations, they were still significantly higher than before.²²⁹ Finally, in October, a Chinese naval contingent sailing up the Sungari from Nikolaevsk to Khabarovsk was fired upon by Kalmykov's troops.²³⁰

To the Chinese, all this only confirmed the Whites' associations with tsarist excesses.

In June 1919, Li Jia'ao - now Chinese representative with the Allied mission in Vladivostok - railed against Semenov:

He has committed many robberies and senselessly harmed many people. His actions are those of a thief. His victims have made accusations against him many times, but nobody has looked into it, time and again negotiations are fruitless... If

²²⁷ The Chinese warships issue is discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 457-458

²²⁸ "Letter to the State Council, 19 Feb 1919" "Letter from Ji Jing, 22 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 61-62, 504-505; "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Jun 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 510-511

²²⁹ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' general chambers of commerce [*sic*], 23 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 191-192

²³⁰ "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 30 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 30 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 6 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 743, 743 793-794

Semenov comes into Chinese territory again he will be arrested and given a taste of his own medicine.²³¹

National prestige and humiliation were frequently invoked. Fu Yangxian, a Foreign Ministry official, was sent to investigate conditions in Vladivostok in August 1918. After extensive interviews with merchants and the chamber of commerce, Fu wrote that although Horvath's government was relatively moderate, the overseas Chinese had come to hate the Whites as a whole: "They are of the same stripe as Gondatti and do their utmost to insult overseas Chinese. It would be best to take precautions to prevent the Chinese from being exploited." Fu acknowledged that the Reds had tried to expel Chinese workers in Vladivostok, but still considered that they were a step up from the Whites.²³²

Manzhouli commander Che was even less equivocal. In a message to Bao, he wrote:

Although the Reds were overbearing, they were still able to respect other countries' rights and thankfully an invasion did not occur. Because of this, the overseas merchants were also at peace. Since the Reds have gone west and the Whites have come east, our overseas citizens have again fallen into danger. The Reds' actions were excessive, but they still had a conscience. Now the Whites are even worse and act like bandits.²³³

Finally, at a nationwide chamber of commerce meeting in September 1919, the Manzhouli representative delivered a report on the hardships of the overseas

²³¹ "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 20 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 333-334

²³² "Vladivostok report from commissioner Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 257-258

²³³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 565

Chinese, including the confiscations in Dauria and the shooting of those accused of being Reds. Again, it demonstrated the Whites' links to Russian imperialism:

The leaders of the Omsk government are mostly Great Russian bureaucrats who not only see Chinese merchants as nothing, but also treat our Chinese government with arrogance. They cannot get rid of their old habit of belittling China. And although the Reds are a collection of low types and their ideology is not entirely correct, they have not acted brutally towards their own people or to others.²³⁴

The final straw was the Whites' association with the Japanese. A new word was applied to the Whites: *chang*, a term from Chinese folklore referring to the ghost of someone devoured by a tiger. The ghost returns to lure more victims to the tiger's lair. In this case, the Whites were the ghosts, who had already sold themselves to the Japanese - and the Japanese were most certainly the tigers. This term was not used with the Reds. Chinese reports were rife with details of the Whites' collusion with the Japanese and Japan's overweening ambition. Fu reported that Horvath had Japanese military advisers and aid, while Kalmykov's supplies and ammunition were mostly supplied by Japan. Bao saw the Whites as expanding Japanese power as far as Irkutsk, causing resentment among the Russians themselves. Jilin governor Guo Zongxi wrote that Semenov alone courted the Japanese; the other Allies had instead thrown their weight behind Kolchak.²³⁵ Consul Shao described the Whites' combination of imperialism and brutality most plainly:

Japan is in league with Semenov, Rozanov and Kalmykov, plotting every day in secret. The three of them are Japan's ghosts [*chang*], seeing us, the Americans and the Czechs as enemies... Rozanov has incurred popular hatred and fears his

²³⁴ "Letter from Sun Liechen, 11 Nov 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 571

²³⁵ "Vladivostok report from Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 257-258; "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 15 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 592-593

power will not last long. As for Semenov and Kalmykov, their savagery knows no limits.²³⁶

The overseas Chinese organisations also associated the Whites with the Japanese.

In June 1919, the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association wrote:

The Russians are using the strength of a third country to treat the overseas Chinese more harshly than before... The number of Chinese living in Russia has not decreased, many new people come to seek a living every day. However their property is dealt with arbitrarily and their lives are wilfully abused.

The appeal made clear that the “third country” was indeed Japan, and that troops should be sent to protect Chinese residents.²³⁷ The Amur Oblast' Association's chairman, Song Yuntong, wrote to the president personally, saying that the Japanese had set up a consulate and banks in Blagoveshchensk, threatening Chinese economic interests. China should send troops not just because it would protect Chinese merchants, but also because it would foster Chinese trade.²³⁸

Semenov's continued intimacy with the Mongols compounded worries about Japanese encroachment.²³⁹ In December 1918, the Chinese attache in Kunlun reported that Semenov was still recruiting Mongols and that the Japanese were using

²³⁶ At the time, the Allies had requested that Rozanov be removed from his post in Vladivostok due to his arbitrary behaviour, which then led to armed conflict between Rozanov and the Czechs. “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 30 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 743

²³⁷ “Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Jun 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 510-511

²³⁸ The nationalist rhetoric of the overseas Chinese organisations are covered in further detail in chapter 2. “Letter from the State Council, 18 Jun 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 513

²³⁹ “Letter to the ambassador in Japan, 24 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 341

him to dominate eastern Siberia, arousing the hatred of the Russians.²⁴⁰ That same month, Bao passed on a rumour that Semenov was planning to hand over the Baikal area to the Japanese. Chita and Manzhouli would be given to the Mongols.²⁴¹ In Vladivostok, consul Shao reiterated that Semenov had many Mongols under his command and, if he could not achieve his goals in Russia, he would incite the Mongols to seek independence.²⁴² Most worrying was Semenov's association with Sheng Fu, a Mongol leader advocating independence of the Barga region. Barga, in fact, had been the subject of a territorial dispute between China and Russia as recently as 1917.²⁴³ Semenov's Mongol escapades therefore placed him on a collision course with China's own territorial claims.

Hence the Whites in power succeeded in pouring salt in all of China's wounds. On one level, the *atamanshchina* in the Russian Far East brought hitherto unknown levels of violence to the overseas Chinese. But this was regarded as more than a humanitarian issue. Overseas Chinese groups and consuls perceived the Whites as a treat to the nation, not just its overseas citizens. The Whites' dependence on Japanese aid and Semenov's involvement with the Mongols only confirmed this. Not only were the lives and property of the overseas Chinese in danger - the very borders of the country were in peril.

²⁴⁰ "Telegram from Kunlun attache Chen Yi, 7 Dec 1918" "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 15 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 586, 592-593

²⁴¹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 26 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 612

²⁴² "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 27 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 69

²⁴³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 18 Dec 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 28 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 595, 615; "Letter from the Army Ministry, 14 Mar 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 93

By the end of 1919, therefore, the Chinese had thoroughly turned against the Whites. In June 1919, Bao suggested deploying a Chinese force into Russia separate from the Allies, due to “the great harm that has been caused to the Chinese overseas”. He had not advocated this when the Reds were in power.²⁴⁴ A military plan was drawn up in consultation with Manchurian potentate Zhang Zuolin, calling for almost 3,000 troops to be stationed in various key points from Dauria to Irkutsk. As always, this was framed in nationalist terms, to “ease the troubles of the overseas Chinese and increase national power. If we use the protection of Chinese merchants to justify sending troops, other countries will have no reason to object”. The State Council approved and blessed the enterprise with 250,000 yuan. However, lack of funds and the more pressing demands of the civil war in China scuppered the plan.²⁴⁵

Act Four: China bites back, January 1920 to December 1920

The situation only worsened as the White movement crumbled in Siberia. Kolchak had gone on the offensive in March 1919, his armies reaching their high water-mark by April. But these victories were built on feet of clay. By then, White misrule had succeeded in alienating the Russian population as a whole. Economic mismanagement created hyperinflation that further impoverished the people and threatened the cities with starvation. Brutal “punitive detachments”, aimed at snuffing out suspected Reds, only succeeded in triggering a vigorous partisan movement. White conscripts deserted in droves. In the Far East, the cossack warlords took advantage of their control over the railways to withhold vital supplies and manpower from the central government in Omsk. Moreover, Allied disillusionment with the White

²⁴⁴ “Letter from Bao Guiqing, 26 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 343-345

²⁴⁵ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 1 Feb 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 464-465. On the funding issue, see “Letter from Bao Guiqing, 26 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 344

regime prompted a gradual withdrawal. Kolchak's initial assault therefore proved abortive and, by June 1919, the front collapsed. Now it was the Reds who galloped forward. They captured Perm and Cheliabinsk in July. By November Omsk itself had fallen, while Krasnoiarsk and Irkutsk followed in December. In January 1920 the Americans and Czechs announced their total withdrawal and the Whites were ejected from Nikolaevsk, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Vladivostok. Blagoveshchensk followed in February.²⁴⁶

Only Semenov was able to hold out, for the time being, in Chita. But Semenov's Japanese backers had other ideas. The Siberian Intervention had proven deeply unpopular domestically and exhausted much of Japan's finances.²⁴⁷ Beginning in February 1920, therefore, Japanese troops began retreating eastwards, vacating first the Amur region and then announcing their official withdrawal in April.²⁴⁸ And although the Japanese eventually re-occupied part of the Maritime Province in mid-April, they chose to control it directly, rather than act via their now-discredited

²⁴⁶ The Chinese authorities were fairly up to date on the deteriorating White front and began their own withdrawal in May 1920. On the fall of Omsk, see "Telegram from Ji Jing, 9 Jan 1920", "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920". On Irkutsk, see "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 13 Jan 1920", "Letter from Canlu, 13 Jan 1920", "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau conveying a telegram from Harbin, 23 Jan 1920", "Telegram from Ji Jing, 26 Jan 1920". On Vladivostok and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, see "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 26 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Dong Shi'en, 28 Jan 1920", "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 29 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 1 Feb 1920". On Blagoveshchensk, see "Telegram from Ji Jing, 5 Feb 1920", "Telegram from Ji Jing, 7 Feb 1920". On US withdrawal, see "Telegram from Lin Jianzhang and Li Jia'ao, 10 Jan 1920". On the Czechs, see "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 25 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 11 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Lin Jianzhang, 26 Aug 1920". On the withdrawal of Chinese troops, see "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 10 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 9-10, 54-56; pp 14, 14-15 31, 38; pp 38-39, 42, 42, 45-46, 51; pp 65, 67-68; p 11; pp 36-37, 203-204, 635; p 294

²⁴⁷ "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 15 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 56-59, 82-83

²⁴⁸ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 22 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 5 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 6 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 4 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 94, 122, 123, 177

cossack clients.²⁴⁹ The formation of the buffer Far Eastern Republic in May 1920 also brought the temperature down and opened the door to peace talks between the Reds and the Japanese. In July, the Japanese reached an agreement with the Republic and resolved to leave Zabaikal'e, abandoning Semenov in Chita. Both Chita and Manzhouli were completely vacated in August, leaving behind only a few diehard Japanese officers.²⁵⁰ This was followed by a phased withdrawal from the Maritime Province, beginning in September 1920.²⁵¹

When the Japanese went, Semenov followed. In July and August he began moving his forces to Dauria and Manzhouli, but he was a spent force.²⁵² By October 1920 his administration in Manzhouli, on the Sino-Russian border, was dismantled under Chinese supervision. Semenov's troops were routed in early November as the Reds moved in.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ These territories included Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Nikolaevsk. "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 7 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 7 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 8 Apr 1920" "Letter from the State Council conveying a telegram from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 10 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Apr 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 20 Apr 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 1 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 190-191, 191, 192, 201-202, 211-212, 242-243, 369

²⁵⁰ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 14 Jul 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau copying a telegram from Zhang Tianyi, 15 Jul 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 6 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 14 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 19 Aug 1920" "Telegram from the Harbin CER office, 28 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 519-520, 521, 577-578, 605, 621, 721

²⁵¹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 29 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 21 Oct 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 6 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 686-687, 714, 730

²⁵² "Letter from Song Xiaolian, 6 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Song Xiaolian, 15 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 16 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 24 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Song Xiaolian, 30 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 575-576, 607, 608, 629-630, 643-644

²⁵³ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 17 Oct 1920" "Letter from the Heilongjiang military governor's office, 6 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 697, 730-731

Feeling the cold breath of defeat, the atamans attempted to bleed what they could out of their dwindling fiefdoms. The Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association wrote:

Russian officials have ordered the confiscation of goods and impose heavy taxes by force. Money in banks cannot be taken out and robberies, murders, deception and treachery are growing ever day. The Chinese in Russia cannot survive and plan to return home, but they have wealth and property and Russian officials forbid us taking them out of the border... They are arrogant and unreasonable, like bandits.²⁵⁴

Irkutsk entered lockdown and the issuing of residence permits was abruptly halted. The Chinese living there were threatened with expulsion, their houses requisitioned for troops and refugees, their goods confiscated and sold.²⁵⁵ As food supplies in Khabarovsk reached critical levels, Kalmykov resolved to requisition food from the 10,000 Chinese merchants there by force. The matter was only resolved after the Chinese commander and the chamber of commerce promised to sell their surplus food cheaply - an outcome that Chinese officials considered surprising, given Kalmykov's temperament.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the ataman was soon back in form. During his escape from Khabarovsk in March 1920, he stole a horse and sledge from a Chinese merchant and killed the drivers.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Dec 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 663

²⁵⁵ "Telegram from Wei Bo, 4 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Wei Bo, 8 Nov 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 517, 568

²⁵⁶ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 21 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 26 Nov 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 644-645, 650-651

²⁵⁷ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 30 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 165-166

In Vladivostok, Rozanov introduced trade restrictions and fixed prices. Inventories could be searched, goods confiscated and serious violations tried under military law. Although the measures were meant to stabilise the economy, they hit Chinese merchants particularly hard.²⁵⁸ Rozanov capped his policies off by requisitioning goods outright and proposing to expel any unemployed Chinese.²⁵⁹

The worst offender, nevertheless, remained Semenov. In November 1919, a contingent of Semenov's men robbed and massacred the overseas Chinese in Gorbitsa, making away with more than 2 million rubles in loot and killing over three hundred.²⁶⁰ The report from a representative of the Chinese residents read:

Semenov's troops entered the town and robbed the Chinese merchants indiscriminately, taking first their money and clothes and then killing them by shooting or stabbing. The bodies lined the ground and their property was cleaned out. They slandered the Chinese residents, saying we had helped the Reds, and went around searching us out and killing. On the streets of Gorbitsa they killed more than 30 Chinese merchants, over 100 more were killed while fleeing or have died in the forest of cold and hunger.²⁶¹

Taking a leaf out of Gondatti's book, Semenov informed the Chinese consul in Blagoveshchensk that the Chinese were no longer allowed to live in the Transbaikal

²⁵⁸ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 12 Sept 1919" "Letter to Kudashev, 15 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang 18 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 493-494, 497, 501

²⁵⁹ "Letter from the Jilin military governor, 27 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 19 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 608-609, 645; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 18 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 811

²⁶⁰ This was the same incident described by Liu Wenzhi and presented in the Introduction. "Letter from Sun Liechen, 29 Jan 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 3 Feb 1920" "Letter from Sun Liechen, 4 Feb 1920" "Letter from the General Staff, 10 Apr 1920" "Letter from the Manzhouli Chamber of Commerce, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 18-19, 24, 25-30, 82-88, 379-380

²⁶¹ "Letter from Sun Liechen, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 25

for more than three days at a time, on pain of imprisonment, forced labour or a heavy fine.²⁶² To replenish his dwindling resources, Semenov began selling off China Eastern Railway property, directly violating what the Chinese considered their rightful property. In fact it was widely rumoured that he was planning to take over the railway himself.²⁶³ Finally, in an act calculated to cause nationalist outrage, a Chinese flag belonging to some Chita residents was torn down by Semenov's troops and damaged.²⁶⁴

Again, Semenov continued to embody China's worst nationalist fears. His ties to the Mongols increased as Outer Mongolia assumed the allure of a safe haven from the advancing Reds. Naturally, the Chinese worried that Semenov was stoking Mongolian independence.²⁶⁵ And in May 1920, Semenov's new government in Chita issued a declaration which promised to hand over Russian rights in Outer Mongolia

²⁶² "Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Jan 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 678; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 24 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 346-347

²⁶³ "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 10 Apr 1920" T. Guo, Y. Wang, Y. Tao and J. Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang, Minguo jinian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1969), pp 130-134; "Telegram from Jilin Governor's office, 21 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 20 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 25, 88

²⁶⁴ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 23 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 248

²⁶⁵ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 19 Sept 1919." Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 559-560; "Letter from the State Council, 23 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 28 Jun 1920" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 10 Aug 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 25 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 8 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 251, 464-465, 586-587, 680, 732-733

and the China Eastern Railway to the Japanese. The decree set alarm bells ringing in Beijing.²⁶⁶

This time even Zhang Zuolin, leader of the Manchurian warlords, joined the call for decisive action in Russia. By December 1919, Zhang had finally consolidated his position in Manchuria, ousting the independent warlord Meng Enyuan from Jilin and installing Bao in his place. Another Zhang loyalist, Sun Liechen, became military governor of Heilongjiang.²⁶⁷ More importantly, Zhang could consolidate his position by adopting the nationalist *cause celebre* and presenting himself as the protector of the overseas Chinese in Russia.²⁶⁸ In his missives to Beijing, Zhang rehashed all the fears and hatreds of the past two years. Russia and China were closely linked, he argued. Delivering Russia into Japanese hands would bring disaster to China. He then railed against the cossacks, harking back to the humiliations of the past:

Now that the Russians are on the brink of death and defeat, they still dare to rampage at will, despising our country, attacking our ships, bullying our people, seizing our property... This type of arbitrariness exceeds even the Boxer situation. Semenov is a scoundrel... His ambition is overwhelming and he has made every effort to destroy the lives and property of Chinese merchants. Not only has he no reason to speak of, he is totally without humanity.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ “Letter from the State Council, 15 May 1920” “Letter from the State Council, 29 May 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 167-169, 215-216; “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 24 Apr 1920” “Letter from the State Council, 13 May 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 253-254, 308-310

²⁶⁷ McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China*, pp 33-43; Chi, *Warlord Politics in China*, pp 51-52

²⁶⁸ R. Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China: Tradition, Modernization and Manchuria* (New York: P. Lang, 2002), p 207

²⁶⁹ “Letter from the Fengtian military headquarters, 22 Dec 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 671-672. Semenov’s involvement with the Japanese was a sore point for Zhang, despite the fact that Zhang himself had received Japanese support. See “Letter from Zhang Zuolin, 29 Jan 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 25-26.

Zhang suggested cutting off Semenov's supplies. Russian refugees should be denied relief and troops should be sent.²⁷⁰ The call for an embargo was taken up by consul Shao, who also justified it by linking Semenov with tsarist expansionism:

I have asked for an embargo in order to hasten the death of the Whites... Semenov is but a remnant of imperialism. He has violated China's goodwill and is particularly unreasonable. He has harmed overseas Chinese, those who have left no corpse must number in the thousands. The amount of Chinese wealth he has stolen is no less than tens of millions. He has joined with Japan to scheme against China... He is China's enemy. This is so obvious it need not even be said. If he is allowed to enter China again, it would bring disaster. Not only would this hurt the feelings of all the Russian people and plant the seeds of future evil, but it would also show that China makes no distinction between good and evil. How shameful that would be.²⁷¹

By 1920, therefore, the Whites had become anathema to the Chinese. Their rule had brought misery to the overseas Chinese and reignited memories of tsarist imperialism. They seemed to be nothing more than agents of Japan. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese lost no chance to stamp out what remained of the atamans. China was sliding into its own civil war and the Beijing government was in no position to undertake decisive action. But it could stand sullenly by while the Reds crushed the Whites one by one.²⁷²

The Manchurian warlords took the initiative in extinguishing the Whites. Bao ousted Horvath from his post with the China Eastern Railway company in March 1920, using

²⁷⁰ "Letter from the Fengtian governor's office, 22 Dec 1919" "Letter from Zhang Zuolin, 26 Jan 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 671-672, 680-681

²⁷¹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 31

²⁷² "Letter from the State Council, 12 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 71-72

a wave of strikes on the railway as an excuse.²⁷³ Working together with Sun Liechen in Heilongjiang and Zhang in Fengtian, Bao also drew up plans against Semenov. Additional troops from the three Manchurian provinces were sent to beef up the border checkpoint at Manzhouli. For the last time, Semenov was warned not to enter Chinese territory. Those White troops that wished to enter China were strictly disarmed.²⁷⁴ Already in March 1920, the first group of Whites was disarmed at the Manzhouli border, but the floodgates really opened in November, when the Japanese had decisively cast Semenov aside.²⁷⁵ All refugee soldiers were promptly packed into trains under guard and shipped off to Vladivostok.²⁷⁶ According to the border garrisons, more than 11,000 troops were disarmed and turfed out. Their weapons enriched the Manchurian warlords' arsenals.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ In this, Bao was supported by Zhang Zuolin. "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 18 Mar 1920" "Meeting between Chen Lu and Kudashev, 17 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Zhang Zuolin, 11 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 96-97, 98-99, 135

²⁷⁴ "Telegram from the CER Guard Headquarters, 3 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 9 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Mar 1920" "Letter from State Council, 12 Mar 1920" "Telegram to Zhang Zuolin, Bao Guiqing and the CER guard, 26 Jul 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 24 Aug 1920" "Telegram from the CER Guard Headquarters, 11 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 14 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 23 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 1-2, 9, 130-131, 136-137, 549, 630-631, 669-670, 741-742, 762; "Draft from Song Xiaolian, 26 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 310-311

²⁷⁵ "Telegram from Zhang Zuolin, 18 Mar 1920" "Telegram from the Heilongjiang Defence Preparation Bureau, 24 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 30 Jul 1920" "Telegram from the CER Guard Headquarters, 18 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 149, 158-159, 559, 613

²⁷⁶ A small number of Kappelite troops who did not wish to go to Vladivostok were allowed to return to Chita via a roundabout route. "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 6 Dec 1920" "Telegram from Song Xiaolian, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 392-393, 403; "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 26 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 768-769, 774, 801-802

²⁷⁷ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 30 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 4 Dec 1920" "Telegram from the CER provincial headquarters, 4 Dec 1920" "Telegram from the CER Guard headquarters" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 776, 787, 788, 815-817

Semenov himself escaped to Korea and thence to South Manchuria, reliant on Japanese protection to the last.²⁷⁸ Reflecting on Semenov's final defeat, Heilongjiang warlord Sun mused:

Luckily, the disarmament was not accompanied by danger and there were no complications in sending the troops off. Those who observed the procedure did not protest. Truly, it is heaven's blessing that the border could be calmed, which was more than one could hope for. The conflict of several years has ended overnight.²⁷⁹

Beijing could not have been happier. It recommended that all the commanding officers involved in disarming, guarding and expelling the White troops be rewarded.²⁸⁰

The full wrath of the Chinese, however, was reserved for Kalmykov, who fled into China when his Khabarovsk fiefdom fell to the Reds.²⁸¹ Kalmykov was particularly reviled for the attack on the Chinese flotilla sailing up the Amur. This was not only an instance of open provocation, but scuppered China's attempts to reclaim its navigation rights as well. His ignominious defeat and escape was met with undisguised glee. Consul Shao in Vladivostok decried Kalmykov as a criminal who should have been given the death penalty long ago. Shao recommended that he be

²⁷⁸ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 2 Dec 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 7 Dec 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 12 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 784-785, 798, 808

²⁷⁹ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 22 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 813-814

²⁸⁰ "Letter from the State Council copying a telegram to Sun Liechen, 27 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 819

²⁸¹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 18 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 24 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 29 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 8 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 86, 99-100, 112, 126-127

arrested and handed over to the Reds. If nobody had objected to Kolchak being handed over to the socialists in Irkutsk, Shao argued, who would bat an eyelid over such a known evildoer as Kalmykov?²⁸² Bao agreed, saying that Kalmykov's "crimes were great and China has no reason to show leniency".²⁸³ The cossack leader was duly arrested in the border province of Jilin and placed under surveillance in the remote town of Fumian. His entourage was disarmed, shipped off to the Russian border and left to the tender mercies of the Red Army.²⁸⁴

Once in custody, however, Kalmykov proved difficult to handle. The Foreign Ministry agonised over whether to extradite him to the Reds, who had not yet been recognised by the Chinese.²⁸⁵ At the same time, the ataman was a constant security risk. Rumours spread that other Whites were trying to secure his release by bribing his wardens. The Russian consul in Jilin was also pestering the provincial authorities about Kalmykov's welfare to an extent that they considered suspicious.²⁸⁶ This thorny problem was referred to ambassador Kudashev, who recommended the classic formula of shooting Kalmykov "while trying to escape". Kudashev's solution was conveyed to Bao.²⁸⁷

²⁸²"Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 113

²⁸³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 120

²⁸⁴ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 1 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 6 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 11 Mar 1920" "Telegram from the CER Guard headquarters, 16 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 115, 123, 133, 148

²⁸⁵ "Telegram to Li Jia'ao and Shao Hengjun, 26 Feb 1920" "Letter to the Frontier Defence Bureau, 28 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 104-105, 465

²⁸⁶ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 May 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 20 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 365, 434

²⁸⁷ "Meeting between Chen Lu and Kudashev, 3 Jun 1920" "Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 5 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 374-375, 376

True enough, Kalmykov disappeared from custody in July 1920, with Russian consular officials heavily implicated in his escape.²⁸⁸ When he was found hiding in a bolthole in the Russian consulate in August, the Chinese government decided to shift him to more secure facilities in Beijing.²⁸⁹ En route to the capital Kalmykov again attempted to flee. This time he was unceremoniously shot by his Chinese guard, his body photographed and buried in a sorghum field.²⁹⁰ The extent of Chinese distaste for the Whites needs no further illustration.

Epilogue: The Reds show their true colours

At this stage, it might be argued that it was the Whites' brutality that informed Chinese attitudes, not their association with imperialist threats. The Reds provide a useful comparison, however. Throughout the Civil War, the Reds played a more subtle game, pandering to the sensitivities of Chinese nationalism. Their conciliatory approach to the Chinese in early 1918 has already been mentioned above, and it was repeated when they first regained power in early 1920. Once again, the Reds eagerly professed friendship and promised to protect the overseas Chinese.²⁹¹ In

²⁸⁸ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 20 Jul 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 30 Jul 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 6 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 535, 559, 577

²⁸⁹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 26 Aug 1920" "Letter from the Foreign Ministry to the Army Ministry, 28 Aug 1920" "Telegram from the Foreign Ministry to Bao Guiqing, 31 Aug 1920" "Letter from Kudashev, 3 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 635, 642, 648, 652-653

²⁹⁰ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 5 Sept 1920" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 29 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 657, 686-687

²⁹¹ "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 15 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 29 Mar 1920" "Letter from the presidential office, 2 Apr 1920" "Announcement by the foreign commissar of the Far Eastern Republic Krasnoshchekov, 18 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 1, 8, 10-11, 39-42 (E dui Hua waijiao shitan); "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 19 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 751-752

Blagoveshchensk, the river-crossing permits and ban on currency exports were initially abolished. Chinese troops were even welcomed to the city and allowed to participate in customs work.²⁹² The previous commissar, who was “not on good terms with the Chinese”, was replaced. His successor, Iakovlev, personally crossed the river in February 1920 to meet with Chinese officials, professing his “earnest wish” to maintain good relations. In fact, the Chinese consul noted with approval that Iakovlev was much more friendly and “China will be able to work with him better than before”. The Reds proved so amenable that by June 1920, the consul recommended that Chinese troops in the city be withdrawn.²⁹³

In Vladivostok, the new socialist regime proposed a joint Sino-Russian boycott of Japanese goods. A Chinese agent sent to make contact with the Vladivostok socialists noted that the Chinese merchants there were very positive about the new government, and described them as “spring warmth after an autumnal chill”.²⁹⁴ The Red takeover of Khabarovsk was also relatively painless and the new administration returned more than 1 million rubles’ worth of cloth and goods that had been confiscated by White customs officials. The Red leader in Khabarovsk condemned Kalmykov’s attack on the Chinese flotilla and encouraged the city’s chamber of

²⁹² “Telegram from Ji Jing, 7 Feb 1920” Li, Li, Xu, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 684; “Telegram from Sun Liechen, 29 Jan 1920” “Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Feb 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 20-21, 39-40

²⁹³ The troops were indeed withdrawn in the first week of July, but a small police force of 10 men was left. “Telegram from Ji Jing, 14 Feb 1920” “Telegram from Ji Jing, 19 Jun 1920” “Telegram from Ji Jing, 25 Jun 1920” “Telegram from Sun Liechen, 10 Jul 1920” “Letter from Ji Jing, 29 Jul 1920” “Telegram from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 28 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 39-40, 175, 180, 190, 204-205, 256; “Telegram from Sun Liechen, 9 Feb 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 71-72

²⁹⁴ “Telegram from the CER Guard headquarters, 13 Feb 1920” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 15 Feb 1920” “Letter from the CER Guard headquarters, 7 Apr 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 75, 82-83, 189

commerce to boycott Japanese goods. Quan Shi'en, the vice-consul in Khabarovsk, was able to report in April that many outstanding matters had been handled "satisfactorily".²⁹⁵

Nevertheless, this was only a temporary thaw. The illusion was shattered first in Irkutsk where, in March 1920, reports arrived of Chinese property being confiscated. Even the selling of food to Chinese was prohibited.²⁹⁶ In early April, the East Siberian Overseas Chinese Association wrote to protest the harsh policies of the Reds, which included requisitions, forced labour, punitive taxes and the issuing of government bonds of dubious value. The unemployed were not given rations. Worse still, in June the Reds shut down the Chinese consulate in Irkutsk, arresting the leader of the chamber of commerce and committing the ultimate insult of tearing up the Chinese flag. The community's food supply had run out and they were being drafted into the army.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 20 Feb 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 27 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 42, 64-65; "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 24 Mar 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 10 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 51-52, 59-62; "Letter from Li Jia'ao conveying a letter from Quan Shi'en, 6 Jan 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 15 Mar 1920" "Letter from the Jilin Governor's Office, 31 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 4, 141-142, 169-171

²⁹⁶ "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 26 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 64. The Manzhouli chamber of commerce eventually compiled a list of goods requisitioned by the Reds in Irkutsk, including large amounts of cloth. See "Letter from Sun Liechen, 15 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 352-369

²⁹⁷ This was confirmed by official reports. "Letter from overseas Chinese representatives Li Hongsheng and Guo Wenbin, 7 Apr 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 12 Apr 1920" "Letter from Canlu 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 77-78, 89, 248-253; "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 11 Jun 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 27 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 395, 452-456

By June 1920 the Red Terror reached Verkhne-Udinsk and the Overseas Chinese Association there called for troops to be sent. The Reds, they said, had “people’s faces and animals’ hearts”. Merchants’ property had been taken away, those refusing to serve in the army were shot, others were arrested on trumped-up charges.

Eventually, houses were confiscated wholesale in exchange for rooms in former prison cells. The Reds, the Association concluded, were “wading deep in blood”.²⁹⁸

Finally, in Blagoveshchensk, the Red administration implemented fixed official prices and confiscated goods shipped to other cities. Many Chinese were winding up their businesses and returning home.²⁹⁹

By the end of 1920, the Reds were showing their true colours. The Chinese were subjected to further requisitions, minuscule rations and compulsory labour service. Those who wished to leave were prohibited from doing so, or could not take hard currency with them out of the border. Those who stayed were only allowed to buy and sell via official shops. Rent contracts were unilaterally abolished and village traders were suppressed. Merchants in Nerchinsk were forced to submit inventories of their goods, while gold miners in Sretensk had to hand over their entire yield to officials. Along the railway, travellers were drafted as coolies, their luggage searched and

²⁹⁸“Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 14 Jun 1920” “Letter from the Irkutsk consulate, 6 Aug 1920” “Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Sept 1920” “Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 165-167, 209, 241-242, 248-253; “Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau copying telegrams from Zhang Silin, 30 Jul 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 68-70 (E dui Hua waijiao shitan)

²⁹⁹ “Letter from the trade advisory board, 11 Aug 1920” “Letter to the Naval Ministry, 6 Nov 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 213-214, 313. A similar vote to return was eventually conducted in Khabarovsk in September 1920. See “Telegram from Quan Shi’en, 23 Sept 1920” “Telegram to Quan Shi’en, 28 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 246-247, 256

confiscated. Those incapable of military service were forced to starve. The sending of telegrams was strictly monitored, lest the Chinese make their hardship known.³⁰⁰

As with the case of the White Terror, the Beijing government took these appeals seriously. In June 1920 a special envoy, Zhang Silin, was despatched to conduct military reconnaissance as well as investigate the conditions of the overseas Chinese. Other representatives were also sent to repatriate thousands of Chinese from Verkhne-Udinsk and Irkutsk, who wished to leave Russia.³⁰¹ Zhang spoke repeatedly to the foreign commissar of the Far Eastern Republic on the issue of the overseas Chinese, and travelled to Moscow in hope of a resolution.³⁰² He described the effects of Red rule in moving terms, quoting the leader of the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association:

The overseas Chinese...entreat Zhang to stay and protect them. If not, they have resolved that rather than die at the hands of that infernal rabble, they would rather die in front of Zhang, either by lying on the railroad tracks or jumping in the river, so that they may die quickly.³⁰³

³⁰⁰ "Telegram from the CER office, 3 Nov 1920" "Letter from Sun Liechen, 11 Nov 1920" "Letter from the Manzhouli chamber of commerce, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 288, 316-319, 379-382. A similar reversal occurred in Turkestan. See "Letter from Yang Zengxin, 17 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 320-322

³⁰¹ "Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Zhang Silin, 26 Nov 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau copying telegrams from Zhang Silin, 29 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 241-242, 331-332, 68-70 (E dui Hua waijiao shitan). On the repatriation, see "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 3 Apr 1920" pp 13-14, (E Dui Hua waijiao shitan); "Letter from Sun Liechen, 27 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 452-456

³⁰² "Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 248-253

³⁰³ "Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 250

Clearly, the Reds were soon reaching White levels of brutality. Chinese attitudes towards the Reds, however, did not harbour the same virulence as those towards the Whites. The critical difference was that the Reds' mailed fist came in a velvet glove. Red diplomacy demonstrated a keen understanding that they could win the Chinese over by repudiating imperialism. No matter how harsh War Communism was on the overseas Chinese, the Reds could still keep the Chinese sweet by promising to restore China's national glory. This understanding was already apparent in July 1919, when deputy Foreign Affairs Commissar L.M. Karakhan issued his famous manifesto which struck at the heart of Chinese aspirations. In its preamble, the manifesto made reference to:

Treaties by which the Tsarist Government, together with its Allies, by force and bribery enslaved the peoples of the East, and in the first place the people of China, in order to provide profits for Russian capitalists, Russian landlords and Russian generals.

Sweeping all such treaties aside, the manifesto promised to return all concessions, renounce all indemnities and abolish all extra-territorial rights. The territories annexed by the tsars would be given the right to decide on their own governments and national affiliations. The Boxer indemnity would be abolished. In addition, "not one Russian official, priest or missionary shall be able to interfere in Chinese affairs, and if he commits a crime, he should be subject to the justice of the local courts." Furthermore, it promised to return the China Eastern Railway without compensation of any kind.³⁰⁴ Significantly, the renunciation of all concessions included not only

³⁰⁴ Under the original terms of the CER contract, China had the right to redeem the railway in 1938, if she was able to pay the capital cost of construction plus the accumulated operational losses. Only in 1982 could China receive the railway gratis. C.C. Wang, "The Sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway", *Foreign Affairs*, October (1933) p 1.

tsarist ones, but also those claimed by “the outlaws Horvath, Semenov, Kolchak, the Russian generals, merchants and capitalists”.³⁰⁵

Soviet concessions came thick and fast. In March, the Vladivostok socialists finally allowed the Chinese river defence flotilla into the Amur River.³⁰⁶ Then, in May, the Amur soviet agreed not to interfere with Chinese ships on the Amur, a gesture that the Chinese considered a diplomatic breakthrough.³⁰⁷ That same month the Tashkent soviet agreed to abolish Russia’s tax-free status in Xinjiang, which had deprived the Chinese of much-needed customs revenue. They also agreed to the stationing of a Chinese trade representative for Semireche, something that had been blocked by tsarist officials, and gave him an enthusiastic welcome.³⁰⁸ In Moscow, Karakhan openly welcomed the presence of Chinese diplomatic representatives, again

³⁰⁵ Taken from the English translation of the manifesto in Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China*, p 270

³⁰⁶ “Letter from Li Jia’ao, 26 Mar 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 52-53 (Dongbei bianfang)

³⁰⁷ The soviet reaffirmed this in September 1920. “Letter from Zhang Shouzeng, 14 Jun 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 167-168; “Telegram from Zhang Shouzeng, 6 Sept 1920”, “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Dec 1920” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 31 Dec 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 125, 152-154, 155-158 (Dongbei bianfang)

³⁰⁸ Most importantly, the customs revenue would be collected by Chinese officials, unlike other such levies which were under the foreign-controlled Maritime Customs. “Letter from the State Council, 22 May 1920” “Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 26 May 1920” “Resolutions of the Sino-Russian meeting in Kulja, Ili, 27 May 1920” “Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 9 Sept 1920” “Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 26 Oct 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 141-143, 148-149, 150-152, 235-236, 284-285. The first Sino-Russian agreement on trade in Xinjiang, signed in 1851, was also concluded in Kulja.

promising to remove the imperialist thorns in China's paw: the Russian leaseholds, extraterritorial consular courts and the Boxer Indemnity.³⁰⁹

The Reds also understood the power of grassroots nationalism. Already in August 1918, a Chinese propaganda tract was found in Harbin, inciting railway workers to stop work and reject White currencies. Written in colloquial language, it was calculated to strike on all the necessary nationalist chords:

To our Chinese worker comrades: Our land has been thoroughly occupied by ambitious Japan. The European conference has resolved that Shandong will be completely given over to Japan. In future, who knows how many millions of our comrades will become slaves to foreigners? If our Chinese comrades cannot defend themselves and their families or prevent our sisters and brothers from becoming slaves to deceitful Japan, how can we have any honour as citizens of the Chinese Republic?³¹⁰

Six months later, in the railway workers' lodgings in Harbin, socialist agitators again distributed a Chinese-language pamphlet in which no rhetorical stone was left unturned. It brought up Russian excesses during the Boxer Rebellion, Gondatti's anti-Chinese legislation and the spread of tsarist power into Manchuria. It linked these directly to Semenov's robberies and the fear of Japanese encroachment. The contrast with Semenov's pro-Japanese Chita decree could not be greater:

³⁰⁹ "Telegram from the ambassador to the UK Alfred Sze, 22 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Zhang Silin, 26 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 326, 331-332. The Indemnity issue must have been especially alluring to the Chinese, as they had already made an attempt to default on payments. By early 1920, they were busy planning alternative uses for the funds. These included redeeming the CER, compensating for the losses of Chinese merchants in Russia, funding Beijing University and relieving refugees. See "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 19 Mar 1920", "Letter from the Finance Ministry, 12 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 101-102, 136

³¹⁰ "Letter from Kudashev, 29 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 475. For the full text of the pamphlet, see Appendix B.

Japan sees the many economic benefits of Siberia, South and North Manchuria, Mongolia and other places as its own. This is all because Horvath and Kolchak let the wolf in the door, they have even signed a secret treaty with Japan openly offering up Russia and secretly oppressing China, giving the sovereignty of both China and Russia over to Japan. Japan clearly wants to be the master of both China and Russia. But unexpectedly, before its wishes could be realised, the Reds are victorious. This shows that heaven is just... Today the Moscow government, set up by the Reds, has already announced to the Chinese government that after it has put down the old Russian officials, it will return the China Eastern Railway to China and abolish all the previous regime's unequal treaties... We hope that all classes in China can quickly come to their senses, so that all may resist and expel Horvath and his ilk... Then Japan will not dare to look down on China. In future China and Russia will enjoy equality.³¹¹

Despite the lamentations of the overseas Chinese, therefore, a fundamental difference separated Red from White. The former seemed willing and able to accommodate Chinese aspirations, whereas the latter had trampled on them with impunity. Hence, although Chinese officials took the Reds' harsh policies seriously, their protests were far more muted. In its repeated negotiations with the Soviets over the Chinese in Irkutsk, for example, the Foreign Ministry maintained a moderate stance. It asked the Soviet negotiator, M.I. Yurin, to give appropriate guarantees on the treatment of Chinese there.³¹² After his arrival in November 1920, Yurin was presented with a list of overseas Chinese losses as a test of his "sincerity and power". This was accompanied by four demands, including compensation and

³¹¹ "Telegram from the Jilin governor's office, 17 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 22

³¹² Chinese officials kept up the pressure on the Irkutsk issue on several fronts. The issue was brought before Yurin in Beijing, before the Vladivostok Soviet by the Chinese Allied representative and consul there, and by Zhang Silin in Moscow. The Chinese chambers of commerce on the Sino-Russian border also supported the linking of trade with better treatment of the overseas Chinese. "Letter from Xu Nailin, 19 Apr 1920", "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 23 Apr 1920" "Letter from the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade, 8 Nov 1920" "Letter to the State Council, 18 Dec 1920" "Draft to Liu Jingren regarding negotiations with Yurin on the abuse of overseas Chinese, Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 93-95, 101, 314-316, 369-370, 387-388; "Letter from the State Council, 15 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 416-419

protection for the Chinese in Russia. Then and only then would trade discussions take place.³¹³ Measured negotiation, rather than outrage, was the order of the day.

The chaos of the Russian Civil War further destabilised an already contested region. On one level, it directly affected the lives of the overseas Chinese, especially in the lawless far eastern regions. On another, it opened old imperialist wounds and inflicted new ones, triggering memories of tsarist expansion and raising the spectre of Japanese encroachment. Unsurprisingly, the Chinese responded to this in nationalist terms. Those who resided in the Russian Far East called for help by identifying with the Chinese nation and appealing to issues of sovereignty and prestige. Consuls and warlords also framed the conflict in nationalist language. A threat to the overseas Chinese and the Manchurian border was perceived as a threat to the nation as a whole.

Such perceptions informed Chinese attitudes and actions. The Whites suffered from their association with tsarist and Japanese imperialism. They seemed to be spreading Japan's sphere of influence, and their machinations in Outer Mongolia antagonised China's own imperial pretensions. In their excesses, they were seen as the inheritors of tsarist arrogance, conjuring up the unquiet ghost of Gondatti. By contrast, the Reds were able to soften harsh rule with anti-imperialist concessions. It was on these grounds that the Chinese set their faces against the Whites. For the time being at least, they reached for an understanding with the Reds.

³¹³ "Telegram to Sun Liechen, 24 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 377-378; "Meeting between Liu Jingren and Yurin, 30 Nov 1920" "Draft to Yurin, 13 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 143-145, 146-149 (E dui Hua waijiao shitan)

Nevertheless, it is now necessary to go further. The Russian Civil War posed new threats to the Sino-Russian frontier, but it presented new opportunities as well. We have already seen how nationalist rhetoric informed the Chinese response to the Reds and the Whites. At the same time, this rhetoric was a call to action. It inspired the overseas Chinese and their officials to make the most of the changed situation in Russia. Without taking into account this activist dimension, the analysis of “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics” would be incomplete. In the next two chapters, the thesis will show how nationalism was employed assertively and successfully to organise the overseas Chinese, expand China’s diplomatic reach and restore Chinese shipping on the Amur.

Chapter 2: “They Woke Up and Joined Forces”

The previous chapter has shown how the violence and chaos of the Russian Civil War provoked a sharp reaction among overseas Chinese and officials alike. This response was couched in strongly nationalist terms. It harked back to China's victimhood at the hands of tsarist Russia and expressed fear at the prospect of further losses to Japan. Furthermore, by framing the Civil War in this way, the Chinese also determined their reaction to it. The Whites, as agents of both tsarist and Japanese imperialism, were anathematised. The Reds, for the moment, seemed more accommodating. Nationalist discourse provided a compass amidst the shifting political sands.

At the same time, however, this discourse was more than reactive. The logic of national humiliation demanded that China should not only prevent future insult, but also reverse past wrongs. This imbued border nationalism with a dynamic and opportunistic quality.

The collapse of Russian state power in the Civil War created precisely this opportunity. Freed from the restrictions of Russian oversight, the Chinese community and their officials across the Sino-Russian border found themselves with unprecedented scope for action. This chance was too tempting to let slip and the overseas Chinese were keen to seize the initiative. Informed, once again, by nationalist concerns, they began forming new civic organisations to protect and enhance their position in Russia. These organisations, christened the Overseas Chinese Associations (*huaqiao lianhe hu*), claimed to represent broader sections of

the Chinese community than previous ones. Working together, they would present the Russians with a united front and wield greater negotiating power.

The Beijing government, too, did not stand idle. On one level, it approved the new Associations. Its consuls and other Manchurian officials worked closely with some of the Associations. Going further, the government advanced its own presence in the Russian Far East by setting up new consulates, more than doubling its original diplomatic presence. The tsarist authorities had previously obstructed this move and Beijing intended to act before the Russians had the capacity to object further. Furthermore, the Chinese could then present a *fait accompli* to whatever regime succeeded the Romanovs. The new consulates advanced China's political and economic interests in Russia together with the Associations and the Chinese chambers of commerce. For both officials and overseas Chinese, therefore, the disorder in Russia was the "opportunity of a thousand years" to advance their national goals.

The results of this initiative were, of course, mixed. By the end of 1920 the efforts of the overseas Chinese had run aground on the new soviet regime. Worker was increasingly pitted against merchant and Beijing's room for manoeuvre diminished. But until then, the language of nationalism continued to exert immense cohesive power, suffusing the founding charter of almost every single organisation and pervading diplomatic correspondence. The advancement of national prestige animated the overseas Chinese and their officials. Amidst the trauma of the White and Red Terrors, it inspired the Chinese to band together in self-defence. More importantly, it allowed the Chinese to assert themselves in the absence of Russian power. Nationalist language oiled the wheels of Chinese activism on the contested

Sino-Russian frontier. The Chinese rhetoric of victimhood and humiliation cannot be taken at face value.

This chapter represents a rare English-language study that uses Chinese sources to examine the diaspora civic organisations and consulates in the Russian Far East.³¹⁴ By focusing on how these institutions participated in the discourse of nationalism, the chapter moves away from the state- or class-based analyses that have characterised previous Russian and Chinese scholarship. Instead, it shows that the nationalist activism of the overseas Chinese organisations in Russia closely mirrored that of similar organs within China itself. They maintained a strong sense of Chinese identification. Together with the Beijing government, they were determined to use the chaos in Russia to further national goals. The picture that emerges is one of state-society collaboration, fostered by a shared nationalist language.

Chambers of commerce and the state-society nexus

Before the revolutions of 1917 and the Civil War, one of the primary organisational structures uniting the Chinese in Russia were the chambers of commerce. These were extensions of the chambers of commerce which proliferated in China itself and had close links to the Chinese state. The first domestic chamber of commerce, the Shanghai Commercial Consultative Guild, was formed in 1902 on merchant initiative. Its leaders were to be elected, not appointed by the government. But the Qing administration soon approved its charter and took over the reins, legitimising all such organisations by state law in 1904. As one of the first “associations established by law”, therefore, chambers of commerce were charged with a series of semi-

³¹⁴ Works by Russian scholars such as A.G. Larin, V.D. Datsyshen and Olga Alexeeva have been published in English but - with the exception of Larin - tend to focus on Russian sources. Chinese scholars such as Li Zhixue, Li Yongchang and Xie Qingming use Chinese sources extensively. As far as I am aware, however, their work is not available in English.

governmental functions, including “unifying the protection of industry, fiscal policy, regulation of prices and the accounts of enterprises; managing registration of enterprises, copyrights, patents and licences; and settling commercial disputes”.³¹⁵ They institutionalised personal links among merchants and systematised channels of communication between merchants and the state. Furthermore, their powers exceeded what would normally be termed commercial. They were in charge of raising troops and keeping order in times of distress. They represented local communities in negotiations with officials, issued public statements detailing their opinions on government policy and submitted petitions to the government.³¹⁶ In practice, the border between chamber of commerce leadership and officialdom was fairly porous, with merchant representatives easing into and out of the legislature and bureaucracy.³¹⁷

The overseas chambers of commerce also straddled the line between government and civil-society organisation. In the Russian Far East, chambers of commerce were of relatively long standing in areas where the Chinese were concentrated, such as Vladivostok and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk. The network soon expanded to include some

³¹⁵ A. Nathan, *Peking Politics, 1918-1923: Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp 13-15

³¹⁶ Chen, *Modern China's Network Revolution*, pp 59, 74-75; M.B. Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), pp 112-113; Xie, “Shiyue geming qianhou de Lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu”, pp 114-115

³¹⁷ Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, pp 42-44; Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China*, pp 113-118, 197, 201-202. For example, the leader of the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, Zhang Daoyou, ran for parliament in 1921. Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s”, p 876

smaller towns and, as late as 1918, new chambers were still being set up.³¹⁸ Their leadership had to be approved by the Foreign Ministry and its consuls, as can be seen in the periodic reports on chamber of commerce elections.³¹⁹ The foundation of the Irkutsk chamber of commerce in October 1918, in particular, illustrates the degree of official involvement in these bodies. According to Irkutsk consul Wei Bo, the Chinese merchant community had established itself in the city 20 years ago and was growing further. The city now had more than 100 Chinese shops and Wei felt that it was high time the merchants got organised. He described the cajoling that took place:

Since they knew the benefits of forming a chamber of commerce, I asked the merchants why they had not done so. The merchants said it was hard to find the funds to establish one. I said that the consulate would be willing to help with the costs. The merchants then said that this would not be necessary and that, in the two years since the consulate was set up, they had proposed establishing a chamber of commerce several times but it was not approved. But now that the consul

³¹⁸ The Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chamber of commerce had been in operation since 1910. Smaller towns with chambers of commerce included Karymskaia and Grodekovo. "Letter from the State Council copying a General Staff telegram, 3 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 24; "Letter from the Ministry of Agriculture and Trade, 11 May 1918" "Letter from Irkutsk representative Wu Mingjun, 4 Sept 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 27 Sept 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 365-366, 487-488, 521

³¹⁹ Alexeeva, "Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East", p 23; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 855. For examples of chamber of commerce election reports for Vladivostok and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk, see "Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 31 Jan 1917", "Letter from the Vladivostok consulate, 11 Jul 1917", "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 4 Mar 1918", "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 19 Mar 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 19, 121, 278, 306-307

is willing to help restore their economic privileges and fulfil their long-held hopes, the merchants are too busy.³²⁰

After repeated parley, the Irkutsk merchants finally acquiesced, formed the chamber and elected its leaders. In a note attached to the report, Wei's role was praised by the Foreign Ministry. To some extent, therefore, the Irkutsk consul acted as the midwife of the city's chamber of commerce.

Like their counterparts in China, the chambers of commerce in Russia acted as interlocutors, transmitting appeals and instructions between overseas merchants and the Chinese authorities. One could argue that chambers of commerce fulfilled certain consular roles in the absence of an actual consul, by acting as agents of Chinese officialdom abroad. They submitted surveys of the trading situation in the Russian Far East, keeping the central government informed of its overseas subjects. Within the community, they were a channel for mutual assistance. They adjudicated disputes, assisted the Russian police and attempted to improve literacy.³²¹ In Vladivostok, the chamber of commerce was even involved in internal policing. The overburdened consulate entrusted it with arresting and repatriating bandits, as well as investigating

³²⁰ "Letter from Wei Bo, 19 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 573. It is possible that Wei overstated his level of initiative. Wei did not always get along with the Irkutsk merchants and seemed more concerned with his personal safety than that of his charges. Some of the merchants' reluctance may therefore have been due to personal antipathy. See "Letter from the Irkutsk Overseas Chinese Association, 5 Mar 1918", Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 281; "Telegram from Wei Bo, 29 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 660; "Letter from the Irkutsk Overseas Chinese Association, 12 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 117-118; "Telegram from Wei Bo, 13 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 138

³²¹ Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 855

opium and gambling dens.³²² Clearly, merchants' business interests were part of the chambers' *raison d'être*, but their responsibilities were not merely mercantile.

This imbued the chambers of commerce in Russia with a semi-governmental character, with clear links to the Chinese state. Until recently, English-language scholarship has tended to ignore these institutions. Russian and Chinese works, by contrast, strongly emphasise the chambers' socio-political role. Chinese scholars, often working within a marxist framework, have described the chambers of commerce as vehicles of merchant interest and offshoots of the pre-communist warlord government. Xie Qingming, for example, claims that both the chambers and the state colluded to suppress workers' organisations, so as to stamp out the embryonic communist movement.³²³ Both Xie and Li Zhixue mention the close financial and personal connections between merchants and officialdom, which predisposed officials to support the merchant-led chambers over workers' organisations.³²⁴ Such views are reflected in the work of some western sinologists. Lucian Pye, for example, argues that the merchants of the Shanghai treaty port renounced nationalist goals and deferred to the more "authentic" Chinese in inland China.³²⁵ The aforementioned arguments, however, do not take into account the chambers' non-commercial responsibilities. Neither do they acknowledge that such activities benefited workers as well as merchants.

³²² "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918" "Letter from Meng Enyuan, 17 Jun 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 20 Jun 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 138-140, 188-189, 190-192

³²³ Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", pp 114-116

³²⁴ Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui Lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 85

³²⁵ L. Pye, "How China's Nationalism was Shanghaied", in J. Unger (ed.) *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1996), pp 93-94, 100

By contrast, most Russian scholars have dealt with the chambers of commerce in the Russian Far East as extensions - even intrusions - of Chinese power at the expense of the Russian state. Olga Alexeeva, in her study of the Chinese community in Russia, argues that “migrant organisations effectively usurped the functions and rights of the civil government and courts by neutralising any intervention on the part of the Russian authorities in the lives and affairs of the Chinese in the Russian Far East”. The chambers conducted their activities without much transparency or disclosure, in a language that the Russians did not understand.³²⁶ A.G. Larin, while acknowledging that the Russians needed such organisations to act as intermediaries with the Chinese community, also states that such bodies were “an alternative source of power” which fostered “systematic non-compliance with the directives of the authorities”. They allowed the Chinese to bypass the Russian courts and form trade cartels. Such evaluations echo the fears of Russian authorities during this period. Chinese organisations were termed “a state within a state” and strict limits set on them.³²⁷ Naturally, these efforts were resented by Chinese officialdom.³²⁸

The focus on Russian versus Chinese jurisdiction or worker versus merchant, however, has obscured a larger issue. Nationalism was the immediate impetus for giving the chambers of commerce - and, by extension, the merchants - a political role. Almost from the moment of conception, therefore, chambers of commerce had a nationalist function. On one level, the cash-strapped Chinese state hoped to gain

³²⁶ Alexeeva, “Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East”, p 23

³²⁷ Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, pp 853, 855-856; Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia (The Contribution of Chinese Immigrants to Russia’s Far East)”, pp 169-170, 171; A. Lukin, *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia’s Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations Since the Eighteenth Century* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2003), p 58

³²⁸ “Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 18 Feb 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 50-51; but see Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia”, p 853

merchant support for its industrial development and reform programme. The chambers of commerce could also supplement the state's efforts in welfare provision and education.³²⁹ More critically, however, the merchants' own fortunes were now seen as a critical part of China's wellbeing. Kwan Man Bun argues that, by the late Qing period, international economic rivalry and concepts of Social Darwinism had combined to popularise the idea of a "commercial war" [*shangzhan*].³³⁰ If China wanted to win, it would have to do its utmost to encourage and coordinate merchant initiative. Viewed in this way, the chambers of commerce were a critical arm of the Chinese economic "war effort".

More recent work on the chambers of commerce in China has picked up on this theme. Kwan's study shows that the Tianjin salt merchants and chambers of commerce "appropriated the vocabulary of citizenship and nationalism and added their voice to the discourse of state building".³³¹ They led a country-wide effort among China's merchants to raise funds and pay off China's Boxer Rebellion and Sino-Japanese War indemnities.³³² Similarly, Chen Zhongping's book on the Lower Yangtze chambers of commerce dubs them "modern China's network revolution". Chen underscores the self-consciously nationalist aims of the chambers of commerce. Like Kwan, Chen emphasises that the original Ministry of Commerce proposal to legitimise chambers of commerce, submitted to the Qing court in 1904, stated that these organisations would be the "leading force in a commercial war with foreign powers".³³³ The chambers proceeded to champion nationalist causes with

³²⁹ Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, pp 10-11, 102-103

³³⁰ Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, p 133

³³¹ Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, p 154

³³² Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, p 133

³³³ Chen, *Modern China's Network Revolution*, p 59

alacrity. In 1905, the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce was spearheading an anti-American boycott, in close cooperation with the government, to protest anti-Chinese immigration laws in the United States. Other chambers of commerce in the Lower Yangtze area created police forces, set up free schools, public libraries and militias. They organised railroad companies in opposition to foreign consortia and pushed for a greater voice in treaty negotiations with foreign powers. They became focal points for the lobbying efforts of other reformist groups, such as students. And in 1912, a national union of chambers of commerce was set up to study constitutional questions and agitate for political representation.³³⁴ In fact, the chambers of commerce championed nationalist causes so vigorously that it sometimes brought them into conflict with the state.³³⁵

The chambers of commerce in Russia were the inheritors of this nationalist tradition. Institutionally, they occupied a distinctive, semi-official space. Discursively, they overwhelmingly adopted the language of nationalism. In the previous chapter, we have already glimpsed how the chambers and other Chinese organisations wielded nationalist language in their response to the upheavals in Russia. The conflict was framed as, and frequently subsumed into, a wider nationalist imperative. Contrary to what Russian and Chinese scholars have argued, therefore, nationalist issues absorbed the chambers' energies far more than class conflict or the desire to avoid Russian oversight. Nowhere is this clearer than in their behaviour during the Civil War.

³³⁴ Chen, *Modern China's Network Revolution*, pp 202-206

³³⁵ Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, pp 125-131; Chen, *Modern China's Network Revolution*, pp 202-206

“The opportunity of a thousand years”

In times of peace, the chambers' role as mediators and interlocutors was already expansive. The chaos of the 1917 revolutions and Civil War raised them to new heights of activism. As in the case of their counterparts in China proper, the chambers of the Russian Far East cast themselves as defenders of the Chinese community as a whole. The previous chapter has shown how the chambers conveyed the community's grievances to Manchurian warlords as well as the Beijing government, becoming in effect one of the key sources of information on the White Terror. Their reports naturally included the merchants' financial distress, but also incorporated robberies and murders committed on workers and farmers.

Nevertheless, the chambers did not confine themselves to channelling complaints. As “men on the spot”, they were well-placed to protect the community's broad interests. Their relief efforts were directed at all Chinese regardless of occupation. In Vladivostok, the chamber of commerce worked hand in glove with the Chinese consul to resolve the community's dwindling food supply in late 1917.³³⁶ When consul Shao Hengjun and the Beijing government decided to evacuate more than 1,000 indigent Chinese from the city on board the passenger ship *Fei Jing* in April 1918, the chamber of commerce also threw its weight behind this. It offered to pay higher passenger fees to offset the cost of dispatching the *Fei Jing*, and later helped to

³³⁶ “Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 27 Nov 1917” “Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 3 Apr 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 1-3, 65

distribute the tickets.³³⁷ Elsewhere, the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce mediated with ataman Kalmykov to avoid a confiscation of the Chinese community's entire food supply in autumn 1919.³³⁸ The leader of the Irkutsk chamber of commerce, Wang Junqing, repatriated thousands of Chinese. In fact, Wang negotiated with the Russians more successfully than the consul and managed to prevent the Reds from requisitioning Chinese goods wholesale. Wang was so successful that, in May 1920, the Chinese in Irkutsk petitioned the Foreign Ministry to appoint him as the new consul.³³⁹ Finally, when War Communism arrived in Irkutsk in autumn 1920, the chambers of commerce throughout the Russian Far East cooperated to send food to the unemployed Chinese there who had been deprived of rations.³⁴⁰

Like their counterparts in China, the chambers of commerce in the Russian Far East also attempted to keep order in the midst of the Civil War. They either appealed for troops or armed sections of the Chinese community themselves. The chambers' requests for protection were addressed not only to the Beijing government, but often to Manchurian warlords as well, who in turn conveyed these demands to Beijing.

³³⁷ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 24 Apr 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 8 May 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 84-85, 113, 125-126. Nevertheless, most merchants did not wish to leave Vladivostok themselves and there was some indignation that the government was charging a significant fee for what was seen as a humanitarian mission. The evacuees were therefore mostly poor Chinese. "Letter from Agriculture 16 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 17 Apr 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 88-89, 91

³³⁸ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 21 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 26 Nov 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 644-645, 650-651

³³⁹ "Letter from the Irkutsk Overseas Chinese Association, 12 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 117-118. So successful was Wang that the Reds shut down the Irkutsk consulate and arrested him. See "Telegram from Zhu Shaoyang in Moscow, 30 Sept 1920", p 262 in the same volume; "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 30 Jul 1920", pp 68-70 in the same volume (E dui Hua wajiao shitan).

³⁴⁰ "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 230

Thus at various times the chambers in Khabarovsk, Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk, Blagoveshchensk and Manzhouli petitioned for troops to be sent, while in Chita the chamber of commerce assembled its own force of 20 men.³⁴¹ Once troop requests were granted, the chambers were in charge of accommodating them. In early 1918, for example, the Vladivostok chamber of commerce led calls for a Chinese warship to be sent to the port.³⁴² When the cruiser *Hai Rong* finally arrived in April 1918, the chamber of commerce stockpiled coal and food for the ship and served as caretaker for the crew's salaries, which had to be remitted to Harbin.³⁴³ Other chambers of commerce from nearby towns pooled funds as a gift to the sailors, although this soon led to conflict as the able seamen set about savouring Vladivostok's seedier establishments. The Vladivostok chamber, as *de facto* police of the Chinese community, promptly became involved in a dispute between a crew member and a Chinese prostitute. The matter caused a momentary rift between the chamber, the *Hai Rong* and consul Shao, which was serious enough for the Foreign Ministry to

³⁴¹ For the Khabarovsk appeals, see "Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 8 Feb 1918" "Letter from Meng Enyuan, 12 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 13-14, 246; "Letter from Canlu, 18 Mar 1918", "Telegram from the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce, 9 Aug 1918." Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 112, 356; "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 23 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 147. For Nikol'sk-Ussuriisk, see "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 11 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 291-292. For Blagoveshchensk, see "Telegram from Wei Bo, 4 Oct 1919," "Telegram from Ji Jing, 20 Dec 1919." For Manzhouli, see "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 4 Jan 1919." For the Chita guard, see "Letter from the overseas Chinese merchants in Chita, 16 May 1920." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 517-518, 648; 1-3; 242

³⁴² "Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 12 Dec 1917" "Letter from Lu Shiyuan, 5 Jan 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 3 Mar 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 5 Apr 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 3-4, 9, 26, 67

³⁴³ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 6 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 10 Apr 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 68, 80

send an official to investigate.³⁴⁴ Finally, when the Beijing government committed troops to the Siberian Intervention in autumn 1918, the Vladivostok chamber was once more involved in finding barracks for the soldiers and conducting the necessary renovations.³⁴⁵

Clearly, the chambers of commerce in the Russian Far East did not confine their responsibilities to trade. During the Russian Civil War, their activities ensured the survival of the overseas Chinese as a whole: Maintaining food supplies, self-defence, keeping lines of communication open. In word as well as in deed, moreover, the chambers of commerce identified with nationalist causes. The language used by the chambers revealed a deep preoccupation with China's international standing and the "humiliations" of the past. It showed an abiding commitment to national prestige and sovereignty. When the Manzhouli chamber of commerce was tasked to investigate the names of those killed in the November 1919 massacre in Gorbitsa, for example, it prefaced its report by appealing not only to humanitarian feeling, but to nationalism as well:

The overseas Chinese in Russia are everywhere, from large cities to small railway stations. Russian troops are deeply hostile to them and treat them cruelly. There must be many who have died in remote areas and their property taken away with nobody the wiser. This is extremely painful to speak of. Those who were identified have been listed, we ask that the names of

³⁴⁴ The Foreign Ministry official reported reassuringly that the prostitute matter had been cleared up by July 1918. "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 22 May 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 22 May 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 16 Jun 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 20 Jun 1918" "Report from commissioner Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918." Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 138-140, 148-149, 149-159, 187, 190-192, 255-248. The *Hai Rong's* presence proved so popular that when the Siberian Intervention wound up, the Vladivostok chamber of commerce petitioned for it to remain. "Letter from the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 29 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 257-258

³⁴⁵ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 21 Aug 1918." Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 269

these poor compatriots may be published and made known, so that officials may intervene to preserve national prestige and ease their souls.³⁴⁶

The Sretensk chamber of commerce, relating the harsh policies of the Reds in the wake of their takeover of Siberia, also said China's prestige had been called into question:

They have oppressed us brutally, confiscating Chinese property, forcing the Chinese to work for them, seeing our Chinese brethren as people without a nation, no better than slaves. Their actions not only oppress the lives of the overseas Chinese and take away our goods - which we totally cannot accept - but also show disregard for China. The shame is immense.³⁴⁷

The Dauria confiscations provide a prime example of the activities and the rhetoric of the chambers of commerce. From the beginning, the Manzhouli chamber of commerce played a central role in reporting these confiscations, which were carried out by Semenov's troops in Dauria in January 1919. The Vladivostok chamber of commerce attempted to negotiate with Semenov directly to reclaim the money.³⁴⁸ When this did not succeed, the Vladivostok, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Khabarovsk chambers of commerce then brought intense pressure to bear on the Chinese authorities, pushing them to secure the return of the funds. The chambers' appeals show a strong sense of national pride. In March 1919, for instance, Chinese border

³⁴⁶ "Letter from the CER management office, 26 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 105. The Sretensk Overseas Chinese Association carried out the investigation together with the Manzhouli chamber of commerce. See "Letter from the Manzhouli chamber of commerce, 26 Dec 1920" pp 379-382, in the same volume.

³⁴⁷ "Letter from Sun Liechen, 11 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 318

³⁴⁸ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 11 Jan 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 10 Apr 1919" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 10 May 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 10-11, 144, 225-227, 375

officials agreed that the merchants should provide receipts for the confiscated funds, as requested by the Russians. In response, the chambers exploded in fury:

The domestic negotiating official thinks little of the merchants' hard-earned money. He has dealt with this feebly, toadying up to foreigners to protect himself, caring nothing for the violation of national sovereignty and the withering of trade, content to be insulted by the Russian consul. It pains us to speak of this. Moreover the Russian authorities in the Far East have come up with hundreds of cunning schemes, claiming that China and Russia are neighbours and intimate friends, but in reality suppressing us Chinese [*wo huaren*] more and more every day. Without urgent protection from the government, those Chinese merchants trading in Russia will be constantly exploited, with no leg to stand on.³⁴⁹

The longer the issue dragged on, the more hardline the chambers of commerce became. In May, with the money still in limbo, the three chambers abandoned a diplomatic solution and began to call for troops. This would address not just the confiscation issue, but wider geopolitical questions as well:

Even though Russia is in turmoil, it still foolishly thinks itself a great power, looking down on our country [*wu guo*], belittling our people [*wu min*], all the time implementing crafty schemes. Unfortunately our diplomacy is slow and prolonged. It cannot win back the confiscated funds by words alone, only with military force as a backup to diplomacy, our country sending troops abroad to help the Russians quell the disorder and to protect overseas citizens... On the surface, this will be purely to help the merchants fight for the return of the funds, giving us the justification to act boldly... Moreover, it can greatly suppress the trouble in Outer Mongolia.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 29 Mar 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 130

³⁵⁰ The phrase "foolishly thinking itself a great power" is translated from the Chinese proverb "Yelang zida", by which the chambers of commerce compared Russia to Yelang, a small barbarian tribal alliance in southern China dating to 300 BC. The proverbial kings of Yelang had foolishly considered themselves the equals of the Han dynasty. "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 10 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 226-227

The three chambers of commerce raised the temperature further by explicitly linking the Dauria confiscation to key events in the timeline of national victimhood. In April 1919, they proposed deducting the confiscated sum - plus indirect losses such as trade and interest foregone - from China's Boxer Indemnity payments.³⁵¹ This spoke directly to the resentment over Russia's occupation of Manchuria during the Boxer Uprising, as well as its imposition of a hefty and ongoing fine. The chambers' rhetoric achieved its intended effect. Acting on the chambers' initiative, the State Council in Beijing began withholding the indemnity payments in May, although it only authorised the original confiscated amount to be deducted. This was equivalent to a mere two months' indemnity but, since the payments were a financial lifeline for the Whites, it successfully forced the Russians to take the matter much more seriously. The January confiscation at Dauria, which by then had dragged on for more than half a year, was resolved by the Kolchak regime in Omsk in less than a month.³⁵²

The Kolchak government's capitulation, however, was still unsatisfactory. It promised to return only the original confiscated sum, and that in Omsk currency. This did not take into account the precipitous fall in the value of the ruble since the confiscation, or the poor credibility of Omsk notes. Therefore, the chambers of commerce were adamant that the money they were now receiving would be worth only a fraction of its

³⁵¹ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 14 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 232-238

³⁵² "Foreign Ministry memo, 19 May 1919" "Letter from the State Council, 24 May 1919" "Meeting between Chen Lu and Obata, 28 May 1919" "Meeting between Chen Lu and Kudashev, 28 May 1919" "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 6 Jun 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 7 Jun 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 25 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 259, 265, 275-276, 276, 307-308, 308-309, 342

original value.³⁵³ Moreover, Semenov had outdone himself with a second, larger confiscation in June 1919. Livid, the Manzhouli chamber of commerce resolved that Chinese traders in their town should close shop in protest. It asked the merchants of Vladivostok and Blagoveshchensk to do the same, and for troops to be sent to Dauria to hunt down the money by force.³⁵⁴ Semenov's victims refused to accept Omsk's compensation even after it was remitted to Vladivostok, despite the exhortations of the Foreign Ministry and consul Shao to leave well enough alone.³⁵⁵ Once again, the Vladivostok, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Khabarovsk chambers of commerce upped the stakes further by appealing to yet another painful historical memory:

if Omsk persists in this cunning policy, saying that the amount [returned] is the same when, in reality, the value of the ruble then and now is extremely different, the overseas merchants wish to use current rubles to redeem the China Eastern Railway based on the stated amount. Apart from using the funds which were confiscated, both then and now, to redeem the railway, the overseas merchants will still take up the burden on behalf of the country and recover the rights to the railway if there is a shortfall.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 20 Jul 1919" "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 22 Jul 1919" "Telegram from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 25 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 397, 400, 415. By mid-1919 the Omsk ruble had even less value than the Romanov or Kerensky ruble. See "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 11 Aug 1919", p 440 in the same volume.

³⁵⁴ "Letter from the State Council copying a report from the General Staff, 28 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 418-419

³⁵⁵ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 11 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 25 Aug 1919" "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 30 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 440, 468, 476-477

³⁵⁶ "Telegram from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 24 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 412. The chambers repeated their offer to redeem the railway several times. See "Telegram from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 25 Jul 1919" "Letter from the State Council conveying a message from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 14 Aug 1919", pp 415, 443-444 in the same volume.

This referenced China's wounded pride over the China Eastern Railway, which was widely perceived as the spearhead of Russian imperialism in Manchuria. Under the treaty which established the Railway, China was entitled to buy it back after 36 years after construction was completed (that is, in 1938).³⁵⁷ By offering to redeem the railway, therefore, the chambers of commerce drew a link between Semenov's insult and that of the tsars. It was a challenge to Omsk's decision phrased in the most emotive terms. Although Beijing subsequently thanked the chambers for their "warm patriotism", it deemed this challenge "diplomatically impossible" - after all, the 36-year term had not yet passed - and did not convey it to the Russians.³⁵⁸

Like their counterparts in China proper, therefore, the chambers of commerce in the Russian Far East defined their roles in expansive terms. Although the chambers' membership was made up of transnational merchants, not domestic ones, they used the same rhetoric of national victimhood. They saw themselves as responsible for the Chinese community as a whole and fulfilled functions that cannot be defined as purely mercantile. Their correspondence was replete with references to national prestige, sovereignty and the threat of foreign imperial encroachment. The only difference was the references to Reds and atamans - and the Russian postmark on the telegrams.

At the same time, however, the chambers' language demonstrated a widespread perception that the Russian Civil War was a time of *opportunity*. The geopolitical cards had been reshuffled, Russia was in disarray and China should use the chance

³⁵⁷ Paine, "The China Eastern Railway from the First Sino-Japanese War until the Russo-Japanese War", p 18; Wang, "The Sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway", p 1

³⁵⁸ "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 31 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 424

to assert itself. The potential gains and pitfalls were both immense. It is remarkable how widespread these views were. Over the Dauria confiscation affair, for example, we have seen how the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers appealed for troops to resolve the matter in May 1919. But putting pressure on Semenov was not the only thing in the chambers' minds. Instead, a stronger military presence would also enable China to take advantage of the upheavals in Russia:

During this turbulent time, fates and fortunes are changing. If our country is indeed able to take the opportunity to master the circumstances, meeting the tide with the whole of its military force, Russia and China both know that we can defeat them [Semenov's troops] without a fight. This will relieve the merchants from their difficult position and consolidate the border areas of the country, killing two birds with one stone.³⁵⁹

The same could be said of the Vladivostok chamber of commerce's petition for a warship in early 1918. Self-defence was only one of the goals that the merchants had. The chamber explicitly contrasted the Beijing government's hesitation on the matter with the initiative shown by the other Allies, who were concerned about the bolsheviks' impending separate peace with Germany. If China did not act now, the chamber argued, it would lose out in a future "scramble for Russia":

Now that China has indeed entered the war, it should swiftly send a warship to deal with emergencies. This will not just protect the lives and property of the overseas Chinese. In the event of a breakdown in the alliance, and if Russia has to make concessions, three countries - Britain, America and Japan - will make certain demands on her, either negotiating over economic rights or the partitioning of colonial concessions. These three countries will certainly have the advantage of being early birds. This is the opportunity of a thousand years. Our country has far

³⁵⁹“Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 10 May 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 227

more overseas citizens [in Russia] than others do. If we do not use military force as a backup, we will be disappointed.³⁶⁰

This language was repeated in the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce's call for troops in August 1918, which was quoted in the previous chapter. We have already seen how the chamber played on fears of Japanese expansionism and historical memories of the disastrous Sino-Japanese War, here termed the "Korean tragedy". However, the potential Japanese threat was tempered with a heady dose of opportunism:

A Japanese warship has entered Nikolaevsk and they may take the opportunity to meddle, which would recreate the Korean tragedy. Although China may benefit from this conflict [i.e. the Russian Civil War], the overseas Chinese do not wish for Japan to be the one reaping the gains. The chamber of commerce knows little of international relations and may misunderstand the general picture, but the authorities must have made calculations. China should take advantage of the opportunity and realise the moment of a thousand years.³⁶¹

This motif cropped up time and again: The Russian Civil War was the "opportunity of a thousand years" to recoup China's past losses. There was a feeling that the chambers of commerce were no longer best suited to take advantage of the changed circumstances. Their remit was too narrow and their presence limited to the larger towns of the Russian Far East. They were not up to the job of protecting the vast number of wartime Chinese workers stranded in Russia. Neither were China's existing diplomatic outposts capable of shouldering the burden. A greater and more

³⁶⁰ "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 13 Mar 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 35. The Beijing government eventually decided to send a warship on 18 March. See "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 18 Mar 1918", p 42 in the same volume.

³⁶¹ The first Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 began as a tussle over Korea, which the Qing dynasty eventually lost. It also led to China's diplomatic shift towards Russia and resulted in the granting of the CER concession in 1896. "Letter from the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce, 29 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 303.

coordinated Chinese presence was needed, especially since the Russians were now in no position to object. The overseas Chinese and the Foreign Ministry seized on the chance with both hands, forming new diaspora associations and consulates to advance China's interests.

From chamber to association

It was ambassador to Russia Liu Jingren who took the first step. As early as the March 1917 revolution, Liu recognised that the situation in Russia had changed fundamentally. He advised the Foreign Ministry to strike while the iron was hot and increase China's diplomatic clout, especially since the issue of Chinese wartime labour was becoming increasingly critical:³⁶²

Chinese labourers have been mistreated in all sorts of ways. Repeated negotiations with the previous [tsarist] Russian government have all been fruitless. Now that Russia is reforming and the workers' faction is powerful, we should take the opportunity to remedy the situation... The embassy has few staff and is unable to take all of this up.³⁶³

At the same time, Liu knew that the wheels of Sino-Russian diplomacy ran exceedingly slowly. In the interim, a new kind of broad-based Chinese organisation could take the lead. Working together with students, merchants and workers, Liu oversaw the formation of a broad-based Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia (*Zhonghua lü E lianhe hui*) in Petrograd in April-May 1917.

³⁶² Liu had dealt with the Russians throughout most of his diplomatic career. His first post, in 1906, was as an attache in the Chinese embassy in Russia. He eventually became ambassador himself in 1912. Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*.

³⁶³ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 May 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 103

This was not the first time overseas Chinese associations *per se* had been formed in Russia. In fact, the term had previously been used to get around tsarist restrictions on the formation of chambers of commerce.³⁶⁴ But the Petrograd Association and its successors took a much more expansive approach. The Association had the express purpose of protecting Chinese workers and was empowered to negotiate with ministers from the Provisional Government, the Petrograd soviet and the municipal дума. A Moscow branch of the Association swiftly followed.³⁶⁵ Beijing heartily approved and went so far as to contribute half of the Association's initial operating expenses, some 40,000 yuan (100,000 rubles). The president himself donated 10,000 yuan and put pressure on the cash-strapped Ministry of Finance to cough up the rest.³⁶⁶

Some indication of the Association's groundbreaking character can be seen in its founding documents. Although encouraged by ambassador Liu Jingren and a beneficiary of government support, the organisation was dominated by two students: its first president, Liu Zerong, and its Moscow branch representative, Zhu Shaoyang. Their pre-eminence only grew after the withdrawal of ambassador Liu from Russia and the communications blackout between European Russia and China that came

³⁶⁴ "Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 18 Feb 1920" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 50-51

³⁶⁵ "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 25 Sept 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 142-147

³⁶⁶ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 May 1917" "Draft to the President, 8 Jun 1917" "Letter from Finance, 11 Jun 1917" "Letter to Finance, 14 Jun 1917" "Letter from Finance, 23 Jun 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 103-104, 111-112, 113-114, 116, 119. Li claims that ambassador Liu did not hand over all of the funds to the Association. See Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*

with the Civil War.³⁶⁷ Unlike the chambers of commerce, the aims of workers and students formed the bedrock of this new Association. Its enhanced remit can be seen in the Association's charter. In a letter to the Foreign Ministry, the Association wrote:

Previously, some had tried to foster a suitable organisation [for workers' welfare], but during the autocratic period in Russia, it was hard to achieve this goal. Unexpectedly, the opportunity of a thousand years suddenly presented itself in a flash. This opportunity was none other than the 1917 Russian Revolution.³⁶⁸

Once again, the language of opportunism was used. The March Revolution was seen as a chance to obtain much-needed results on the issue of Chinese labour. In fact, the Association's responsibilities were painted in such broad strokes that they exceeded those of ordinary chambers of commerce or even an organisation for workers' welfare. In many ways, it resembled the progressive organisations for national revival in China:

The Association will maintain contact with Chinese in Russia. In all its work with the overseas Chinese in Russia, the Association will do its utmost to aid them, keeping within legal methods.

The Association has the power to organise meetings, speeches and exhibitions, and to set up special classes, libraries, tour groups, laboratories, clinics and shelters and to distribute publications. It can buy property and draw up contracts.

The Association will help Chinese students in Russia to study political, economic and social questions, including Russian education, science, culture, arts, industry and technology. It will help merchants in Russia study Russian trade, markets and shipping, and it will work with Chinese and Russian commercial

³⁶⁷ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 25 Feb 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 261. Liu Zerong came from a prominent family of tea traders who had settled in Russia. He had lived in Russia since he was five and married a woman who, by varying accounts, was either Russian or Polish. See Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 875; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; M. Gamsa, "Mixed Marriages in Russian-Chinese Manchuria", in D. Ben-Canaan, F. Gruner and I. Prodohl (eds.), *Entangled Histories: The Transcultural Past of Northeast China* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), pp 56-57

³⁶⁸ "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 30 Oct 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 164

organisations to promote trade.

The Association will help Chinese workers improve their situation in Russia, and prevent conflict and misunderstandings between them and Russian workers. It will foster contact between Chinese and Russians in order to improve relations.³⁶⁹

Clearly, the Association was not content to confine itself to either merchants' or workers' interests. Instead, the charter shows that the Association saw itself as a force in Sino-Russian relations that would endure even if the workers' question were to be solved. And unlike chambers of commerce, which pegged membership fees to the firm's size,³⁷⁰ the Association's criteria were expansive:

Any Chinese, male or female, above the age of 16 can be an ordinary member of the Association. There is a membership fee of 5 rubles per annum. Anyone who has rendered great service to the Association or has donated above 1,000 rubles to the Association, including foreigners, can become honorary members, subject to the recommendation of the executive and the confirmation of the assembly... If the Chinese government permits the Association to send a representative to Parliament, this representative will be chosen in an assembly vote.³⁷¹

Unfortunately, the Association in Petrograd and its branch in Moscow became increasingly isolated, cut off from the Russian Far East by the November Revolution and the spread of Civil War. The collapse of tsarist state power and the violence that followed, however, created exactly the same mix of danger and opportunity that

³⁶⁹ "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 30 Oct 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 165-166. Chinese scholars have often depicted the Association as a worker-only organisation, which neglects its charter's truly wide-ranging objectives.

³⁷⁰ "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 216; "Letter from the Manzhouli chamber of commerce, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 379-382. By contrast, the chamber of commerce in Tianjin charged relatively low membership fees. Kwan, *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin*, p 112

³⁷¹ "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 30 Oct 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 166, 169

allowed similar Associations to take root elsewhere. As we have seen, the chambers of commerce went some way towards defending the overseas Chinese. Given the large number of stranded Chinese workers and the atamans' vigorous attempts to recruit them, however, new organisations were crucial. The two existing Chinese consuls could only extend their reach so far. In July 1918, therefore, when Irkutsk consul Wei instructed one of his subordinates, Wu Mingjun, to look into the condition of overseas Chinese in the Zabaikal and Amur areas, Wu found that new united workers' and merchants' groups had been set up in Chita, Verkhne-Udinsk and Nerchinsk. They formed a network with the express aim of protecting Chinese lives and property. Wu attended one of their meetings and noted with satisfaction:

Before, the Chinese were still thinking of their individual interests, without the capacity to unite. Now they have been roused by the disorder in Russia and have begun to wake up, joining forces to set up overseas Chinese organisations. This is indeed a grand undertaking. From now on the Chinese will protect each other.³⁷²

Apart from those Associations mentioned by Wu, another was set up in Sretensk. On 9 July 1918, the Associations sent delegates to Chita to form a region-wide umbrella organisation, the East Siberian Overseas Chinese Association. As a regional body, the assembly argued, the East Siberian Association would be better placed to deal with the Russian provincial authorities at a higher level, and obtain satisfactory results for the more than 100,000 overseas Chinese living in the region. Wu gave this

³⁷² It is not clear if the initial push towards organising was provided by consular officials or by the community itself, but subsequent letters from the Associations do not make frequent reference to consular staff and were not signed off by them. "Letter from Wu Mingjun, 4 Sept 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 488

his immediate approval.³⁷³ In addition, an Association representing the Amur oblast' as a whole was headquartered in Blagoveshchensk.³⁷⁴

These new Associations were founded on the same broad principles of their Petrograd forerunner, although they were not linked to Petrograd. They also adopted the blanket term Overseas Chinese Association [*Huaqiao lianhe hui*]. This set them apart from other traditional forms of overseas Chinese organisation - which were segmented along the lines of trade, locality, surname or dialect - and gave them a broadly ethno-national character.³⁷⁵ And unlike the chambers of commerce, they seem to have been truly products of civil society, with little evidence of direct official involvement.

The charters of these new Associations were framed in nationalist terms. They burnished the history of the Chinese in Russia and decried the cruelty of the Russians. As with the chambers of commerce, moreover, they combined this with a heady dose of political opportunism. Take, for example, the first official communique from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, which is worth quoting extensively:

Muraviev founded the city of Blagoveshchensk beginning in 1850 [*sic*]. Because there were few Russian residents, in order to excavate mines and open up the forests as the basis for a colony, the Russians employed Chinese coolies to work there. At the time, relations were friendly and the Chinese were not

³⁷³ "Letter from Wu Mingjun, 4 Sept 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 487-488

³⁷⁴ "Telegram from the Heilongjiang military governor's office, 12 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 565-566

³⁷⁵ H. Liu, in H. Liu (ed.), *The Chinese Overseas, Volume I* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 11-12. For example, Yang Hongyu, the first chairman of the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, had previously worked with an association for his fellow Shandong provincials in Blagoveshchensk. See "Letter from Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Feb 1919." Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 37

harmed... Recently, because of famine in the Chinese interior, increasing numbers of Chinese have arrived. Several hundreds of thousands of Chinese now live along the border, without common leadership. Since the revolution in Russia, their lives and property are on the brink of disaster... Now, with the military intervention, Japanese troops are stationed here. If the overseas Chinese keep to their old ways, not only will the future of our property and businesses be in danger, but hundreds of thousands of souls will also have no organisation to protect them if there is an incident. Hence the Chinese associations in Amur oblast' have assembled and resolved to reorganise the old Overseas Chinese Association, so that the Chinese may have a unified organisation to act for them and Beijing may have a source of information about the border. In protecting overseas citizens, there is also the intention of restoring sovereignty. Many benefits will come from this and the opportunity will pass if we slacken even one bit.³⁷⁶

The Foreign Ministry approved the formation of the Amur Oblast' Association on the grounds that the existing chamber of commerce's remit was "too small" and would not be able to protect the community as a whole.³⁷⁷ However, the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, which was traditionally in charge of overseas Chinese organisations, had the final say. When it insisted that the Association reorganise itself on chamber-of-commerce lines, the Association's reply was equally revealing:

Because Amur Oblast' is vast and overseas Chinese farmers, workers and merchants are to be found everywhere, numbering no less than 600,000, if we were merely to follow past precedent and organise a chamber of commerce, only overseas merchants would have protection. The farmers and workers would still be in danger. Moreover the Whites have revived and

³⁷⁶ "Letter from the leader of the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association Yang Hongyu, 22 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 575. Yang notes that there was a previous Overseas Chinese Association in Blagoveshchensk, set up in 1911, but it had become defunct. A note from the Foreign Ministry confirms that the previous Association had lapsed. The archives suggest that the previous Association represented only merchants. See "Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 14 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 592; "Telegram from the Blagoveshchensk Overseas Chinese Association, 12 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 103-104

³⁷⁷ Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 14 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 592

have paid no attention to anything other than themselves, turning this place into a bandit's world... We had no choice but to gather the various overseas farmers, workers and merchants and hold a general assembly. After a detailed discussion the multitude resolved to take a broad approach and organise an Overseas Chinese Association, to avoid being exploited by the Russians and with the intention of expanding our sovereignty.³⁷⁸

The Amur Oblast' Association was not the only one to adopt such a wide-ranging mission. A glance at the East Siberian Overseas Chinese Association's charter reveals its equally expansive and nationalist character:

Tasks. To facilitate contact between Chinese and Russians and enhance the friendship between the two countries.

To check on the performance of other Overseas Chinese Associations, as well as their financial holdings.

To improve the trade and commercial situation of overseas Chinese.

To help overseas Chinese study trade and industry as well as market conditions, and to achieve mutual benefit in the shipping trade via negotiations with various Chinese and Russian organisations...

To resolve conflict between Chinese merchants and workers, Russian merchants or Russian workers...

To work together with Russian authorities and the various Associations to maintain order in times of panic, and to ask consulates to convey the need for protection to the Chinese and Russian governments...

Any matter of particular importance to Chinese merchants and workers will be brought to the attention of the consulate and Russian authorities.

Individual Associations will be informed of national holidays, so that a day off may be observed and the flag flown to express patriotism.

If the government allows this organisation to elect a representative to Parliament, such an election will be held to determine a suitable delegate.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ "Letter from Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Feb 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 36. The figure of 600,000 seems to be vastly exaggerated. By Yang's own admission, there were 5,000 Chinese merchants in Blagoveshchensk and 10,000 Chinese workers in the gold mines east of the town. "Letter from the Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 363-364

³⁷⁹ "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 27 Dec 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 608-609

Like the Petrograd Association, the East Siberian Association opened membership to all, not just merchants. All those above 30 and who could pay a 12 ruble “acceptance fee” were eligible to serve on the board (excepting the mentally ill, bankrupts and those with criminal convictions). Little wonder that when the Vladivostok consul, Shao Hengjun, conveyed these regulations to Beijing, he noted that such Associations were not the same as chambers of commerce, although both worked for the common good. “If the overseas Chinese are able to unite,” Shao wrote, “This will benefit the country.” Hence, he asked Beijing to approve the East Siberian Association’s regulations.³⁸⁰

The Associations’ sense of nationalist mission went somewhat farther than those of the chambers of commerce. But like the chambers, they spoke the same fundamental language. After all, chamber and Association leaders were mostly merchants or members of the social elite. The founder and first chairman of the Amur Oblast’ Association was Yang Hongyu, a Shandong native and the manager of an electric light company.³⁸¹ Yang’s successor, Ma Jianzhang, was also from Shandong. He had been a Harbin chamber of commerce leader and ran a large regional company.³⁸² One of the Association’s vice-chairmen, Song Yuntong, hailed from

³⁸⁰ “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 27 Dec 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (1), pp 606-607. The Foreign Ministry also gave its support to the East Siberian Association. See “Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 7 Jan 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 5

³⁸¹ “Letter from Amur Oblast’ Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Feb 1919” “Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consul Ji Jing, 14 Oct 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 37, 533

³⁸² “Letter from the Amur Oblast’ Overseas Chinese Association, 23 Apr 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 534. Ma graduated from a Vladivostok Russian language school and worked for Yi He Sheng.

Fengtian in south Manchuria.³⁸³ Song had previously been an advisor to the Heilongjiang governor's administration (then under warlord Bao Guiqing) and an officer with the 3rd Heilongjiang mixed brigade, but gave up his job to work for the Association. When, in April 1919, Song received the summons to resume official duties in Heilongjiang, he relinquished his post at the Association with regret:

From 1850 till today, the government still does not know how numerous the overseas Chinese are in Amur Oblast'. Decades of harsh laws have been borne with tears. Now, however, the tide has turned and we may recover. If there is a successor, we can advance without backing down. This is a matter of national sovereignty. The opportunity of a thousand years is fading with every passing day, time is not on our side... In order to consolidate national sovereignty, I and the Association's officers have exerted ourself to the utmost for several months, urgently planning the advance, organising this body. We are using the issue of protection to lay the foundation for future diplomacy.³⁸⁴

Song's words reveal a preoccupation with national humiliation. Like his compatriots throughout the Russian Far East, he also maintained that the Civil War was the "opportunity of a thousand years". A firm believer in an imminent "trade and racial war", Song insisted that China should send troops to Blagoveshchensk, not only to protect the overseas Chinese but also to serve as a toehold for economic expansion. China, he argued, could use the troops' remittances as a justification to set up Chinese banks in the region, in direct competition with Japanese banks:

Ever since Japanese troops were stationed in Amur oblast', they have set up a consulate, banks and all economic privileges have been manipulated by them with impunity. Their overseas citizens are one per cent of China's and China should exercise its right to manage them... The overseas Chinese have no protection and their economic rights will be lost. Their property

³⁸³ "Letter from Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Feb 1919" "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consul Ji Jing, 14 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 37, 533

³⁸⁴ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' general chamber of commerce [sic], 23 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 192

will be disposed of at will and their lives arbitrarily abused. I am a virtuous man and cannot abide this.³⁸⁵

So convinced was Song that he eventually left his job with the Heilongjiang administration and returned to work for the Amur Oblast' Association two months later.

The same ethno-nationalist pride can be found in a message from Hong Yao, the leader of the Chita Overseas Chinese Association. Like the Amur Oblast' Association, Hong emphasised the Chinese contribution to the Russian Far East and included workers in his statement:

Zabaikal'e and Irkutsk have many Chinese workers and traders, either selling goods or working in the mines and forests, farming or providing labour. The overseas Chinese have left their traces everywhere. The people of both countries trade with and benefit each other, Russia did not dare to look down on the Chinese and always offered help. The Japanese were alarmed and could not compete with them. Moreover the Chinese are honest and conscientious, thrifty and hardworking. Apart from a few large merchants, those who went to Russia mostly earned a living through their labour. They accumulated capital to become traders, transforming workers into merchants. After much hardship and suffering they are finally tasting success. That the remote wilderness of the Sino-Russian border was able to flourish is indeed mostly due to the efforts of the overseas Chinese.

All this was under threat during the Civil War. With this in mind, Hong argued, how could he shirk from his responsibilities to the community as a whole? More

³⁸⁵“Letter from the State Council, 18 Jun 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 513. On Song’s Social Darwinist views, see also “Letter from Song Yuntong, 18 Jun 1919”, pp 511-512, in the same volume. Nevertheless, it seems that Song was not a capable leader and both he and Yang had resigned by August 1919. Fresh elections were held to find replacements. See “Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Oct 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 533-534

importantly, how could the Beijing government not wish to protect the overseas Chinese in Russia?³⁸⁶

The founder of the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, Shandong merchant Yu Enbo, was even more vitriolic. Together with other merchants in the city, he had formed the Association in spring 1918 to defend the Chinese against the Russians, both White and Red. Neither the chairman nor the Association's staff received any salary for their efforts to negotiate with the Russian authorities. Instead, he said, they were motivated by sheer indignation:

I came to Russia on business and have seen the behaviour of the Russians. They are not human. Although they have eyes, ears, mouths and noses, they have no humanity and are to be feared... These brutal animals are extremely cruel, both heaven and earth despise them. With their riffraff and their lawless officers, they oppress their neighbours... The Chinese are a civilised race, why should we have no heroes or defenders who, seeing their brethren in peril and on the brink of death, can stretch out a helping hand to those in extremis?³⁸⁷

Besides sharing so much of the chambers' rhetoric, the Associations complemented many of their functions. In fact, the Associations were active in areas where chambers were dormant, extending protection and assistance into new areas of the Russian Far East - particularly those with large numbers of workers. In Vladivostok, Manzhouli and Khabarovsk, where the chambers of commerce were strong or the consular presence already well-established, Associations were absent. By contrast, the Associations were particularly active in the mining regions of Sretensk and Amur Oblast', or in towns which had achieved newfound prominence during the Civil War, such as Chita or Verkhne-Udinsk.

³⁸⁶ "Letter from Overseas Chinese representatives Li Hongsheng and Guo Wenbin, 7 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 77-78

³⁸⁷ "Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 14 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 165-166

The previous chapter has shown how, like the chambers, the Associations provided much-needed information on the situation in Russia. In some cases, their reports were commissioned by warlords or diplomatic officials. Hence the Associations acted as the eyes and ears of Chinese officialdom. The East Siberian Overseas Chinese Association, for example, was instructed by Heilongjiang warlord Bao Guiqing to investigate Chinese losses in Chita and Irkutsk. It eventually produced an exhaustive list of thefts and murders that included not just merchants, but also farmers, workers and hawkers.³⁸⁸ Vladivostok consul Shao charged the Sretensk Association with investigating a series of thefts and murders that had taken place in winter 1918 in the Ust-Kara gold mines. The Association proceeded to interview Chinese miners, investigate losses and produce a set of accounts for compensation. Under instructions from the Chita consul, the Sretensk Association reprised this investigative role in the Gorbitsa massacre.³⁸⁹

Unsolicited reports were also sent, often with appeals for armed protection. The Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association was particularly active in this regard, maintaining close contact with the Chinese border garrison across the river. Its accounts ranged from the fighting and refugee situation to a rough census of the Chinese population in the district. Further reports included Semenov's confiscations and complaints against the Chinese consul. These were sent to Beijing as well as to

³⁸⁸ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 18 Mar 1919" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 97-106, 162-186

³⁸⁹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Bureau for Overseas Chinese Workers, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 201, 212-215; "Letter from the Manzhouli chamber of commerce, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 379-383

Bao, whose jurisdiction included the Blagoveshchensk border. Some correspondence was even addressed to the Manchurian potentate Zhang Zuolin. Bao and Zhang, in turn, acted as the muscle behind the Association's appeals, backing its demands for compensation from the Russians and its requests for troops.³⁹⁰ In a similar vein, the East Siberian Association provided information on Semenov's recruitment activities, calling for them to be stopped. In April 1920, it even proposed a military plan by which troops should be stationed in Chita and Verkhne-Udinsk to protect the overseas Chinese there.³⁹¹ Finally, as the Terror went from White to Red, the Sretensk Association provided a full list of the soviets' punitive policies, calling for urgent redress.³⁹² And in August 1920, the Verkhne-Udinsk Association presented Beijing's envoy with an extensive list of losses and requested troops for protection.³⁹³

³⁹⁰ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 22 Feb 1919" "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 22 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 14 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 64-65, 187-191, 532-533; "Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Zhang Zuolin, 26 Jan 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 678-680, 680-681. For troop requests, see "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 15 Apr 1919", p 492 in the same volume. The Association also sent direct appeals for troops, which were eventually granted in Feb 1920. See "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 29 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 278; "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Jun 1919" "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 29 Jun 1919" "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 9 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 4 Nov 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 510-511, 515, 535, 574

³⁹¹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 201; "Letter from overseas Chinese representatives Li Hongsheng and Guo Wenbin, 7 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 77-78. Li and Guo were members of the East Siberian Association.

³⁹² "Letter from the Bureau for Overseas Chinese Workers, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 212-215; "Letter from the Manzhouli chamber of commerce, 26 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 379-383

³⁹³ "Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 248-253

Nevertheless, the Associations were not mere supplements to the chambers of commerce, providing information on areas that the chambers could not reach. Instead, the Associations proved to be far more active and effective. Some Associations went so far as to negotiate with the Russian authorities, Red or White. It was the leader of the Sretensk Overseas Chinese Association, He Yongli, who protested the killing of Chinese vegetable farmers to Semenov's troops.³⁹⁴ In June 1919, the Verkhne-Udinsk Association assisted Russian police in investigating the murder and robbery of four Chinese merchants, bringing the case to a successful conclusion. Lacking muscle, however, its attempts in August 1920 to negotiate with the Reds regarding confiscations and arrests were less successful.³⁹⁵ The Amur Oblast' Association, after talks with the Russians, managed to reduce the controversial residence permit fees from 57 to 55 rubles, and fines for overstaying from 25 to 10 rubles. River-crossing permits were cut from 5 to 3 rubles. In total, the savings from these reduced rates were expected to reach 10 million rubles a year. Furthermore, the Association secured the right to conduct the checks on Chinese travellers crossing the river, taking over responsibility from the Russians. Humiliating strip-searches were abolished.³⁹⁶

Such efforts could be dangerous for the Associations involved. In April 1919, when the Chita Association attempted to negotiate an end to Semenov's recruitment, they were accused by the White troops of being Reds. The Association officials were

³⁹⁴ "Telegram from the Heilongjiang military governor's office, 12 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 565-566

³⁹⁵ "Letter from the Chita consulate, 30 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 661; "Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 241-242

³⁹⁶ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' general chamber of commerce [sic], 23 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 191-192

arrested, beaten up and would have been shot if not for the intervention of Japanese officers. The Chita Association fared better under the Reds, organising a peacekeeping militia together with the Soviets after Semenov's withdrawal in August 1920. It also repatriated some Chinese residents who wished to leave Russia.³⁹⁷

When push came to shove, the Associations were not averse to strong-arm tactics. Frustrated with the Whites' continued depredations, the Amur Oblast' Association and the Blagoveshchensk chamber of commerce decided to starve the Russians into submission. In January 1920, therefore, both organisations formed a joint embargo committee to shut off vital supplies of grain, wood and other exports to Russia. If the Russians wanted food, the organisations argued, they would have to repeal all "harsh laws" and compensate the Chinese for their losses. On top of that, the Russians would have to allow Chinese warships to sail on the Amur, a critical part of China's drive to reclaim shipping rights. The embargo campaign received the support of the Heihe circuit intendant as well as the new military governor of Heilongjiang, Sun Liechen. Its effect was almost immediate. With official backing, the embargo committee swiftly extracted a promise from the Russians to abolish river crossing fees, loosen up the regulations on currency exports and grant the Chinese equal treatment to other foreigners.³⁹⁸

By far the most active Association was the Petrograd one. Before the November Revolution, the Petrograd Association had already negotiated with the Provisional

³⁹⁷ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 28 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, Shao Hengjun and Lin Jianzhang, 1 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 201, 207-208; "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 16 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Song Xiaolian, 27 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 608, 638

³⁹⁸ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 29 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 1 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 20-21, 22-23

Government to grant Chinese workers equal pay and treatment. A shelter was set up in Petrograd for sick and unemployed workers, together with a recruitment agency. The Association also gave out ration cards and assisted in criminal cases involving Chinese. Its Moscow branch, headed by Liu Wen and Zhu Shaoyang, mediated between Russian customs and Chinese merchants.³⁹⁹ As Russia spiralled into civil war after the bolshevik takeover, however, it became more pressing to repatriate Chinese workers. Initially, the Petrograd Association worked together with the remaining members of the Chinese embassy to obtain trains for repatriation.⁴⁰⁰ When contact with Beijing and its diplomatic officials was lost, the Association was left to its own devices. Working alone, the Association proceeded to negotiate with the Reds on the issue and even drew up a repatriation protocol. Zhu himself undertook a mission to South Russia and Ukraine in order to extricate the Chinese workers there. Although the Red government supported their efforts, the chaotic situation on almost all of Russia's borders thwarted any attempt at mass repatriation. In total, the Association succeeded in sending several thousand Chinese workers home.⁴⁰¹

The activities of the overseas Chinese associations show that they shared the same fundamental nationalist goals as the chambers of commerce. They were led by the same elite-merchant group which defined and justified its actions in nationalist terms.

³⁹⁹ "Letter from the Association of Chinese in Russia, 25 Sept 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 142-147

⁴⁰⁰ "Telegram from Li Shizhong, 6 Mar 1918" "Letter from Liu Jingren, 27 Jul 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 282, 458-459

⁴⁰¹ "Telegram from Zheng Yanxi, 11 Mar 1919" "Letter from Zheng Yanxi, 27 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Zheng Yanxi, 30 Nov 1919" "Telegram to Zheng Yanxi, 2 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 87-88, 509-510, 613-619, 621. "Letter from the embassy in Russia, 19 Jan 1920" "Letter from Zhu Shaoyang, 18 May 1920" "Telegram from Liu Zerong, 23 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 11-12, 127-130, 246-247. Zhu's efforts were rewarded when he was appointed Irkutsk consul in 1920.

In practice, however, the Associations were a manifestation of the opportunistic side of Chinese nationalism. Taking advantage of the Russian Civil War, they extended the reach of Chinese organisations more firmly into new demographics and regions. They had the express aim of uniting disparate sectors of diaspora society, including workers and farmers. Their charters were far more expansive than their chamber of commerce predecessors. Unlike the chambers, which seem to have functioned more as self-defence organisations, the Associations also took the initiative to negotiate with the Russian authorities directly. The Petrograd Association was the most active in this regard, but its far eastern counterparts were not far behind.

One testament to the activism of the Associations and chambers of commerce was how often their aims dovetailed with official ones. Warlords and the Beijing government alike were not averse to using such organisations as diplomatic fig leaves for their own actions. Over the Dauria confiscations, for example, the Foreign Ministry was well aware that although withholding the Boxer Indemnity was effective diplomacy, it would draw the ire of both the Russians and the Allies. In its official correspondence with the Russian ambassador, therefore, the Ministry emphasised that the initiative had come from the chambers of commerce:

Half a year has passed since the confiscation and negotiations have been repeatedly undertaken with various parties, with no real solution... The Chinese government must place importance on Chinese merchants' property and cannot reject the chambers' of commerce request to deduct the sum as compensation from the Indemnity.⁴⁰²

Like Beijing, warlord Bao also saw the utility in harnessing the overseas Chinese organisations. As military governor of Heilongjiang and then Jilin, he was the first port

⁴⁰² "Letter to Kudashev, 11 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 319

of call for many chamber and Association appeals. Bao used their pleas for help to justify military intervention above and beyond China's existing Allied commitments. He recognised that his plan to station Chinese forces from Dauria to Irkutsk could run into diplomatic obstacles. By using the overseas Chinese as a pretext, Bao argued, China could sidestep any foreign objections:

I have sent representatives many times to Russia and Mongolia to find out about the situation with the overseas Chinese there. They, too, have sent their cries for help. Having heard a rumour that Chinese troops will soon be sent there, they long for this intensely... China must make its justifications known to the foreign ambassadors first and work out its arguments as a first step. It must state that its reasons for sending troops is to protect Chinese residents and consulates in Russia.⁴⁰³

Sun Liechen, Bao's successor in Heilongjiang province, also understood the potential utility of these organisations. He instructed border officials not only to support the Blagoveshchensk embargo committee, but to take their demands even further. In addition to the demands for compensation and equal treatment, Sun argued, China should take advantage of the merchants' anger to demand the return of 64 villages occupied by the Russians after the Boxer Rebellion.⁴⁰⁴ The initiative of these civic organisations thus metamorphosed into a push for territorial revanchism, as if it was the most natural progression in the world. A shared nationalist rhetoric and sense of opportunism made this transformation possible.

⁴⁰³ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 26 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), pp 343-344. For Bao'

⁴⁰⁴ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 29 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 20-21

Beijing extends its reach

Nowhere is this common opportunistic impulse more clearly demonstrated than in the discourse surrounding the push for new Chinese consulates in Russia.⁴⁰⁵ If the chambers of commerce and Overseas Chinese Associations were examples of civic nationalism, the new consulates were their official counterpart. As of 1917, China had only two consulates in Russia: one in Vladivostok and another, more recent one, in Irkutsk.⁴⁰⁶ Although the Beijing government had been requesting additional consulates for a long time, the Russians persisted in blocking this.⁴⁰⁷ The reason for rejecting the establishment of new consulates was the same as those for Chinese civil society organisations: It would be “tantamount to a special Chinese kingdom in the territory”.⁴⁰⁸

Such a sparse network was clearly insufficient to deal with the large overseas Chinese population and the existing consulates were already creaking under the strain when World War I broke out. As we have seen, the influx of at least 100,000 Chinese wartime workers, their geographic spread and the issues arising from their conditions of work were the immediate impetus for the formation of the Overseas Chinese Association in Petrograd. At the same time, the worker problem also made further consulates an imperative. In February 1917, therefore, ambassador Liu

⁴⁰⁵ On the successful pursuit of nationalist goals by the Foreign Ministry, see Waldron, *From War to Nationalism*, pp 7-8, 279-280. On similar arguments surrounding the establishment of consulates in other countries, see Yen, *Coolies and Mandarins*, pp 138-140

⁴⁰⁶ The Irkutsk consulate was set up in 1915. “Letter from Irkutsk consul Wei Bo, 26 Dec 1917” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 195; “Letter to the State Council, 1 Mar 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 73-75

⁴⁰⁷ “Letter to the State Council, 1 Mar 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 73-75. Negotiations over the establishment of consulates in Turkestan were also stymied by the Russians. See “Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 29 Sept 1919”, pp 512-513, in the same volume.

⁴⁰⁸ Larin, “Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s”, p 853

Jingren pressed for an expanded consular network to protect these workers and foster trade. Equally importantly, it would enhance China's prestige:

Great Britain and France have no less than thirty to forty consulates in various Russian cities, and we need not even mention our fellow Asian country, Japan. Even weak Persia has twenty. Because there are so many overseas Chinese, the matters that arise are far more complicated than those of Japan and Persia... Other neutral countries have used the opportunity of the war to use their consulates to promote their goods. Only China lacks consulates in European Russia. This has had an impact, blocking the streams of revenue and hampering us in the commercial war.⁴⁰⁹

Couched in the inevitable language of national prestige and international competition, Liu's argument was irresistible. The Foreign Ministry agreed, but said that funds were lacking. As a money-saving measure, Liu attempted to employ non-Chinese businessmen as honorary consuls, but they were too engrossed in their own wartime enterprises to devote much attention to the overseas Chinese. Without official status, the Petrograd Overseas Chinese Association had limited clout.⁴¹⁰ In November 1917, therefore, Liu resumed his campaign, this time with the requisite dose of opportunism:

Now, just as Russia is reforming its political system and our country has entered the wartime Allies, the establishment of consulates is even more critical than before. Ever since the [March] Revolution in Russia, the power of the workers' faction is expanding daily. They are paying more attention to the postwar issue of Chinese labour. China cannot but take this opportunity to urgently change the destinies of tens of thousands of coolies.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁹ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 15 Feb 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (1), pp 25-26

⁴¹⁰ "Letter to Liu Jingren, 17 Feb 1917" "Letter from the Embassy in Russia, 12 Nov 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (1), pp 28-29, 173-175

⁴¹¹ "Letter from Liu Jingren, 12 Nov 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (1), p 174

Similar appeals were sent by leaders of the Petrograd Association calling for consulates to be set up in both capitals.⁴¹² A conference of Chinese merchants in Moscow, recognising Beijing's financial difficulties, even proposed to fund the initial expenses of setting up a consulate, as well as two years' operating costs. Twelve of the assembled merchants then issued a power of attorney to Liu Wen, the head of the Moscow branch of the Overseas Chinese Association, which he took to Beijing in November 1918.⁴¹³ In it, they expressed their desire for consulates in "all cities where the Chinese congregate", using language reminiscent of the Chinese ambassador:

China and Russia were the first to establish trade and consular relations. Chinese merchants have seen the breadth of Russian territory and its wealth. Hence, with great enthusiasm, they traded in both the Russian capitals and other cities in increasing numbers. All great trading cities have consulates and western countries have worked together to protect their residents. But China has the least representation... The Russians have treated us unlawfully and abused us, insulting the Chinese government. If there is no representative organisation to deal with this, the Chinese merchants will suffer both spiritually and physically.⁴¹⁴

As the Civil War and its accompanying *atamanshchina* developed, moreover, pressure in the Russian Far East for consular representation to protect the vulnerable Chinese community grew stronger. As in Petrograd and Moscow, the rising clamour for new consulates was phrased in nationalist terms. The similarities with the language used by the chambers of commerce and Overseas Chinese Associations

⁴¹² "Letter from Liu Wen, 10 Dec 1917" "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 17 Dec 1917" "Telegram from Liu Wen, 21 Jan 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 186-188, 191-192, 222

⁴¹³ Liu Wen had been a former Qing official who was studying mining in Petrograd. Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*

⁴¹⁴ "Power of attorney from the Overseas Chinese in Moscow, 30 Nov 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 583

are no less striking. In April 1919, for example, Heihe circuit intendant Shi Shaochang wrote to the Foreign Ministry to call for a consulate in Blagoveshchensk. Despite having 7,000 Chinese workers and merchants and 400 Chinese shops, the city had no consul. Instead, matters were dealt with by the Heihe circuit intendant and the Aigun foreign affairs official, although Blagoveshchensk was technically outside both of these jurisdictions.⁴¹⁵ Shi's appeal struck the key note, namely competition with Japan:

It would be advisable to appoint an official in Amur to be in charge of overseas Chinese affairs. Japan sent representatives from Qiqihar and Harbin last year to establish offices in Amur Oblast' and Chita, which perform consular duties. There are few overseas Japanese in Blagoveshchensk, but they have also sent a representative to be stationed there as a prelude to establishing a consulate. I have witnessed this myself and cannot stay silent.⁴¹⁶

Li Jia'ao, one of China's Allied representatives in Vladivostok and an "old Russia hand" with nine years' experience in Sino-Russian diplomacy, backed Shi's argument. Recalling painful shared memories, Li harked back to the 1900 massacre in Blagoveshchensk, when fears of a Boxer attack led the Russians to kill thousands of Chinese by forcing them into the Amur River. With the White Terror in full swing, Li said, history was repeating itself. To prevent another Blagoveshchensk tragedy, it was absolutely vital to send a consul to protect the overseas Chinese. More importantly, however, a consul would not "lose face" before the Russians:

Russian officials are arrogant and look down on China. The consul will be an official of the fourth rank, equivalent to a high-ranking Russian official. He will be seen as an equal and it will

⁴¹⁵ By 1917, the former border town of Aigun - which lent its name to the 1858 Treaty - was now under the jurisdiction of Heihe. The Heihe circuit intendant also fulfilled the role of the Aigun foreign affairs official.

⁴¹⁶ "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 4 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 138

be easier to manage things. This is the Russian custom and character.⁴¹⁷

Song Yuntong, the activist vice-chairman of the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, joined in the calls for a consulate in the Amur region. Once again, concerns of national prestige and international competition were paramount:

No matter how difficult this is for Beijing, no matter how straitened our finances are, our national sovereignty must not hang on the mere annual cost of a consulate. Moreover, the European War has come to an end and peace is being discussed, whereupon the trade war will immediately follow. The East Asian trade war will be focused in four areas: Irkutsk, Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok and Harbin... If a consulate is not quickly set up, there will be no way to ensure our future.⁴¹⁸

Zhang Silin, who had been sent by the Beijing government on a fact-finding mission to Omsk, urged his superiors to send a consul there after the Kolchak government expressed an interest in working more closely with the Chinese. Zhang's appeal showed concern about Japan's expanding influence in Russia:

Japan has three army and three naval officers in Omsk, and from time to time yet others come as observers. Other countries also have consulates and they are debating over whether to send military representatives... The people in Omsk and the other foreign representatives are friendly to China and hostile to Japan. Out of consideration for its interests in Siberia, China must do the same as other countries and send a military representative and consul. If not, once a proper Russian government is formed, China will not be able to enjoy the same privileges as other countries.⁴¹⁹

Later, when arguing for a consulate in Chita, Zhang joined the chorus of opportunism:

⁴¹⁷ "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 19 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 156

⁴¹⁸ "Letter from the Amur Oblast' general chamber of commerce [sic], 23 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 192

⁴¹⁹ "Letter from Canlu, 16 Apr 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 152

World War I gave China the opportunity of a thousand years. The historic unequal treaties can be abolished based on international law. The new economic privileges springing up around the world should be developed as and when they arise. Previously, Russia was powerful and very unyielding in its dealings with China. China had to tolerate this quietly and not disobey. Thankfully, the revolution is occurring everywhere in Russia today and trouble is widespread... In this time of disintegration Russia is weak. Before it consolidates, China should take the opportunity to...set up consulates to conduct foreign affairs.⁴²⁰

Beijing was alive to the new possibilities presented by the Civil War. In fact, the Foreign Ministry had appointed the Petrograd Association's president, Liu Zerong, as the capital's consul as early as December 1917.⁴²¹ The November Revolution shook up these tentative plans, if only for the moment. In February 1918, most of the embassy staff in Petrograd were evacuated and the issue momentarily lapsed.⁴²²

Nevertheless, the Foreign Ministry did not abandon its plans to exploit the disorder in Russia to expand China's consular presence. The tsarist regime had blocked further consulates but, by acting quickly, the Foreign Ministry would be able to present successive Russian governments with a *fait accompli*. In December 1918, therefore, the Foreign Ministry approved the establishment of more consulates in Russia, with one proviso: Because there was no recognised Russian government, the institutions

⁴²⁰ "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 5 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 217

⁴²¹ "Letter from the Association of Overseas Chinese in Russia, 17 Dec 1917" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 191-192. In September 1919 the Xinjiang warlord Yang Zengxin called for "trade representatives" - consuls in all but name - to be sent to Russian Turkestan. This was also approved by the Foreign Ministry. See "Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 29 Sept 1919", "Telegram to Yang Zengxin, 29 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 9 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 512-513, 513, 522-523

⁴²² "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 25 Feb 1918" "Telegram from Zheng Yanxi, 17 Aug 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 261, 476; Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 868

could not be called “consulates”. Instead, they should technically be termed “temporary consular executives” or “acting consular bureaux”, which were authorised by the Foreign Ministry.⁴²³ These were consulates in all but name and official Chinese correspondence certainly referred to them as such. Having reached this decision, the Ministry was happy to accept the Moscow merchants’ offer of financial assistance and embassy secretary Chen Guangping was appointed the first Moscow consul.⁴²⁴

The Civil War cut off Chen’s route to European Russia, but his appointment set the wheels in motion once and for all.⁴²⁵ In January 1919, the Foreign Ministry asked its diplomatic officials in Vladivostok for advice on where further consulates should be located. Consul Shao, after consulting with now-former ambassador Liu Jingren, suggested consulates in Khabarovsk, Blagoveshchensk and Omsk, as well as vice-consulates in Nikolaevsk, Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Chita.⁴²⁶ Liu’s own reply to the Foreign Ministry backed Shao’s recommendations, but also contained a long preamble reiterating his earlier stance on the necessity of consulates:

Even when there is peace, because we do not have the ability to protect ourselves, it is already unavoidable that we experience shame and humiliation. When matters arise, what is at stake will be hundreds of thousands of overseas migrants

⁴²³ “Foreign Ministry advisory council reply to the Moscow power of attorney, 4 Dec 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 548-549; “Letter to the State Council, 1 Mar 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 73-75

⁴²⁴ Chen eventually left to take up his post in October 1920. “Note to the general affairs department, 10 Dec 1918” “Letter of commission to Chen Guangping, 10 Dec 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 587, 588; “Letter to the State Council, 1 Mar 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 73-75

⁴²⁵ “Letter to the State Council, 1 Mar 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 73-75

⁴²⁶ “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 27 Feb 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 96

who will live in hardship and peril, with no way to survive. This neither protects sovereignty nor fosters trade!⁴²⁷

Shao's recommendations formed the basis of a March 1919 proposal to the State Council, in which the Foreign Ministry formally requested approval for consulates to be established in these six areas. This was granted by the State Council on 8 March. By early April, the Foreign Ministry had dispatched consuls to Omsk and Chita. Further discussion with Allied representative Li Jia'ao, Vladivostok consul Shao and ambassador Liu fleshed out the final details of China's new consular network. A third consulate should be established in Blagoveshchensk. Nikolaevsk and Khabarovsk earmarked for a vice-consulate. The existing consulate in Vladivostok would be in charge of Nikolsk-Ussuriisk and Iman. In late June, the representatives for Khabarovsk and Blagoveshchensk were appointed. Russian ambassador Kudashev, who had proven obstructive over the consular issue in the past, was conveniently kept in the dark.⁴²⁸

Beijing's opportunism bore fruit, decisively eliminating the need to obtain Russian approval for the new consulates. The new consuls encountered only token resistance from the White administration, if at all. By the end of 1920, when Red power had consolidated itself in the form of the Far Eastern Republic, the Foreign Ministry could claim that these consulates were already up and running and needed only to renew

⁴²⁷ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 20 Mar 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 108

⁴²⁸ It seems that Liu's reply reached the State Council and Foreign Ministry only after the Council meeting which approved the new consulates. "Letter from the State Council, 8 Mar 1919" "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 2 Apr 1919" "Letter to the State Council, 3 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 11 Apr 1919" "Letter to Canlu, 18 Apr 1919" "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 19 Apr 1919" "Minutes of the advisory council meeting, 19 Apr 1919" "Letter to the State Council, 28 Apr 1919" "Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 23 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 82, 134, 135, 145, 154-155, 156-159, 160-161, 201-202, 340. See also Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 84

their credentials.⁴²⁹ The success of this initiative proved so compelling that embassy attache Zheng Yanxi - who remained in Russia after ambassador Liu's departure - suggested setting up even more consulates to protect the widely dispersed Chinese workers and merchants. Writing in October 1919, Zheng recognised that the threat to the community now came as much from the Reds as from their White and tsarist predecessors. After all, the bolsheviks were now closing off trade traffic, enforcing military service and requisitioning property. He sensibly argued that the new Siberian consulates could not reach the Chinese in European Russia. Instead, Zheng proposed setting up a North Russian consulate, to care for the workers in Archangel and Murmansk; Ukrainian consulates in Kharkov, Kiev and Odessa; and consulates in the Caucasus, including Rostov and Batum.⁴³⁰ For the time being, however, such plans remained only on paper.

Once put in place, however, the new Far Eastern consuls varied in effectiveness.⁴³¹ Although they served as important sources of official intelligence on the situation in Russia, this function was performed more extensively and effectively by the Chinese civic organisations and the Manchurian warlords' border garrisons. China Eastern Railway officials in Harbin, fact-finding missions from the various ministries and the diplomatic channels in Vladivostok also proved more active. Existing negotiation networks - between the Heihe circuit intendant and the Blagoveshchensk authorities,

⁴²⁹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 Nov 1920" "Telegram to Guan Shangping, 6 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 335, 342

⁴³⁰ "Letter from the embassy in Russia, 19 Jan 1920." Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 12-13

⁴³¹ On the varied effectiveness of the consuls, see Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", pp 85-86. Nevertheless, Li and Xie's conclusions are questionable. They claim consul Wei in Irkutsk was popular, when in fact merchants filed petitions against him. Similarly, they accuse consul Chen in Chita of ignoring the Dauria confiscations, when the archival evidence suggests that he was fairly active in pursuing the matter (see below).

for example, or between the Manzhouli garrison and Semenov - seem to have maintained their importance. Some even eclipsed the new consuls. Nevertheless, most of the new consuls were animated by the same nationalist goals that accompanied their appointment. In most cases, they managed to protect their compatriots and assist in various rights-recovery projects.

Consul Fan in Omsk

The Foreign Ministry's Omsk consul, Fan Qiguang, had previously been the foreign affairs official in Heilongjiang province. At the time, his tasks included investigating the presence of German Prisoners-of-War in Russia.⁴³² He seems to have been the first of the newly-minted consuls to take up his post, as well as one of the most effective. Fan left Beijing on 22 April 1919 and arrived in Omsk in May, throwing himself into his duties.⁴³³ His first diplomatic foray was to test the waters regarding a revision of the tsarist-era treaties, which had been high on the list of reasons to send a consul to begin with. This was a clear attempt to gauge Kolchak's willingness to relinquish some of Russia's privileges in China. Unfortunately, this soon proved to be a dead end.⁴³⁴ Fan then turned his attention to more conventional consular affairs, such as repatriating Chinese forced conscripts, cajoling Omsk into resolving the

⁴³² "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 13 Jan 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 61

⁴³³ "Letter to Canlu, 18 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 16 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 154-155, 327-328

⁴³⁴ "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 16 Jun 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 327

Dauria confiscations and conveying messages between Omsk and Beijing.⁴³⁵ He aided in several murder investigations, negotiated the return of requisitioned houses and secured the release of some Chinese who were arrested without permits.⁴³⁶

Nevertheless, Fan was none too impressed with Kolchak⁴³⁷ and continued to champion the nationalist agenda. When Omsk asked to train White troops in Xinjiang, Fan forwarded this to Beijing, but not before warning the Russians that such a request would “hamper Chinese sovereignty” and that he was only passing it on out of goodwill.⁴³⁸ Having learnt of the burgeoning Chinese presence in the grey market and the problems this caused for Russian officials, Fan blamed the “corrupt” Omsk administration and the “prejudiced” Russian police. This was in spite of clear evidence that the Chinese were indeed trading semi-legally. To combat what he perceived as anti-Chinese discrimination, Fan introduced a consular permit system for Chinese goods imported to Omsk, so that the merchants “do not lose out”.⁴³⁹

Similarly, Fan negotiated the return of the Dauria funds in such a way as to minimise

⁴³⁵ “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 16 Jun 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 18 Jun 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 20 Jun 1919” “Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 26 Jun 1919” “Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 27 Jun 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 2 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 4 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 4 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 13 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 18 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 22 Jul 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 27 Jul 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 327-328, 331-332, 334, 356, 357, 364, 366-367, 367, 382, 393, 399, 417

⁴³⁶ “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 20 Sept 1919” “Letter from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 502-503, 525-530

⁴³⁷ “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 702-703

⁴³⁸ “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 18 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 331-332. The Foreign Ministry agreed with Fan’s sentiments and said that the training request should be denied. See “Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 18 Jun 1919”, p 332 in the same volume.

⁴³⁹ “Letter from Fan Qiguang, 30 Jun 1919” “Letter from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 360-361, 525

losses from the increasingly-discredited Omsk currency.⁴⁴⁰ He also attempted to persuade Omsk to allow the Chinese naval flotilla to sail up the Amur river.⁴⁴¹

Fan's commitment to national prestige was not only limited to China's material interests. He was also concerned with the Chinese image abroad. In August 1919, for example, he protested against a cartoon, posted on the streets of Omsk, depicting a rifle-toting Chinese with a queue. This was a clear reference to the large number of Chinese in the Red Army. Worse still, a baby was impaled on the rifle's bayonet. Omsk agreed to take the posters down in response to Fan's complaint. Finally, when Fan went to the police headquarters to look into some goods which had been confiscated from a Chinese businessman, he heard the superintendent loudly proclaiming, "The Chinese are here to argue again, how despicable! All Chinese should be hanged from the lamp-posts." Fan threatened to report the "impertinent" comments to the Omsk foreign department. The superintendent apologised but, in his report, Fan added that the insult "clearly shows that Russian officials are unreasonable and deeply hostile to the Chinese".⁴⁴²

His critical moment seems to have come in autumn 1919, when the collapse of Kolchak's armies saw the Reds advancing ever closer to Omsk. Although other foreign representatives were getting ready to leave, the Foreign Ministry specifically

⁴⁴⁰ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 10 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 438-439

⁴⁴¹ "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919", "Telegram from Fan Qiguang to Liu Jingren, 12 Aug 1919" "Letter to the Naval Ministry, 18 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 27 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 561, 585, 592, 612-613, 702-703

⁴⁴² The queue was associated with the discredited Qing dynasty. "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 528

instructed Fan to stay and arrange for the evacuation of the Chinese community.⁴⁴³

Fan's worst fears were realised in August, when the gradual exodus from Omsk commenced. Some Chinese tried to leave Omsk but were unable to board the packed trains. Acting on the initiative of the chamber of commerce, Fan and the Chinese military representative obtained several train carriages from the Omsk government and repatriated some of the town's 2,000 Chinese.⁴⁴⁴ There was a slight lull in the Red advance in September and October, but by November the flight from Omsk resumed in earnest. Fan again battled the Omsk government for transport and personally checked on the safety of the remaining Chinese in the city. Wrapped up in their own escape plans, however, the White administration prevaricated and an increasingly desperate Fan resolved to stay in Omsk to the end, sending his consular staff away without him. Finally, on 10 November, Fan managed to secure a passenger carriage and a goods wagon. He escaped Omsk with all the members of the Chinese community who wished to leave, some 100 people in all.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 7 Aug 1919" "Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 8 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 432, 435. Fan finally left when Omsk fell. See "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 3 Nov 1919", p 560 in the same volume.

⁴⁴⁴ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau conveying a telegram from Zhang Silin, 5 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau conveying a telegram from Zhang Silin, 6 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau conveying a telegram from Zhang Silin, 11 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 20 Sept 1919" "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 483, 485, 493, 503-503, 529-530; "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 56-59

⁴⁴⁵ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 4 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 7 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 9 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 10 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Xu Tongxi in Irkutsk, 26 Nov 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 561, 567, 569, 569, 607-608; "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 54-56

That was the last the Chinese authorities heard from Fan for more than two months, although fragments of his journey back to China reached Beijing in the interim.⁴⁴⁶ He only re-emerged in late January 1920, informing the Foreign Ministry of his and his charges' safe arrival in Harbin.⁴⁴⁷ A full report came in February, in which Fan described his harrowing escape on 11 November 1919. Any locomotive to which the carriages were attached was repeatedly confiscated for other trains, forcing Fan to fight just to keep his convoy moving. At Mariinsk, Fan even managed to get his carriages linked to Kolchak's retinue, but the entire chain proved too heavy for the locomotive and Fan had to get people to push his wagons. As Kolchak's transport faltered, Fan parlayed with the Czechs and Reds to get the Chinese carriages linked to other trains. At Irkutsk, he staunchly opposed any inspection of his carriages, fearing that the Reds might loot them. In Dauria, the merchants handed all their valuables over to Fan, fearing a repeat of Semenov's confiscations. Thanks to Fan's efforts, the merchants' funds - some 8 million rubles - reached Harbin intact on 18 January 1920. A few of the merchants and workers on board had fallen ill and died over the course of the 60-day journey. "There were many dangers along the way, as well as unexpected and awkward incidents which cannot bear recollecting," Fan concluded.⁴⁴⁸ Having returned to China, Fan capped off his consular career with a long and detailed analysis of the situation in Russia, weighing the relative strengths

⁴⁴⁶ "Telegram from Xu Tongxi in Irkutsk, 26 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau copying a telegram from Irkutsk, 5 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 607-608, 627; "Telegram from the Frontier Defence Bureau copying a telegram from Irkutsk, 5 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 3

⁴⁴⁷ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang in Harbin, 21 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 26

⁴⁴⁸ "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 54-56

of Kolchak, Semenov, the Czechs and the Reds, and concluding that the Japanese would not remain long in Siberia.⁴⁴⁹

Consul Guan in Chita

The designated consul for Chita, Guan Shangping, had earlier served in the same position in Irkutsk, where it seems he left under a cloud due to corruption.⁴⁵⁰ Guan took up his Chita post in June or July 1919. Like Fan, Guan served as an intermediary between the White administration and Beijing, and also became involved in negotiating the return of the Dauria funds.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, Guan was in Semenov's fiefdom and became an important source of information on the ataman's misrule. He was specifically tasked with investigating the maltreatment of the overseas Chinese in Chita and his reports carried news of Semenov's recruitment activities, military manoeuvres and cooperation with the Japanese.⁴⁵² After the Red takeover, Guan described the new currency regime, conscription and widespread

⁴⁴⁹ "Letter from Fan Qiguang, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 56-59. Fan continued to serve in Harbin as an advisor to the Foreign Ministry on Russian affairs. See "Telegram to Shao Hengjun and Fan Qiguang, 27 May 1920" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang in Harbin, 28 May 1920" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang in Harbin, 11 Jun 1920", pp 356, 357-358, 395-396, in the same volume.

⁴⁵⁰ "Letter from the Chita consulate, 30 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 661-663; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", p 86

⁴⁵¹ "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 15 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 29 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 31 Jul 1919" "Telegram to Guan Shangping, 5 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 13 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 21 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 23 Aug 1919" "Letter from Guan Shangping, 3 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 384, 420, 422-423, 429-430, 443, 461, 464-465, 480-481

⁴⁵² "Telegram to Guan Shangping, 4 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 19 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 369, 395-396; "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 17 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 24 Jan 1920" "Letter from Guan Shangping, 9 Feb 1920" "Letter from the Chita consulate, 23 Jul 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 16 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 29 Aug 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 6 Nov 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 20 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 23, 35, 68, 541-543, 608, 643, 729, 753-754. See also "Report from former Chita assistant consul Wang Zhixiang, 28 Sept 1920", pp 681-686, in the same volume.

requisitions that plagued the Chinese community.⁴⁵³ However, it seems that Guan confined his role mostly as a conduit of information and his correspondence did not make extensive mention of the overseas Chinese in his area. Neither did he provide in-depth reports of his negotiations on their behalf. Apart from the usual requests for troops common to all consuls, Guan's custodial efforts seem to have stopped at assembling the community's valuables in the consulate for safekeeping, and to advise the overseas Chinese to return home.⁴⁵⁴

Consul Ji in Blagoveshchensk

Consul Ji Jing left China in July 1919 and reached Blagoveshchensk at the end of August, taking up his duties in September. He submitted a detailed report on the early days of the consulate, saying that it was welcomed by the Russians and eagerly anticipated by the Chinese.⁴⁵⁵ The Blagoveshchensk chamber of commerce and the Heihe circuit attendant helped to secure suitable premises, which could not "seem to be worse than the Japanese consulate...since this would harm prestige". Ji's first act was to call for troops to be sent across the Amur to protect the fractious Chinese community, both against the Russians as well as from themselves.⁴⁵⁶ Like the other consuls, Ji also submitted detailed reports on Russian and Japanese activity in the region and, on many occasions, conveyed the Chinese community's

⁴⁵³ "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 8 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 799; "Letter from Guan Shangping, 2 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 70

⁴⁵⁴ "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 9 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Guan Shangping, 18 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 45, 193

⁴⁵⁵ "Letter from Song Yuntong, 18 Jun 1919" "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 29 Jun 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 511-512, 515

⁴⁵⁶ "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 22 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 504-505; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 20 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 8 Sept 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 535, 556

own requests for protection.⁴⁵⁷ Finally, he proposed the establishment of a consular guard, which could help settle disputes, curb banditry and supervise the Chinese scattered in the villages north of Blagoveshchensk. The consulate had already formed an inspectorate for this purpose.⁴⁵⁸

Of all the new consuls, Ji's relationship with his charges seems to have been the most fraught. He was less inclined than Fan to make excuses for Chinese sins, describing their criminal activities in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, Ji was largely effective in furthering Chinese interests. Once power changed hands in January 1920, he cultivated a good working relationship with the Reds, going so far as to request the suppression of White and Japanese activity in Heihe on the Amur soviet's behalf.⁴⁵⁹ He turned this *modus vivendi* to the Chinese community's advantage. Aided by the brinkmanship of the Amur Oblast Association's embargo committee, Ji negotiated the elimination of both the river crossing permits and the ban on currency exports from Blagoveshchensk.⁴⁶⁰ Residence permit fees for Chinese would also be

⁴⁵⁷ "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 5 Dec 1919" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 20 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 624-627, 648; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 9 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 15 Feb 1920" "Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 9-10, 82, 572-574. See also "Telegram from Blagoveshchensk assistant consul Qiu Fenling, 4 Nov 1920", pp 728-729, in the same volume.

⁴⁵⁸ "Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Nov 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 633-634; "Letter from Ji Jing, 29 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 204-205

⁴⁵⁹ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 27 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 14 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 28 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 109, 212, 360; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 14 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 27 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 22 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 41, 44, 101; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 29 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 8 (E dui Hua waijiao shitan)

⁴⁶⁰ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 19 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 86-87; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 7 Feb 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 683

equal to other foreigners'.⁴⁶¹ At one stroke, therefore, Ji was able to get several of the tsarist-era anti-Chinese laws removed. Together with the Heihe circuit attendant, Ji also arranged for a small force to be sent across the river to Blagoveshchensk to protect the Chinese, and obtained the approval of the Reds for these soldiers.⁴⁶² These troops were subsequently used to help mediate customs disputes, which often arose due to the Chinese violating currency export regulations. They also assisted in investigating crimes within the community.⁴⁶³ Although the main contingent was withdrawn in July 1920, a consular "police" of 10 men was left in the city.⁴⁶⁴

Finally, like Quan in Khabarovsk, Ji negotiated with the Reds over Chinese shipping rights on the Amur. He was the first to propose drawing up a local shipping agreement with the Reds to avoid "diplomatic complications". The project was subsequently taken up by Heilongjiang warlord Sun Liechen and Chinese officials in Heihe. In May 1920, the combined efforts of Ji and his counterparts in China secured a promise from the Reds not to interfere with Chinese ships.⁴⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Ji

⁴⁶¹ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 21 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 90

⁴⁶² "Telegram from Ji Jing, 21 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 26 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 29 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 7 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 26-27, 38, 46, 67-68; "Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 7 Feb 1920" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 633-634, 683; "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 14 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 39-40

⁴⁶³ "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 14 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 39-40

⁴⁶⁴ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 4 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 482; "Telegram from Ji Jing, 25 Jun 1920" "Letter from Ji Jing, 29 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 180, 204-205

⁴⁶⁵ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 30 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Apr 1920" "Telegram to Sun Liechen, 10 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 14 May 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 17 May 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 21 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 54, 58-59, 62, 67, 77, 78 (Dongbei bianfang)

seems to have been somewhat eclipsed by Zhang Shouzeng, the Heihe circuit intendant, who had been dealing with the Russians for a far longer time.⁴⁶⁶

Vice-consul Quan in Khabarovsk

Khabarovsk vice-consul Quan Shi'en began his duties in July 1919.⁴⁶⁷ Like his counterparts in the other Russian consulates, he conveyed information on the military situation in the Russian Far East - as well as Kalmykov's brutality - to Beijing.⁴⁶⁸

Quan seems to have been more even-handed than Fan in Omsk. Acting on the White administration's requests, Quan urged Chinese merchants to lower their prices, which had been a cause of great unhappiness among Russian workers.⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, when the Reds came to power in February 1920, he was able to secure the return of more than 1 million rubles in cloth and other goods that had been confiscated as contraband by the Khabarovsk customs. The Chinese merchants were naturally delighted.⁴⁷⁰ Finally, in July 1920, Quan dispatched a ship to rescue Chinese refugees who had escaped from the fierce fighting in Nikolaevsk earlier that year. When the refugees were brought to Khabarovsk, he was in charge of all the

⁴⁶⁶ See, for example, Zhang's earlier negotiations with the Reds, including a 1918 shipping agreement. "Telegram from Zhang Shouzeng, 21 Mar 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 114-115, 187-188; "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 25 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 823-824

⁴⁶⁷ "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 17 Jul 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 392

⁴⁶⁸ "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 23 Jan 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 30 Mar 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 1 Jun 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 10 Jun 1920" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 21 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 31, 165-167, 369, 388, 714. On the Reds, see "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 22 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 282-283

⁴⁶⁹ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 26 Dec 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 654-655

⁴⁷⁰ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 27 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 64-65

necessary negotiations with the Japanese, who by then had occupied the Maritime Province. Only then were the refugees allowed to disembark.⁴⁷¹

Through his tenure, Quan's primary preoccupation was the recovery of Chinese shipping rights on the Amur. After all, he had experienced Russian obstructiveness first-hand when his ship was held up by customs en route to his post in Khabarovsk.⁴⁷² Quan was a key player in this concerted effort and carried out negotiations in Khabarovsk to secure passage for Chinese merchant and naval vessels. Even after the shipping issue had been largely resolved, Quan persisted in placing it high on his agenda, "so that the overseas Chinese in Russia may have a new beginning".⁴⁷³ This was a nationalist goal *par excellence* and will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter.

Vice-consul Zhang in Nikolaevsk

Like Ji, vice-consul Zhang Wenhuan also submitted a detailed report of his arrival in Nikolaevsk. He reached Nikolaevsk in November 1919 and was given some trouble by the White administration, which doubted his credentials. Sensing that White power would not last long, Zhang ignored their objections and continued with his duties. The chamber of commerce rented a building for the vice-consulate, which Zhang considered inferior to the Japanese consulate: "There may be some loss of prestige". Difficulties continued with the Russians, particularly due to prohibitions on "yellow

⁴⁷¹ "Letter from Nikolaevsk assistant consul Zhu Dexin, 26 Aug 1920" T. Guo, Y. Wang, Y. Tao and J. Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 121-124 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁴⁷² "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 754

⁴⁷³ "Letter from the Khabarovsk vice-consulate, 30 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 383-384

labour” which had not been lifted since before the war. Chinese could not make up more than half the payroll in the region’s fisheries. “From this,” Zhang said, “The harshness towards Chinese can be clearly seen. Ever since the consulate was set up, the Russians have been more tolerant and do not dare to act as they please. However, their habits are deeply set and it is not easy to get them to comply.”⁴⁷⁴

Of all the consuls, Zhang seems to have had the most troubled watch. Because of this, he was unable to devote his attention to larger, unresolved diplomatic issues, such as labour laws or shipping. Instead, he was forced to devote his attention to coping with emergencies. Not long after his arrival, a major offensive broke out between the Reds on the one hand and the Whites and Japanese on the other. At the same time, a Chinese naval flotilla had been forced to winter in Nikolaevsk after being fired upon by White forces. During the fighting in Nikolaevsk, the leader of the chamber of commerce was caught in the crossfire and died of his wounds. The consulate itself was hit by stray shells. The unrest culminated in the bloody massacre of March 1920, when the Reds annihilated the town’s Japanese population. Shaken by the events, the Chinese community feared retaliation from the Japanese, since there were many Chinese among the Red Army troops.⁴⁷⁵ Zhang therefore organised an evacuation in May, taking more than 2,000 Chinese out of Nikolaevsk on sailboats. They were put up in warehouses in a village farther upriver. This was not a moment too soon, for reports later arrived from refugees of the burning of Chinese houses in Nikolaevsk. Even the Chinese vice-consulate was not spared.

⁴⁷⁴ “Letter from Zhang Wenhuan, 10 Apr 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 80-82

⁴⁷⁵ “Telegram from Zhang Wenhuan, 10 Apr 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 80

Nevertheless, Zhang had to deal with continued hostility from the Japanese. He supplied the starving Chinese refugees until two merchant ships eventually arrived in July with the promise of food and safe passage. The Japanese, who by then had recaptured Nikolaevsk, objected to the unloading of the ship's cargo, prompting further negotiations from Zhang. Eventually the ships were permitted to carry out their rescue mission and Zhang sent his assistant Zhu Dexin to accompany 925 Chinese to safety in Khabarovsk. An additional problem was the increasingly fractious Chinese naval flotilla, whose crew had endured the Siberian winter and had been unable to reach their destination for over a year. Once again, the vice-consul was in charge of mollifying the frustrated sailors and persuading the Japanese to allow them to depart.⁴⁷⁶

Any assessment of the new consuls' effectiveness must therefore be mixed. Nationalist rhetoric had accompanied the establishment of their posts and, in most cases, nationalist aims informed their activities. Fan in Omsk was particularly outstanding in this regard. Quan in Khabarovsk and Ji in Blagoveshchensk also set about recovering shipping rights and negotiating the repeal of anti-Chinese laws. Zhang in Nikolaevsk was preoccupied by more immediate, pressing issues, but his mention of the "yellow labour" question early in his career suggests that, given the opportunity, he may have initiated talks on that front. Only Guan in Chita seems to have lagged behind. If Guan's performance as Irkutsk consul was any indication, he may have been motivated more by personal gain than by the public good. Clearly, no matter how overwhelming nationalist discourse was, it could be filtered through the prism of self-interest and ambition.

⁴⁷⁶ "Letter from Nikolaevsk assistant consul Zhu Dexin, 26 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 121-124 (Dongbei bianfang)

The limits of nationalist discourse

The issue of the new consuls highlights several key ambiguities in the nationalist argument. The overseas Chinese and their officials were not simple patriots.

Nationalist rhetoric did not prevent individuals from pursuing private goals. Some of the chamber of commerce and Overseas Chinese Association leaders used their organisations as tools of corruption. In Chita, for example, the merchants complained that the chamber of commerce chairman had obtained his position by fraud and used the chamber's guard as his own personal enforcers. His accomplice, the chamber's vice-chairman, even gave himself the nickname "lord of heaven" [*batian*] and used the guard to murder a business rival.⁴⁷⁷ Later, in July 1920, Vladivostok consul Shao ordered a re-election of the Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chamber of commerce by fiat, arguing that the former chairman had not been able to deal with the killing of innocent Chinese by Japanese troops.⁴⁷⁸ Blagoveshchensk consul Ji accused the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association of being "manipulated by a small number of powerful people"⁴⁷⁹ and called for its reform:

Although there is an Overseas Chinese Association here, their managers, translators and messengers use their power to exploit the virtuous and shelter criminals. They have been denounced by others long ago and cannot be used as an instrument of policy.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ "Letter from the Chinese merchants of Chita, 16 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 242

⁴⁷⁸ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 192-193

⁴⁷⁹ "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 22 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 504-505

⁴⁸⁰ "Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Nov 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 633

Significantly, its activist vice-chairman Song Yuntong was singled out as one of the key offenders,⁴⁸¹ and both he and chairman Yang Hongyu had resigned by August 1919.⁴⁸² However, this seems more to do with Ji's personal hostility towards the Association's leaders than with the leaders themselves. There were no merchant complaints against Yang and Song. In fact, their departure brought about a decline in the Association's activities and its correspondence became far less extensive.

Ji's antipathy towards the Amur Oblast' Association is also proof against the assumption that shared nationalism meant brotherly solidarity. It is important not to overstate the degree of sympathy between the Chinese organisations and diplomatic officials. In Vladivostok, the chamber's confidence in consul Shao was temporarily lost due to the delay in the warship's arrival and the charging of fees for repatriation.⁴⁸³ In Blagoveshchensk, the bad blood between consul and Association was mutual. We have already seen Ji's accusations against the Association. In December 1919, even after the resignations of Yang and Song, the Association returned the favour, denouncing the consul in nationalist terms:

The circuit intendant and consul have no plan of action and are mistreated by others. We are like servants without a master. Some of us have even gone to the Japanese for protection. Sovereignty has been lost and China has become a laughingstock.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 22 Sept 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 505

⁴⁸² "Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 14 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 533-534

⁴⁸³ "Letter from the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, 16 Apr 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 8 May 1918" "Letter from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 88-89, 125-126, 138-140

⁴⁸⁴ "Telegram from the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Dec 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 663

The Association appealed to Manchurian potentate Zhang Zuolin and Heilongjiang warlord Sun Liechen in even harsher language, asking them to admonish Ji:

The insult to the country and misfortune to the people has reached a climax... The root of this disaster is because the consul fears the Russians like tigers. He sees the people as meat, caring only about his salary and position. He does not fight for the people. Hence the Russians look down on Chinese officials without exception. In their eyes, not only is there no consul, there is no China.⁴⁸⁵

Ji got hold of the telegram and accused the overseas Chinese of being “corrupt”, “slandering the consul and insulting the government”.⁴⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this exchange of fire seems to have been the result of momentary panic as White power wobbled in the Amur and the Chinese feared a bloodbath. The arrival of the consular guard calmed the situation, Ji was retained and Yang was re-elected to the Association sometime in 1920.⁴⁸⁷

Similar fault lines certainly existed between the overseas Chinese community and the Beijing government. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Dauria confiscations. The Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce were already deeply dissatisfied with Omsk’s “compensation” and Beijing’s weak response when, in March 1920, news broke of six crates of gold bars confiscated in Harbin from one

⁴⁸⁵ “Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Jan 1920” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 679. Zhang Zuolin promptly accused Ji of having “no guts” and recommended that he be replaced. “Telegram from Zhang Zuolin, 26 Jan 1920”, pp 680-681 in the same volume.

⁴⁸⁶ “Letter from Ji Jing, 6 Jan 1920” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 678-679

⁴⁸⁷ “Letter from the trade representative, 11 Aug 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 213-214

of Semenov's convoys.⁴⁸⁸ Sensing their chance, the chambers of commerce wrote to ask that the gold be used as compensation for the robberies at Dauria. As always, they phrased their request in nationalist language:

Semenov has taken money from merchants, provoked Outer Mongolia and is truly a bandit to China [*zhonghua zhi koudao*]. Because he has failed in Chita he has fled for his life with this gold. He is also a criminal to the Russians, all his unlawful actions are widely known. He absolutely cannot be considered among the ranks of political prisoners to be protected. We must ask first that his thief's gold be confiscated, that Russia may compensate for the overseas merchants' losses, and second that Semenov be handed over to Russia so that his crimes may be judged.⁴⁸⁹

The Foreign Ministry initially approved of this solution and proposed it to the State Council.⁴⁹⁰ However, in a later official draft to the State Council, the Ministry added that the gold should also be used to compensate the Wu Tong shipping company, since its vessels had been targeted by Ivanov-Rinov and Kalmykov.⁴⁹¹ This was before Wu Tong had even made its own claim to the gold.⁴⁹² After the State Council's

⁴⁸⁸ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 14 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Xu Nailin, 16 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 20 Mar 1920" "Letter from the CER Guard headquarters, 23 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 51-52, 52, 55, 58; "Telegram from the CER Guard headquarters, 13 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 138

⁴⁸⁹ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 20 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 56

⁴⁹⁰ "Telegram to Li Jia'ao and Shao Hengjun, 22 Mar 1920", "Letter to the State Council, 27 Mar 1920" "Letter from the Customs Department, 29 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 56, 66, 67-68

⁴⁹¹ "Draft to the State Council, 31 Mar 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 7 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 69-70, 79. See also "Letter to the Agriculture and Trade Ministry, Communications Ministry, Zhang Zuolin, Bao Guiqing and Sun Liechen, 21 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 78-79 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁴⁹² "Letter from Wu Tong, 13 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 89-90. Wu Tong had in fact written to the Foreign Ministry in March claiming financial hardship and asking for compensation, however these communiques did not mention the gold directly. "Letter from Wu Tong, 17 Mar 1920" "Letter from Wu Tong, 17 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 47-48, 48 (Dongbei bianfang)

green light, moreover, the Ministry changed its tune yet again, saying the gold should be split, with half used to repatriate the Chinese fleeing Irkutsk, Chita and Moscow and the other half going to Wu Tong. Bao Guiqing, by then military governor of Jilin, set up his own relief organisation in Harbin in May 1920 and also requested a share of the gold. The chamber of commerce claims were relegated to the back burner.⁴⁹³

The State Council eventually agreed to the Wu Tong-refugee split,⁴⁹⁴ but the merchants were incensed. Writing directly to the Foreign Ministry in May 1920, the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce argued that the damage to Wu Tong's ships had been carried out by Kalmykov, not Semenov, so why should Semenov's gold be dragged in?⁴⁹⁵ Their initial protest was ignored and the chambers of commerce petitioned again in September, accusing the government of cronyism, "bullying" and "lying" to the merchants and "getting their pound of flesh from the people". The government, they charged, was using refugee repatriation as an excuse to enrich its friends in Wu Tong. This claim was not without foundation, as many of Wu Tong's board members were influential power brokers in Beijing. For once, the image of national unity was shattered:

We would like to ask where the government has put those who have actually been harmed... The Foreign Ministry has shifted the funds to refugee relief on the basis that its own coffers are low. This is tantamount to taking away the rightful financial claims of a few based on a false premise about the general

⁴⁹³ "Foreign Ministry draft, 26 Apr 1920" "Telegram from the State Council to all the provinces, 27 May 1920" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 1 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 105, 152-151, 156-157. To be fair, Bao did send 20,000 *pu* (327 tonnes) of flour to relieve the overseas Chinese in Siberia. See "Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 17 Sept 1920", pp 241-242, in the same volume.

⁴⁹⁴ "Letter from the State Council, 30 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 108

⁴⁹⁵ "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 21 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 134-136

good. They are improperly moving the money into government coffers and giving it to Wu Tong... There are some hidden forces at work and the merchants cannot understand this.⁴⁹⁶

The chambers even went as far as to dub Wu Tong - and the supposedly corrupt Foreign Ministry - as a “second Semenov”. If Semenov himself heard of this farce, the chambers fumed, China’s prestige would be completely lost.⁴⁹⁷ For its part, Wu Tong accused the chambers of commerce of being “conceited” and misunderstanding the “greater good”.⁴⁹⁸ By the end of 1920, the matter had still not been resolved.⁴⁹⁹

Finally, divisions existed between the Foreign Ministry’s consular officials and the Chinese community as a whole. The consuls’ distaste was usually reserved for the more déclassé elements within the community - the term “mixed character” or “mixed origins” was used to describe them - although merchants also came in for their share of criticism. Consul Fan in Omsk, in lengthy reports from June and October 1919, described the profiteering and smuggling activities of Chinese merchants.⁵⁰⁰ Most of them, Fan argued, were low types:

There are only a few legitimate traders among the overseas Chinese. Most are shabby and look like beggars. They trade by setting up stalls along the road, selling matches or sunflower

⁴⁹⁶ “Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 226. On the list of Wu Tong’s board members, see “Letter from Wu Tong, 13 Apr 1920”, p 90 in the same volume.

⁴⁹⁷ “Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 231, 234

⁴⁹⁸ “Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 231-232

⁴⁹⁹ “Letter from the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 22 Dec 1920” “Letter to the Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk chambers of commerce, 30 Dec 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 372-373, 384-385

⁵⁰⁰ “Letter from Fan Qiguang, 30 Jun 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 360-301

seeds. They are of mixed character and it is easy to look down on them. Hence they have been mistreated.⁵⁰¹

In Blagoveshchensk, consul Ji harboured an especially bleak opinion of the Chinese, going so far as to say that “no crime was beyond them”.⁵⁰² Opium houses, gambling dens and brothels were rife, especially in the villages around Blagoveshchensk, Ji reported. The large proportion of workers and “ruffians” drew Ji’s disdain:

After the Japanese military came, they used hunting down the Reds as a pretext to abuse the Chinese. But this often happened because of Chinese informing on each other... Those who are strong mistreat the weak, this has become a common practice. Those who are rich are not afraid to run afoul of the law, they seek revenge for petty grievances and are willing to harm others. How regrettable this is.⁵⁰³

In Vladivostok, consul Shao did not take kindly to the fractiousness of the Chinese in his city and their propensity for opium, gambling and shady dealing. When the first Red takeover of April 1918 prompted a small-scale evacuation, Shao took the opportunity to repatriate many “vagrants” and “bandits” on the *Fei Jing* by force.⁵⁰⁴ In June 1918, after the prostitute affair (see pages 127-128) shook up both the warship and the Vladivostok community, Shao lamented that his charges were “shaming the country” and that the ship’s crew did not “honour themselves or their country”.⁵⁰⁵ And

⁵⁰¹ “Letter from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 525

⁵⁰² “Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Feb 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 40

⁵⁰³ “Letter from the Blagoveshchensk consulate, 22 Sept 1919” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 504

⁵⁰⁴ “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 25 Mar 1918” “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 9 Apr 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 17 Apr 1918” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 21 Apr 1918” “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 8 May 1918” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 May 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 49, 75-76, 91, 98, 125-126, 138-140

⁵⁰⁵ “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 16 Jun 1918” “Letter from Shao Hengjun, 20 Jun 1918” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 187, 190-192

in Nikolaevsk, vice-consul Zhang decried the behaviour of Chinese miners, who often became bandits, and called for the provision of a consular guard:

Nikolaevsk is surrounded by more than forty gold mines, hence the status of the overseas Chinese is more mixed than usual. Most are set in their stubborn ways and although they may be reined in by the law, they will not turn over a new leaf. If officials do not have power, they will cause trouble without restraint.⁵⁰⁶

These fault lines are a useful corrective to simplistic conceptions of nationalism. Nationalist rhetoric did not preclude the pursuit of other interests, disputes, or antipathy towards one's compatriots. In fact, it is testament to the power of such rhetoric that conflict, when it arose, was also framed in nationalist terms. Déclassé Chinese were criticised for their lack of personal and national pride. Consuls and civic organisations traded shots by accusing each other of damaging national prestige and pandering to foreigners. Despite their differences, therefore, officials and civic organisations persisted in speaking the same language. When they acted in unison, they did so in nationalist language; when they fought each other, they used precisely the same discourse. Questions of sovereignty and prestige still linked organisations and officials in a fundamental way.

A more problematic issue, however, is the incidence of nationalism in other social groups. Despite the attempts of the Overseas Chinese Associations to unify the community, it seems that nationalism remained an elite discourse dominated by merchants and officials. Whereas nationalism could be relied on to keep such groups in loose formation, it had less of a hold on non-elites. Bandits did not seem to have suffered from much nationalist scruple, instead taking advantage of the disorder in

⁵⁰⁶ "Letter from Zhang Wenhuan, 10 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 82

Russia to expand their activities and prey on fellow Chinese.⁵⁰⁷ Neither would Semenov's recruitment activities have caused so much concern if the Chinese were not in fact joining his units.⁵⁰⁸

More importantly, however, the allure of Red ideology was beginning to undercut the appeal of nationalism. Reports poured in claiming that as many as 30,000 Chinese had joined the Red Army, though perhaps not all of their own volition.⁵⁰⁹ In Verkhne-Udinsk, some Chinese preferred to join the soviet than their own organisations, much to the consternation of the merchants. Some 1,500 had enlisted in the Red Army and others were working in the foreign commissariat of the Far Eastern Republic.⁵¹⁰ The same thing occurred in Nerchinsk, where a Chinese committee, working under the soviet, enforced the Reds' decree that all Chinese merchants should submit

⁵⁰⁷ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Jul 1920" "Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 192-193, 248-253; "Letter from Canlu, 24 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 204; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 21 Mar 1918" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 14 Apr 1918" "Letter from Meng Enyuan, 17 Jun 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 46, 84-85, 188-189

⁵⁰⁸ "Letter from Sun Liechen, 24 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 346-347; "Letter from the State Council passing on a telegram from Meng Enyuan, 11 Jun 1918" "Letter from the State Council, 22 Jun 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 23 Jun 1918" "Letter from Wu Peiguang, 13 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 217, 236-237, 238, 294-297; "Report from Fu Yangxian, 16 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 254-258

⁵⁰⁹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, Zhang Zuolin and Sun Liechen, 4 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 61; "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 9 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 270; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 28 Oct 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 570-571. For a modern treatment of the role of the Chinese in the Red Army, see Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*

⁵¹⁰ "Letter from the Verkhne-Udinsk Overseas Chinese Association, 14 Jun 1920", "Letter from Canlu 24 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 165-168, 248-253; "Letter from Sun Liechen, 27 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 452-456

inventories of their goods.⁵¹¹ In Blagoveshchensk, several hundred Chinese had also joined the Red Army and consul Ji was thinking of ways to disband them.⁵¹²

Reports indicated that most of those who joined the Reds were workers. Zhang Silin, the Chinese envoy tasked to investigate the condition of the overseas Chinese in summer 1920, characterised them thus:

Those overseas Chinese who are serving with foreign organisations are of very mixed origins. Some were understandably forced to do so by cold and hunger. A minority of unworthy types are helping the Reds carry out their abuse, using it as an opportunity to enact revenge and oppress their brethren, but this is also unavoidable.⁵¹³

In Irkutsk, a worker named Liu Huan had been despatched from Moscow, allegedly with credentials from Lenin. He proceeded to set up a rival Chinese association with the aim of spreading Red ideology, but was opposed by the Irkutsk chamber of commerce leader and other Chinese workers.⁵¹⁴ Similarly, the Red administration in Blagoveshchensk managed to recruit some Chinese as guards, while others were busy printing socialist propaganda. The Chinese consulate complained in October 1920 that “unworthy” Chinese were being used to form a “Chinese bolshevik party”,

⁵¹¹ “Letter from Sun Liechen, 11 Nov 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 316-319

⁵¹² “Telegram from Ji Jing, 19 Feb 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 87. See also “Letter from Ji Jing, 14 Nov 1919” Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 633-634

⁵¹³ “Letter from Canlu, 24 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 251

⁵¹⁴ “Letter from Sun Liechen, 27 Jun 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 455. The report claims Liu was not successful.

complete with a newspaper.⁵¹⁵ Finally, the Petrograd Overseas Chinese Association itself came under the sway of the Reds. Its president, Liu Zerong - now calling himself Liu Shaozhou - joined the Petrograd Soviet and attended the First and Second Comintern congresses. In December 1918, the Association renamed itself the Association of Overseas Chinese Workers in Russia and began publishing a pro-bolshevik Chinese newspaper.⁵¹⁶ The new Association's first official communique to the Beijing government, dated June 1920, was couched in terms more class-based than nationalist:

We ask the Chinese people and their organs to nurture the seedlings of revolutionary spirit in China, so as to oppose the imperialist and capitalist treaties of foreign enemies. The battles of the soviet republic are none other than the people escaping from oppression. The Association asks the Chinese people and their organs to recognise it at once and refuse any aid to the countries opposing Russia.⁵¹⁷

Workers' organisations eventually came into conflict with the chambers of commerce and Overseas Chinese Associations, especially since they received the support of the new soviet authorities.⁵¹⁸

This seems to justify Gregor Benton's argument that the Chinese workers were "unencumbered by strong nationalist loyalties" and "even less inhibited than the Red

⁵¹⁵ "Letter from Zhang Shouzeng, 14 Jun 1920" "Letter from Qiu Fenling, 31 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 167-168, 287. Chinese workers across the Xinjiang border were also being recruited. See "Telegram from Yang Zengxin, 8 Oct 1920, pp 266-267, in the same volume.

⁵¹⁶ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 23; Y. Li, *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*; Gamsa, "Mixed Marriages in Russian-Chinese Manchuria", p 56

⁵¹⁷ "Telegram from the Association of Chinese Workers in Russia, 8 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 500. See also "Letter from the State Council, 14 Jul 1920", pp 520-521 in the same volume.

⁵¹⁸ Larin, "Chinese Immigration in Russia", p 877; Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", pp 85-86; Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", pp 114-116

Army's non-Russian Europeans about solidarising with their Soviet brethren".⁵¹⁹ Of course, it is important not to overstate this. The previous chapter has shown that Red propaganda aimed at Chinese workers often contained nationalist arguments.⁵²⁰ The workers may have been persuaded more by the Reds' anti-imperialist rhetoric than by the language of class warfare. But, by the end of 1920 at least, clear signs emerged that socialism was beginning to win the support of overseas Chinese workers, pitting them against the more nationalist-oriented merchants and officials.

With this caveat in place, however, the ubiquity of nationalist discourse among the Chinese merchants and officials in the Russian Far East is undeniable. This combined memories of national humiliation with fears of further imperialist encroachment, whether by the Russians or by Japan. It raised the spectre of international competition as well as the tantalising promise of revival. As a call to action, it galvanised the overseas Chinese into organising, and on a broader basis than before. At the same time, it pushed Beijing into expanding its diplomatic institutions in the Russian Far East, deftly bypassing Russia's previous objections. Nationalist discourse served as an important cohesive force, driving the overseas Chinese to take advantage of the "opportunity of a thousand years" presented by the Russian Civil War. Clearly, it was not just the language of victimhood. It could be a deeply activist discourse as well.

⁵¹⁹ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 29

⁵²⁰ See, for example, "Letter from Kudashev, 29 Aug 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 474-475; "Telegram from the Jilin governor's office, 17 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 20-21. Benton also attributes the home-grown Chinese Communist Party's great appeal to its association with nationalist causes. Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 25

In the case of the chambers, associations and consulates, the report card is somewhat mixed. Not all organisations were equally successful. The new consuls varied in their effectiveness. The next chapter, however, examines a case in which the cohesive power of nationalist discourse produced an unambiguous victory for China. Chambers of commerce, overseas Chinese associations, warlords, border officials, consuls and the Beijing government rallied around one single rights-recovery issue and resolved it decisively. The question of Chinese shipping rights on the Amur River is a stark illustration of how the “opportunity of a thousand years” could be seized - and won.

Chapter 3: Taming the Black Dragon

The previous chapter has shown how nationalist rhetoric inspired the overseas Chinese, their officials and the Beijing government to respond opportunistically to the turbulence of the Russian Civil War. They did so by forming new diaspora organisations and consulates, with the express aim of furthering Chinese interests. Clearly, divisions remained. Red ideology competed with nationalist discourse for the loyalty of Chinese workers. But within elite merchant and official groups at least, nationalism fostered a significant degree of cooperation. It provided the driving force for attempts at “rights-recovery” and national restoration.

Both the overseas Chinese associations and the consulates achieved mixed results, although the language of nationalism was ubiquitous in their correspondence. This chapter will focus on an issue in which the Chinese were unambiguously successful in reclaiming rights which had been “lost” to tsarist Russia: The Amur shipping question. Unlike previous chapters, it will study the activities of officials and civil society organisations on both sides of the border. By adopting a cross-border approach, the picture emerges of a concerted, multi-layered effort to re-establish China’s presence on the Amur River. From beginning to end, this was framed as a nationalist issue in which China was a victim of Russian imperialism. Once again, the Russian Civil War was the “opportunity of a thousand years” to redress this wrong.

In particular, this chapter will focus on the activities of the Wu Tong Shipping Company, which embodied merchant-official collaboration in pursuit of a nationalist goal. Although Wu Tong began life as a Harbin merchant-led firm, it defined its mission from the outset in nationalist terms. It received backing from Bao Guiqing,

the military governor of Heilongjiang. Its board comprised important financiers with close links to the Beijing government. In its heyday, therefore, Wu Tong had access to the corridors of power. Wu Tong was a trailblazer in restoring Chinese merchant shipping on the Amur. By the end of 1920, it was largely effective in achieving this.

The chapter will also deal with the Beijing government's Amur River flotilla.

Encouraged by the advances on the merchant shipping front, the Navy Ministry was also seized by the spirit of opportunism. It proposed to test Russian resolve by sending Chinese gunboats to the Amur. This was met with much enthusiasm from the Chinese on both sides of the border. Although progress was beset with one crisis after another, consuls, chambers of commerce and Manchurian warlords were drawn into the project. As with merchant shipping, the flotilla issue also came to a successful conclusion in 1920.

Thus far, the Amur shipping question has not been adequately studied, perhaps due to the focus on railways as an instrument of imperial power projection. Sow-Theng Leong's seminal work on Sino-Soviet diplomacy dedicates a mere seven pages to Amur shipping and focuses overwhelmingly on the activities of the Foreign Ministry. Far less attention is given to nationalist opportunism along the border or to the particular rhetoric they used.⁵²¹ Those works which do deal with the Amur River frame it as a quintessential contested frontier region. Stephen Marks, for example, emphasises that Russian shipping was vital to the development of the new far

⁵²¹ Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp 63-69. Leong's account, while correct in most respects, also contains certain factual errors. For example, he neglects to mention several journeys made by Chinese merchant ships to the mouth of the Amur. Over the Amur flotilla issue, Leong claims that the Chinese were only able to enter Russian waters on humanitarian grounds. Taken together, these errors underestimate the activism and effectiveness of Chinese policy.

eastern territories, but competition with the Chinese was also an important goal.⁵²²

The most extensive study on the subject, V.V. Zatssepine's 2006 thesis on the Amur region, further develops the "contested frontier" model. The Amur River, he writes, was at the forefront of colonial competition in the Russian Far East. Until Russia's great eastward push, it had been one of Qing China's domestic rivers. After 1858, its status as the dividing line with Russia served as an abiding symbol of China's territorial losses. At the same time, however, the Amur represented a link between both empires. Zatssepine's work focuses on the terrain of the region: The Amur's tributaries, their characteristics and navigability. He argues that the river's geography had a significant impact on the region's colonists, whether Russian or Chinese. These environmental conditions fundamentally limited and directed colonial development, creating a hybrid society that was forced to forge cross-border alliances in order to survive.⁵²³

Zatssepine's approach highlights how regional interactions took place over a shared geographical space. His conclusions place him broadly in line with other scholars of the transcultural school. Nevertheless, Zatssepine's study contains many of the pitfalls which, as was noted in the introduction, are characteristic of this school. His work is based mostly on Russian-language sources, especially those linked to the Manchurian colonial project.⁵²⁴ Oddly enough for a work dealing with the Amur river frontier, Zatssepine also has little to say about shipping.⁵²⁵

⁵²² Marks, *Road to Power*, pp 25-26, 165

⁵²³ V.V. Zatssepine, *Beyond the Black Dragon River: Encounters and Decline of the Qing and Russian Empires: 1860-1917*. PhD, University of British Columbia (2006), pp 4-5, 27-34, 200-206. See also V.V. Zatssepine, "The Amur: As River, as Border", in D. Lary (ed.), *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), pp 151, 157-159

⁵²⁴ Zatssepine, *Beyond the Black Dragon River*, pp 25-26, 30-31

⁵²⁵ He does, however, mention Sino-Russian trade on the Sungari, which at the time was one of China's domestic rivers. Zatssepine, *Beyond the Black Dragon River*, pp 134-135

The Chinese Foreign Ministry archives reveal a different story. More than a thousand pages of correspondence are devoted to the Amur shipping question. Clearly, this issue was of great importance to the Chinese at the time, and hence deserves greater scholarly attention. Throughout the archival sources, the themes raised in the previous chapters of this thesis - national victimhood, opportunism and nationalist collaboration - come across loud and clear. This is not to say, of course, that cross-border interactions did not take place across the Amur border, or that such interactions were necessarily hostile. Nevertheless, the internal narrative surrounding the shipping question shows that nationalist and rights-recovery motivations were critical to the Chinese view of the Amur River. Such language permeated multiple sectors of society. Merchants, Manchurian warlords and the Beijing government cooperated to reinstate China's navigation rights.

The Amur shipping controversy is a microcosm of "Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics". It perfectly encapsulates the fear and opportunism that characterised the Chinese response to the Russian Civil War. Significantly, the Chinese were able to obtain concrete gains. By the end of 1920, a new shipping agreement had been drawn up with the Reds in Blagoveshchensk, Chinese vessels were sailing to the mouth of the Amur and a small gunboat flotilla had established itself on the Sungari. All of these achievements were seen as a nationalist victory for the Chinese.

The geography of victimhood

As with Zatsepine's work, it is necessary to begin with a geographical study. The Amur River (*Heilongjiang*, or "Black Dragon River" in Chinese) begins at the confluence of the Shilka and Argun rivers, ending 1,755 miles later in the Strait of

Tatary. In its lower reaches it connects with the “Chinese” Sungari (*Songhua*) and Ussuri rivers, linking the Amur to Manchuria and the Maritime Province. Although the entire stretch of the Amur is navigable, shipping is only possible six months in the year - roughly from May to October - when the river is not frozen over. Due to the rapid flow of the water as well as the river’s variable depth, the contours of the Amur often change, creating sandbanks and new channels especially in the summer months. Lighthouses, warning markers and dredging equipment are absolutely necessary to maintain safety. These, in turn, have to be frequently monitored and moved according to the variations in the river. Whoever wished to undertake large-scale shipping on the river had to be willing to implement the organisational and infrastructure requirements that Amur navigation demanded.⁵²⁶

The issue of navigation rights had its roots in the very first “unequal” Sino-Russian treaty, the 1858 Treaty of Aigun, which delineated the border between both countries. According to the Treaty, the left bank of the Amur belonged to Russia and the right bank, to China. Both China and Russia - and only China and Russia - were allowed to sail on the Amur, Sungari and Ussuri rivers.⁵²⁷ This right was confirmed in the 1881 Treaty of St Petersburg, but with the proviso that the actual implementation of these

⁵²⁶ “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Jun 1919” “Letter from Shi Shaochang, 12 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 539-542, 569-583. Zatssepine, *Beyond the Black Dragon River*, pp 27-34; Zatssepine, “The Amur”, pp 152-153; Marks, *Road to Power*, pp 25-26.

⁵²⁷ A discrepancy exists between the Russian and Chinese texts of the Aigun Treaty. The Chinese text implies that the stretch of the Amur between Khabarovsk and the sea is the Songhua (Sungari), whereas the Russian text merely calls it the “mouth of the Amur”. Properly speaking, the Chinese Sungari is a Chinese inland river, both banks of which were Chinese territory, and the Russians were barred from sailing there. “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Mar 1918” “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 13 Mar 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 93-94, 106; “Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919” “Letter to Sun Liechen and Guo Zongxi, 20 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 548-551, 662-663; “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Dec 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 152-154 (Dongbei bianfang). See also Marks, *Road to Power*, p 165; Clausen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, pp 57-58

rights had to be resolved first. This meant that the technical aspects of river navigation - including shipping regulations, safety facilities and so on - had to be settled before China could actually launch its vessels on the Amur.⁵²⁸ On paper, therefore, Russia had no objection to Chinese shipping on the Amur. But in practice, this was an empty gesture, as the Chinese did not yet have modern or large-scale shipping operations on the river.⁵²⁹ As long as no Chinese steamships appeared on the docks to challenge Russian domination, the Russians were inclined to be generous.

Moreover, the Aigun and Petersburg treaties left certain matters vague. After the 1860 Treaty of Peking, the Maritime Province region was ceded to Russia and the stretch of the Amur from Khabarovsk to the sea now passed through wholly Russian territory. The Aigun and Petersburg treaties were not updated to reflect this. Hence, it was unclear if Chinese ships would still be allowed access to the sea.⁵³⁰ Neither was it clear if the navigation rights laid out in the treaties included military vessels. In

⁵²⁸ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 14 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 20 May 1919" "Letter from Fu Jiang, 4 Jun 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" R. Deng, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 495-496, 512-513, 529-530, 548-551

⁵²⁹ "Letter to Kudashev, 6 Apr 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 27

⁵³⁰ "Letter from Guo Zongxi and Wang Shuhan, 6 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 14 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 625-630, 711-716; "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 22 Nov 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 147-150 (Dongbei bianfang)

practice, Russian gunboats did patrol the river, but Chinese naval craft were completely absent.⁵³¹

As long as the Chinese had no need to claim their full share of the river, the Amur shipping question could remain in abeyance.⁵³² By 1917, however, the picture changed completely. The first chapter of this thesis has shown that natural disasters, famine and political unrest in the Chinese interior prompted large-scale migration to the Sino-Russian border and into Russia itself. The development of Russia's far eastern territories also led to a hunger for labour, raw materials, consumer goods and grain. This led to an exponential increase in cross-border trade and passenger traffic on the Amur River. In March 1917, the Heihe chamber of commerce estimated that 2 million *pud* (32,760 tonnes) of freight was being shipped along the river per annum. It also found that 50-60,000 passengers a year travelled along the river, a large number of whom were itinerant Chinese gold miners.⁵³³ To meet the demand, the Russians set up a shipping consortium on the north bank of the Amur in spring 1916. The China Eastern Railway had its own shipping office, with 19 steamers and 37 cargo boats on the Amur and Ussuri. A Foreign Ministry official in Beijing estimated that

⁵³¹ "Letter from the head of the Amur Packet Boat Office, 26 Sept 1917" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Mar 1918" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 13 Mar 1918" "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 26 May 1918" "Letter from the Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918" Deng, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 40-41, 93-94, 104-105, 206-207, 363-364; "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Omsk consul Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 6 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 561, 566

⁵³² "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Oct 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 44-45

⁵³³ "Letter from the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 20 Mar 1917" Deng, T. Guo and Q. Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 24-25

some 100 Russian ships were plying the river in 1917; according to Leong, the Russians had no less than 262 steamships and 300 lighters.⁵³⁴

It therefore became an imperative to develop and institutionalise Chinese shipping on the Amur, but the Russians obstructed this at every turn. In 1908, when a Chinese steamship attempted to sail on the river, the Russians objected on the basis of the 1881 Petersburg Treaty. They argued that new shipping regulations had to be drawn up before the Chinese could sail. At the negotiating table, however, both sides could not reach an agreement and the Chinese were still barred from the Amur. The same thing happened again in 1915, when Beijing attempted to revive the shipping issue. The Russians claimed that the time was not ripe and that Chinese ships did not have sufficient horsepower. Worse still, they demanded further concessions in North Manchuria before they would compromise on the shipping question, a clear demonstration of Russia's bad faith on the matter. Naturally, this was anathema to the Chinese and the matter lapsed once more.⁵³⁵ Local negotiations initiated by the Manchurian governors met a similar fate.⁵³⁶ Moreover, since the Russians had begun sailing their own vessels on the river, they had sunk significant sums into developing the necessary infrastructure for shipping, including lights, pontoons, buoys and so on.

⁵³⁴ "Letter from the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 20 Mar 1917" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Oct 1917" "Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Dec 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 24-25, 44-45, 372-376, 436-438; Clausen, *The Making of a Chinese City*, pp 57-58; Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p 64

⁵³⁵ Specifically, the Russians demanded that their concessions in North Manchuria should be equal to the Japanese concessions in South Manchuria. "Letter to Kudashev, 6 Apr 1917" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 7 Apr 1917" "Letter from the head of the Amur Packet Boat Office, 26 Sept 1917" "Letter from Kudashev, 26 Oct 1917" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Dec 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 27, 27-28, 40-41, 46, 436-438; "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 20 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 512-513

⁵³⁶ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Oct 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 44-45

A bureau had been established to oversee these facilities - most of which were along the Russian bank - and monitor the condition of the river. The cost of lighting alone was estimated at 400-500,000 rubles and the Russians would not allow Chinese ships to enjoy these shared facilities without some form of compensation.⁵³⁷ And to cap it all off, the Russians eventually banned the sale and hire of ships to Chinese, which dealt the death blow to Chinese shipping.⁵³⁸

What resulted was a Russian monopoly on the Amur shipping trade, which put the Chinese at the mercy of whatever prices they wished to impose. The only way to get around Russian shipping restrictions was to transport items by rail, hire Russian vessels under false pretences, or ship goods up the Chinese Sungari to the Amur junction and find a representative to sell them north of the river, in Khabarovsk.⁵³⁹

This frustrated merchants and officials alike, prompting attempts to challenge Russia's predominance. In 1915, the then-governor of Heilongjiang province acquired a steamship, the *Qing Lan*, to make official visits and carry out inspections.⁵⁴⁰ In fact, the ship was deliberately purchased as a test. It was selected to conform to all

⁵³⁷ "Letter from the head of the Amur Packet Boat Office, 26 Sept 1917" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 40-41, 187-188; "Letter from the Customs Department, 19 May 1919" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 17 Jun 1919" "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 12 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 510-512, 534, 569-583; Zatsopine, "The Amur", p 159; Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p 64-65

⁵³⁸ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 Apr 1918" "Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 138, 372-376; "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 456

⁵³⁹ "Letter from Kudashev, 22 Aug 1918" "Telegram from Meng Enyuan and Guo Zongxi, 28 Sept 1918" "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 12 Oct 1918" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, pp 478-479, 523-524, 544-545; "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 23 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 538

⁵⁴⁰ "Qing Lan" roughly means "celebrating the great waves". "Letter from the head of the Amur Packet Boat Office, 26 Sept 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 40-41

Russian specifications with regards to make, horsepower and so on, making it impossible for the Russians to block the vessel on technical grounds. The *Qing Lan* never set sail, however, as the Russian governor at Khabarovsk argued that further negotiations would have to be carried out beforehand, and at a national level.⁵⁴¹ Even Chinese customs boats were confiscated by the Russians.⁵⁴²

Emanating as it did from China's many "unequal treaties", the shipping issue became a nationalist cause *par excellence*. The Russians were accused of denying China its rightful place on the Amur, which in any case had been a Chinese river to begin with. Russian restrictions were seen as suffocating Manchurian trade and violating Chinese sovereignty. Such arguments were startling in their ubiquity and it was often merchants and local officials who proved the most contentious. In March 1917, for example, five chambers of commerce and eight trade bureaux along the Heihe border wrote to the Beijing government to protest Russian domination of Amur shipping. Since the Manchurian governors had ignored the merchants' pleas for help, the chamber said, it had no choice but to ask the various ministries for redress:

This sickens the country and the people... When our economic rights flow outwards, the suffering of the merchants may still be considered a small thing, but all these areas will be hamstrung as well: trade, border defence, mining and the settling of uncultivated territory. Each and every one of these issues will have a great impact on the loss of sovereignty and danger to our territory.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴¹ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Oct 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 44-45

⁵⁴² "Telegram from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 28 Jul 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 341-342

⁵⁴³ "Letter from the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 20 Mar 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 24

Their message carried all the nationalist hallmarks of a chamber of commerce appeal and, in many ways, it echoed Russian arguments about the virtues of the Trans-Siberian Railway. It claimed that the Russians' price-gouging meant more than a financial loss to the merchants - it was also a direct loss to national sovereignty. Developing Chinese shipping would allow soldiers to be transported quickly to defend the border. Finally, a better transport network would help bring migrants to the sparsely-populated frontier: "Yesterday's migrants are today's colonists. The cultivation of agriculture is indeed part of frontier governance."⁵⁴⁴

This was more than mere rhetoric. The Heihe border chambers said that it had already reached an agreement with Chinese merchants on the Sungari to provide funds for a shipping initiative. That same month, they sent representatives from five chambers of commerce on the Chinese side of the border to Beijing, requesting an audience with the government to discuss this further.⁵⁴⁵ The Foreign Ministry could only send a half-hearted memo to the Russian ambassador, Kudashev, and promise the Heihe border chambers that fresh talks would take place on the issue.⁵⁴⁶

Similarly, local officials were not averse to using nationalist language in order to prod Beijing into action. In September 1917, the Sungari post-boat office sent in its own appeal lamenting the underdeveloped state of Chinese shipping. It recommended that China kick-start the shipping rights-recovery project by offering to pay half of the

⁵⁴⁴ "Letter from the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 20 Mar 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 25

⁵⁴⁵ "Letter from the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 20 Mar 1917"; "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 31 Mar 1917" "Letter from the Heihe border chambers of commerce representatives, 31 Mar 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 24-25, 26, 26-27

⁵⁴⁶ "Letter to Kudashev, 6 Apr 1917" "Letter to the representatives of the Heihe border chambers of commerce, 7 Apr 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 27, 28

lighting infrastructure costs. The money could be obtained from officials and especially merchants, since the latter would be enthusiastic about the new trading opportunities. Based on revenue projections, the office calculated, this expenditure could be recouped in two to three years. But its main argument was not purely financial:

Once the Amur shipping routes are opened to us, people will be falling over themselves to develop the shipping trade... Moreover, once merchant ships can set sail, military craft can also use this as a precedent to protect the border area. Think of the Boxer Rebellion, when the Russians cruelly and inhumanely forced Chinese workers into the river. If our countries' troops had been within reach, would tens of thousands of citizens have died in that way?⁵⁴⁷

Then, in October 1917, Heilongjiang warlord Bao Guiqing passed on and endorsed a message from Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng on the shipping issue. Zhang said that he had received many complaints from merchants about the Russians' shipping monopoly and their exploitative prices. Like the Sungari office, Zhang argued that in order to break the monopoly, China would have to cough up its share of the infrastructure costs, including lighting, repairs and dredging. Despite the immense sums involved, however, the solution to this was right at hand: Merchants were willing to foot the bill and even purchase their own ships to set up a shipping company. And, like the Sungari office, Zhang drew an explicit link between the recovery of shipping rights and border defence.⁵⁴⁸

Clearly, there was a consensus among the merchants and officials along the Amur border that shipping was a nationalist issue, and that something needed to be done

⁵⁴⁷ "Letter from the head of the Amur Packet Boat Office, 26 Sept 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 41

⁵⁴⁸ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 22 Oct 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 44-45

about it. This resonated outside of Manchuria as well. The National Peace Union Society, one of China's many patriotic organisations whose members came from provincial assemblies, agricultural societies, chambers of commerce and overseas Chinese associations, also weighed in on the issue. Writing from Shanghai, it called for funds to be pumped into Amur shipping, both to recover navigation rights and prevent other countries - particularly Japan - from elbowing in. The Society said that the shipping issue was even more important than the shameful loss of Shandong and Qingdao in the Paris Peace Conference:

If China fails and Manchuria is lost to us, the Central Plains will also be subjugated in succession. The precedent of how the Manchu Qing entered the gates is not a remote one. The people's anger resonates through the whole country. We cannot rue the past, but we can still aspire to the future. The restoration of past faults rests entirely on this.⁵⁴⁹

Even outside the hallowed halls of the Beijing government, therefore, the Amur shipping issue was framed in nationalist terms. The loss of navigation rights represented not just an economic obstacle, but an erosion of sovereignty as well. Together with the Blagoveshchensk massacre and the ceding of Shandong and Qingdao to Japan, the Amur question was regarded as one of a long series of national humiliations. Moreover, the initiative seems to have come from the ground up. Chinese merchants on the border were willing to put their money where their mouths were, and Manchurian officials were eager to support them. In this respect, the Beijing government lagged behind.

⁵⁴⁹ "Telegram from the Shanghai National Peace Union Society, 14 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 533-534. For more details on the Society, see J.T. Chen, *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai: The Making of a Social Movement in Modern China* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p 69

Merchants and local officials proved to be the key to recovering navigation rights on the Amur. Until the 1917 revolutions and the Russian Civil War, they were blocked by tsarist state power and the Beijing Foreign Ministry's glacial diplomacy. After receiving Bao's October 1917 request, for example, the Foreign Ministry could only needle Kudashev again for a response, even passing on the offer to pay half the infrastructure costs. When the ambassador resorted to the familiar tactic of demanding more concessions in North Manchuria in return, the proposal came to an immediate standstill.⁵⁵⁰ The Ministry could only send its apologies to Bao with the words: "It is not possible to move forward for now."⁵⁵¹ Once Russian state power collapsed in late 1917, however, the "opportunity of a thousand years" truly came to pass. Negotiations which had been stymied for more than a decade came suddenly to life. In Manchuria, merchants and officials united by the language of nationalism seized the initiative to launch Chinese ships on the Amur.

Opening shots: The foundation of Wu Tong

The end of tsarist power in the Russian Far East opened up new possibilities precisely because the geopolitical and economic cards were reshuffled. Now the Russians were in no position to confiscate Chinese vessels or prohibit Chinese from buying them. Both Russian merchant shipping and river patrols collapsed, triggering food shortages and a resurgence of piracy. A Maritime Customs report on the situation in Blagoveshchensk described one such dismal scene:

We saw some 20 boats on the Russian side of the river...
Before the events in Russia, the boats had been moored on the

⁵⁵⁰ "Letter to Kudashev, 24 Oct 1917" "Letter from Kudashev, 26 Oct 1917" "Letter to the Customs Department, 19 Apr 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 45-46, 46, 163-164

⁵⁵¹ "Letter to Bao Guiqing, 8 Nov 1917" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 46-47

south [Chinese] bank, but now they are being run by the Reds. They sometimes travel to and from Khabarovsk, but mostly they lie idle. The shops are still open, but there are not many goods... Moreover, since the disorder in Russia, traffic has been disrupted and it is impossible to ship goods.⁵⁵²

Chinese vessels had to take their place, restore supplies and ensure security. On top of this, desperate Russian merchants fleeing the Civil War were eager to sell their ships and Chinese money was as good as any. Finally, the Russians were no longer able to wage diplomatic war over the issue of shipping regulations. White leaders - although jealous guardians of Russia's shipping monopoly - were unable to shoulder the financial burden that came with maintaining the necessary infrastructure on the river. The Reds, for their part, were far more amenable and could be negotiated with.

On all fronts, therefore, the Chinese could advance. They could claim that a Chinese presence on the Amur was urgently needed to prevent crime and starvation. They could circumvent the ban on ship sales and build up their own fleet on the wreckage of the Russians'. And they could negotiate in turn with either White or Red to secure their gains.

As before, the initiative came from officials and merchants. By March 1918, the Heihe chamber of commerce had grown well and truly impatient with the Foreign Ministry's lack of results. Armed with circuit intendant Zhang's approval, the chamber went ahead and purchased a steamship to ply the Chinese side of the river. This time, they had no intention of seeking Russian approval first. Warlord Bao, whose Heilongjiang jurisdiction included Heihe, was appraised of the situation and wholeheartedly agreed

⁵⁵² "Letter from the Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 363-364

with the chamber's plan. His language showed that he was firmly in the rights-recovery camp:

In the matter of North Manchuria, China has already shown the utmost virtue towards Russia and it cannot give more. Moreover Russia persists in intentionally obstructing us from enjoying the treaty rights that we should have. All things considered, this is extremely unjust... In this matter we have not violated any treaty. The sailing of ships is indeed our right. With regards to the merchants' present request, it is only necessary to inform Russia as a matter of procedure. There is no reason to ask for their response again.⁵⁵³

The Foreign Ministry, seized by the general mood of opportunism, supported Bao and the merchants. "The situation in Russia has changed greatly," the Ministry wrote. "It is not in a position to discuss the issue. If the chamber of commerce has already bought the ship, it can sail as planned. If there are problems, the Foreign Ministry will handle it."⁵⁵⁴

In April 1918, Bao came up with his own scheme. He warned that Russian ships were no longer sailing to the Chinese side of the Amur, dangerously affecting food supplies. In response, the *Qing Lan* should be mobilised, but it would stay on the Chinese side of the river and with soldiers on board for protection. The Chinese would take over responsibility for lighting on their side of the river, which in any case had been neglected due to the fighting in Russia.⁵⁵⁵ Again, the Foreign Ministry approved this, saying that Russia was not in a position to negotiate.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵³ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 94

⁵⁵⁴ "Letter to Bao Guiqing, 15 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 110

⁵⁵⁵ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 16 Apr 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 22 Apr 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 161, 170

⁵⁵⁶ "Letter to the Customs Department, 19 Apr 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 163-164

Indeed, the Russians did not object. But these were only baby steps and the ships were still technically confined to the Chinese side of the river. The Chinese appetite for further gains was not yet sated.⁵⁵⁷ Moreover, the mood of nationalist opportunism that arose in spring 1918 came loaded with a heavy dose of fear, directed particularly at Japan. Although the disorder in Russia had produced many willing sellers, the ban on ship sales to Chinese had not yet been lifted. Private deals were already taking place between Russians and Chinese, but the Russian consul in Harbin refused to sign off on them. Some ships could not be delivered, while others were confiscated when they berthed on the Russian side.⁵⁵⁸ When rumours emerged that the Japanese - who did not come under the prohibition - were successfully buying Russian ships, it raised the spectre of a Japanese fleet on the Amur. This was prohibited under the terms of the Aigun Treaty, which restricted Amur shipping to Russia and China alone.⁵⁵⁹ But to the Chinese, any Japanese presence presaged the total loss of navigation rights by *both* China and Russia. Geopolitical worries promptly reached fever pitch. The State Council saw the alleged purchases as a Japanese plot to circumvent the Aigun Treaty by sailing under the Russian flag: “Even though this is not an invasion in name, in reality our rights have already been secretly violated.”⁵⁶⁰ Bao echoed these fears, calling the Japanese ship sales a

⁵⁵⁷ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 Apr 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 138

⁵⁵⁸ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 Apr 1918” “Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 22 Apr 1918” “Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 138, 170, 372-376

⁵⁵⁹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 6 May 1918” “Letter to the Customs Department, 10 May 1918” “Report from Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 185, 191, 372-376

⁵⁶⁰ “Letter from the State Council, 9 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 190

“disaster”. He advised that China should alert the Allies to Japan’s activities and use them to rein in the Japanese.⁵⁶¹

Jilin warlord Meng Enyuan added to the sense of alarm, claiming that the Japanese were taking the opportunity to elbow in on shipping and fishing rights on the Amur. This, he claimed, was only part of a concerted Japanese effort to erode Chinese sovereignty and economic development. Meng rehearsed the rumours that the Japanese had bought ships from the Russians, demonstrating the usual combination of opportunism and fear:

Japan has coveted shipping rights on the Sungari and Amur for a long time. Now, just as the Reds in Russia are causing trouble on the border, all the Russian ships do not dare to sail. Truly, this is the most opportune moment to seize the shipping rights on both rivers... Once the factions in Russia have been quelled, the rights on both rivers will necessarily be seized by Japan. After all, the Sungari and Amur shipping rights have long fallen into Russian hands. Now that the Russians have loosened their grip a little, the Japanese will grab it in one fell swoop.⁵⁶²

Meng’s report made waves and reached even the State Council. In fact, any suggestion of Japanese involvement prompted a strong reaction from multiple ministries, from Communications to War. The Foreign Ministry was instructed to put its Manchurian officials on alert. It also directed protests to ambassador Kudashev,

⁵⁶¹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 16 Oct 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 394

⁵⁶² Meng claimed that the Japanese had also set up a fishing company, which would use more advanced methods than the Chinese, as well as a colonisation society, to gradually dispossess Chinese landowners via mortgages. “Letter from the State Council, 23 Jul 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 326-327. Nevertheless, Meng himself worked closely with the Japanese in setting up joint enterprises. See McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China*, pp 36-38

appealing on the basis of the Aigun Treaty.⁵⁶³ Kudashev claimed that no such sales had taken place, but this did not quash the rumours.⁵⁶⁴

This combination of opportunism and fear lent urgency to the Amur navigation project and served as an effective call to action - as well as a diplomatic weapon. The State Council instructed Bao to buy ships with public funds, in order to “oppose Japan”.⁵⁶⁵ Acting on Bao’s information about the Japanese, the Foreign Minister asked Kudashev to lift the ban on ship sales, which he claimed represented the former tsarist government’s “prejudice against Chinese merchants”. Circumstances were no longer the same, the Minister said, and the ban should naturally be abolished.⁵⁶⁶ To really push the point home, however, the Minister warned Kudashev against the Japanese:

If the Japanese buy ships in endless succession, the Sungari and Amur shipping rights shared by China and Russia will fall completely into Japanese hands. It would be better for the Chinese to buy them. When conducting matters in future it will be easier to negotiate [with us].⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶³ “Letter from the State Council, 23 Jul 1918” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 2 Aug 1918” “Telegram to Jilin foreign affairs official Wang Jiase and Li Jia’ao, 14 Aug 1918” “Letter to Kudashev, 26 Oct 1918” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 29 Oct 1918” “Letter to the War Participation Bureau, 31 Oct 1918” “Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 6 Nov 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 326-328, 384, 359, 405-406, 408-409, 409-410, 415

⁵⁶⁴ “Letter from Kudashev, 30 Nov 1918” “Letter to the War Participation Bureau and the Communications Ministry, 3 Dec 1918” “Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 4 Dec 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 432, 432, 434. Kudashev’s protestations proved disingenuous. In April 1919, he admitted that he had heard that Japanese ships were indeed sailing on the Amur. In fact, he had even discussed this with Horvath. See “Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 1 Apr 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 447-448

⁵⁶⁵ “Letter from the State Council, 9 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 190

⁵⁶⁶ “Meeting with Kudashev, 20 Apr 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 166

⁵⁶⁷ “Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 24 Apr 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 172

The Minister's canny decision to play on the Russians' own fears of Japan found their mark. Kudashev was moved to lift the ban in late April 1918.⁵⁶⁸ By early May, more than 20 Russian ships had been purchased by the Chinese, including representatives of warlord Bao.⁵⁶⁹

Bao's involvement and the lifting of the sales ban marked the genesis of the Wu Tong Shipping Company, which was incorporated in April 1918. As with many of the Amur shipping initiatives, Wu Tong combined merchant initiative with warlord and official support. Bao was one of the masterminds behind the establishment of the company, and its 2 million yuan startup capital was raised from merchants in Beijing, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Harbin and Changchun. Its board of directors was a veritable who's who of business bigwigs in Beijing, including Liang Shiyi, Cao Rulin, Ye Gongchuo, Ren Fengbao and Xie Lin.⁵⁷⁰ These were all members of Liang's Communications Clique. Liang, nicknamed "god of wealth", was an influential power broker whose retinue of followers included several Communications ministers. He was also a major shareholder in China's Bank of Communications, as well as the founder of many other private banks. Ye Gongchuo's *curriculum vitae* included such positions as chairman of the national Railway Association, Communications minister and manager of the Bank of Communications. Cao Rulin negotiated the Nishihara loans on behalf

⁵⁶⁸ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 24 Apr 1918" "Telegram to Guo Zongxi and Bao Guiqing, 25 Apr 1918" "Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 27 Sept 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 172, 174, 385

⁵⁶⁹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 187-188

⁵⁷⁰ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Dec 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 436-438; "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 548-551; "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 225-235

of premier Duan Qirui in 1917. Like Ye, Cao had also served as Communications minister and manager of the Communications Bank. Ren Fengbao, also a member of the Clique, was elected to the Senate in 1918.⁵⁷¹ Xie Lin, a more local figure, was a leader of the Binjiang shipping guild.

Wu Tong's foundation therefore reflected a mix of local merchant initiative, warlord support and high factional politics. The company's mission combined business objectives with a hefty dose of nationalism. Its name alone expressed these aims in no uncertain terms: "Wu Tong" can be translated as "To clear the way in 1918".

Nowhere is this clearer than in Wu Tong's own account of its origins, as told by Liang.

It is worth quoting at length:

The Amur, Sungari and Ussuri regions are rich and fertile. The rivers criss-cross each other, a natural advantage for transport. In the past, there were only sailboats, which could traverse only the shortest routes. Hence these natural blessings could not be exploited. Seeing this, the Russians set up companies and built several hundred ships. They wove through the river like threads in a tapestry, reaping great profits of tens of thousands a year. These rendered sailboats obsolete and Chinese shipping could not but become dependent on them... Russia knew that Chinese shipping would disadvantage them in future and caused trouble for China... Several rounds of negotiations have all failed to yield good results. I have travelled on the river and witnessed these circumstances, or heard rumours and hence understand the broad outlines. I fear that Chinese sovereignty may be forever lost, since more and more of our rights are being lost every day. I discussed the matter with officials from Jilin and Heilongjiang, we all said that China must recover its rights and there must not be any delay.⁵⁷²

⁵⁷¹ Nathan, *Peking Politics*, pp 245-251; R. Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), p 3, Z. Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2003), pp 149, 178; Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, p 15

⁵⁷² "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 548

Beginning in April 1918, Wu Tong bought 50 ships from the Russians, valued at more than 12 million rubles. Most of the ships had been purchased from a Russian Jewish businessman named Soskin in Harbin. By early 1919, 40% of Chinese ships on the Amur were owned by Wu Tong. The company also agreed to shoulder the cost of lighting the Chinese bank.⁵⁷³

If Wu Tong marked a breakthrough on the business front, similar successes were being scored on a diplomatic level. Once again, the animus came from the localities. Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng, whose petition on shipping rights has already been mentioned above, was the main driving force. In May 1918, seemingly on his own authority, Zhang negotiated a shipping agreement with the Reds in Blagoveshchensk. Anxious to win the support of the Chinese, the Reds were only too happy to compromise.⁵⁷⁴ The resulting agreement was exactly what the Chinese were hoping for:

All Chinese ships on the Amur will fly the Chinese flag and be issued permits by Chinese officials. Russian soldiers will not be permitted to board.

Russian customs and the shipping bureau are not allowed to inspect Chinese ships. However, if Chinese ships dock on the Russian side, they must load or unload goods according to Russian regulations.

The circuit intendant undertakes to ensure that no Chinese will aid the Whites by acting as their agent and transporting them

⁵⁷³ “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 21 Apr 1919” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 26 Apr 1919” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 6 May 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 463-474, 477-479, 483-484, 548-551

⁵⁷⁴ Zhang seems to have cultivated a fairly decent working relationship with the soviet leader in Blagoveshchensk, F.N. Mukhin. The Amur shipping agreement was but one in a handful of bilateral agreements regarding the protection of Chinese in Blagoveshchensk, treatment of refugee Russians and disarming of White troops. See “Letter from the State Council, 20 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 365-367

on the Amur on a ship flying the Chinese flag. In case of such an incident, the ship and its crew will be detained.⁵⁷⁵

This time, the Chinese could afford to be hardline. They turned down a Red request to access the Chinese-only stretch of the Sungari, since this would jeopardise the security of the region. Bao conveyed the news as a triumph, especially now that the ships bought from the Russians were about to set sail: “I humbly submit that border shipping rights had been lost for a long time but, thankfully, we have successfully recovered them.”⁵⁷⁶ The Beijing government was delighted.⁵⁷⁷

By May 1918, therefore, mere months after the Reds had seized control of the Russian Far East, two major obstacles to Chinese shipping had been removed. Exploiting the Russians’ fear of Japan, the Chinese managed to get the sales ban lifted and took decisive steps towards building their own merchant fleet under the Wu Tong company. Taking advantage of the Reds’ accommodating spirit, they paved the way for Chinese ships to sail not just on their side of the Amur, but to the Russian side as well. Armed with this agreement, the *Qing Lan* made its first cross-river voyage in May to supply the inhabitants of Blagoveshchensk, whose food stocks had run out. Kudashev was merely informed of the *Qing Lan*’s journey. Outmanoeuvred, the ambassador could only reply that in the absence of a proper Russian

⁵⁷⁵ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 187-188. The substance of the agreement was eventually reported in the press. See “Telegram from Li Jia’ao, 9 Jul 1918” “Telegram from Li Jia’ao, 15 Jul 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 273, 308

⁵⁷⁶ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918” “Letter to the Customs Department, 11 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 187-188, 192-193

⁵⁷⁷ “Letter from the State Council, 17 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 199

government, he could not resume negotiations on the shipping issue.⁵⁷⁸ For their part, the Reds kept their word and did not obstruct the ship.⁵⁷⁹

The Blagoveshchensk agreement and the sailing of the *Qing Lan* provided the fillip that Chinese shipping needed. Thenceforth, Chinese ships not only commenced operations, they did not limit themselves to the Chinese side of the river.⁵⁸⁰ In July 1918, a Khabarovsk chamber of commerce ship seems to have taken up the Khabarovsk-Blagoveshchensk route.⁵⁸¹ By early August, no less than eight Chinese ships were sailing between Harbin, Blagoveshchensk and the Chinese gold-mining town of Mohe, carrying mostly food. Other ships were sailing to Khabarovsk with the “tacit acceptance” of the Russian authorities. According to a report from a Foreign Ministry official, the 20-day journey between Harbin and Blagoveshchensk could yield 70,000 rubles net profit. Food shortages also increased the demand for imports and ships could capitalise on wartime disruptions to the rail network. Naturally, more merchants were being drawn to this lucrative trade.⁵⁸²

Nevertheless, the impetus - as always - was nationalist. Wu Tong conveyed news of its initial successes in patriotic terms:

⁵⁷⁸ “Letter to Kudashev, 11 Jun 1918” “Letter from the Russian embassy, 24 Jun 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 218, 238-239

⁵⁷⁹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Jun 1918” “Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 214, 372-376

⁵⁸⁰ “Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 372-376

⁵⁸¹ “Letter from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 14 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 358-359

⁵⁸² “Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 372-376; “Letter from Quan Shi’en, 4 Nov 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong, 16 Dec 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 753-755, 809-810; “Telegram from Li Jia’ao, 31 Oct 1918” Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1)*, p 559

Ever since the disorder in Russia, because half of their ships and railways have been damaged, the company progressively took up shipping in their stead. Not only are merchants' goods dependent on the company for transport, it has laid the foundation for the future of national shipping. All the shareholders, based on the common good, dare not consider merely their own profit. Instead, they wish only to ease communications and recover shipping rights.⁵⁸³

The Foreign Ministry was inclined to agree. It wrote to Wu Tong in glowing terms:

[Wu Tong] will stem a tide that has been raging for a century and several decades, opening up shipping routes that have never been travelled before. Because the Russian government has been toppled, heaven provided a good opportunity. The only thing needed to seize it was your enthusiasm and determination. On the one hand, it protects national sovereignty; on the other, it benefits the people. This is greatly to be admired.⁵⁸⁴

With the immediate obstacles to shipping seemingly settled, attention soon turned to a more lasting solution. The activists, once again, were local officials. Zhang, the mastermind of the Blagoveshchensk agreement, realised that shipping negotiations had to take place on a national, not just a local level. He therefore proposed re-opening the talks on shipping regulations that had run aground so many times before. At the same time, he suggested that the Chinese set up a bureau to administer these regulations, as well as forestall Russian objections by paying its share of the infrastructure costs.⁵⁸⁵ These concerns were echoed by warlord Bao.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 549

⁵⁸⁴ "Reply to Wu Tong manager Liang Yansun [Liang Shiyi], 24 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 558

⁵⁸⁵ "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 12 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 569-583

⁵⁸⁶ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918" "Letter to the Customs Department, 11 May 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 187-188

Security was also a pressing concern and local authorities provided the drive to deal with the issue. Piracy was rife along the river, hampering trade and fishing. With Russian power in tatters, there was no longer any check to their activities.⁵⁸⁷ In May, therefore, Bao proposed an ambitious plan to establish a river police, complete with patrol boats. This was endorsed by the State Council.⁵⁸⁸ That same month, Jilin warlord Meng took advantage of the lifting of the sales ban to purchase an ironclad ship for defence, with proposals to buy two to three more. He also planned to use the ships more aggressively and force Horvath to withdraw White troops that had taken over four areas in Yilan county near Harbin. The ships could also be used to seize Russian barracks in Tongjiang.⁵⁸⁹ Heihe circuit intendant Zhang also suggested buying a few shallow-water patrol boats to protect merchant ships in the dangerous waters where the Sungari and Ussuri converged.⁵⁹⁰

By August, these efforts began to assume a more permanent and organised character. The Manchurian authorities started establishing military installations along the river. Meng in Jilin formed a coastal defence unit of three battalions, headquartered at the confluence of the Amur and Sungari. He also set up a checkpoint there, which proceeded to inspect Russian ships. In Heilongjiang, Bao

⁵⁸⁷ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Dec 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 436-438; “Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 24 Apr 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919” “Draft of Amur shipping regulations proposed by Wang Chongwen and Fu Jiang, Aug 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 474-475, 548-551, 616-618, 703-706

⁵⁸⁸ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1918” “Letter from the State Council, 11 May 1918” “Letter from the Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 187-188, 193-194, 363-364

⁵⁸⁹ “Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 26 May 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, p 206-207

⁵⁹⁰ “Letter from the Customs Department, 19 Aug 1918” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 363-364

matched this with a temporary garrison in Heihe totalling 1,700 men, to be supplemented in future by shallow-water craft and batteries along the river. Bao asked if the Navy Ministry could dispatch a few vessels as a stopgap solution.⁵⁹¹ All this was endorsed by the Army and Navy ministries and, in January 1919, the State Council granted an initial 100,000 yuan for Amur river defence. While the funds were being sought, a few patrol craft would be seconded to the river after undergoing renovations.⁵⁹²

These were all attempts to build on China's initial successes on the Amur navigation issue. By summer 1918, the foundations had been laid by merchants and local officials working together, animated by a common nationalist impulse. The language of opportunism and fear accompanied the birth of Wu Tong, drove negotiation efforts by Manchurian warlords and their subordinates, and goaded Beijing to action. What was at stake was not just trade or financial gain, but questions of sovereignty and the recovery of lost rights. Nationalism united local actors in a common language, motivating them to take advantage of the opportunities accorded by the Civil War. As we shall see, nationalism also equipped the Chinese to deal with the setbacks that would come with the *atamanshchina*.

⁵⁹¹ "Report from commissioner Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 12 Dec 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 372-376, 436-438; "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 15 May 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 10 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 500, 531

⁵⁹² "Letter from the Army Ministry, 30 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 378-379; "Navy Ministry opinion paper, 17 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 461-462

The first setback: White confiscations

The Whites' resurgence in summer and autumn 1918 soon put paid to China's early breakthroughs. As the Czech mutiny and Siberian Intervention swept away the Reds, power in the Russian Far East was taken up by White officials whose approach to the Amur issue was reactionary in the extreme. Soon enough, the May Blagoveshchensk shipping agreement became a dead letter. Former restrictions on Chinese shipping were reinstated. In August, the Whites were demanding that Chinese ships carry Russian permits as well as Chinese ones. They insisted that Russian officers had to be on board Chinese ships, their salary and upkeep provided by the ship's captain. Inspections were reintroduced and Chinese ships were stopped for not having the right technical specifications.⁵⁹³ In fact, the Whites went so far as to fire warning shots at the *Qing Lan* when it refused to stop for checks during a routine voyage.⁵⁹⁴ By the time the river closed for the 1918 season, it seemed that the clock might be turned back on the Amur shipping question.

Worse still was the White atamans' closeness to the Japanese. As we have seen in previous chapters, fear of Japanese encroachment was a key factor turning the Chinese against the Whites. The shipping issue threw this into sharp relief. A Japanese cruiser was sent to Nikolaevsk in August, prompting alarm bells among the Jilin authorities.⁵⁹⁵ Newspapers reported that the Japanese had set up an East

⁵⁹³ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 24 Oct 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 404-405

⁵⁹⁴ "Report from Wu Peiguang, 26 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), pp 372-376

⁵⁹⁵ "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 12 Aug 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (1), p 357; "Telegram from Meng Enyuan, 12 Aug 1918" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, p 246

Siberian Steamship Company, with five ships already berthed in Harbin.⁵⁹⁶ And predictably, the Japanese soon used their joint operations with the Whites as an excuse to negotiate the dispatch of warships to the Amur. Russian ships were observed carrying Japanese troops and flying the Japanese flag.⁵⁹⁷

Having tasted success, however, the Chinese were not about to go down without a fight. They attempted to hold on to what they had already gained and to resolve two further outstanding issues: Chinese ships' access to the sea, and the stationing of gunboats on the Amur. In all these campaigns, the firepower was chiefly provided by merchants - via Wu Tong - and local officials. By late 1919, they were joined by the new consuls dispatched to the Russia Far East by the Foreign Ministry. Nationalism provided the impetus behind their efforts and made concerted action possible in areas that the central government could not reach.

The first major crisis came on 18 March 1919, before the river reopened for the 1919 season. Ataman Ivanov-Rinov - Kolchak's enforcer in Vladivostok⁵⁹⁸ - reiterated in a decree that the sale of ships to Chinese was illegal. All ships previously sold had to be redeemed by 1 April, or their former Russian owners would be tried in a military court. Ships which had already been sold, but were still on the Russian bank awaiting

⁵⁹⁶ "Draft of Amur shipping regulations by Wang Chongwen and Fu Jiang, Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 616-618

⁵⁹⁷ "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 24 Oct 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1)*, pp 404-405; "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 24 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 15 May 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 24 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 474-475, 500, 520

⁵⁹⁸ On Ivanov-Rinov's brutal and unpopular policies, see B. Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok: Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), pp 126-127; Bisher, *White Terror*, p 148

collection or repairs, would be summarily confiscated.⁵⁹⁹ Naturally, this provoked a storm of protest from the Chinese. Wu Tong was particularly hard-hit. Of the 50 ships it had bought from the Russians, many had been left on the Russian bank when the river iced over. Others were still being repaired.⁶⁰⁰

With only two weeks to Ivanov-Rinov's deadline, local officials were immediately goaded to action. On the diplomatic front, negotiations took place on several levels. In Harbin, Binjiang circuit intendant Fu Jiang confronted Horvath, Ivanov-Rinov's civilian counterpart. Fu questioned the source of Ivanov-Rinov's authority and held Horvath responsible for the decree.⁶⁰¹ In Vladivostok, consul Shao Hengjun noted that his Japanese counterpart had not received any confiscation notice, although Japanese merchants were allegedly also buying Russian ships. Shao questioned Horvath as well, but was fobbed off. Indignant, Shao pressed Beijing to act by explicitly comparing the Whites' behaviour to that of tsarist imperialists:

The Whites are brutal and unreasonable, they do their utmost to come up with ways to restore Gondatti's policies towards the Chinese. The woes of the Chinese merchants are indescribable.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ "Letter from Guo Zongxi, 29 Mar 1918" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 30 Mar 1918" "Letter from Wu Tong manager Wang Zaishan, 31 Mar 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 31 Mar 1919" "Telegram from Aigun foreign affairs officer Shi Shaochang, 5 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Customs Department, 22 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 443-444, 444-445, 445-446, 446, 450, 456-460, 516-517

⁶⁰⁰ "Letter from Wu Tong manager Wang Zaishan, 31 Mar 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 26 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 445-446, 456-460, 477-479

⁶⁰¹ "Letter from Guo Zongxi, 29 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 443-444

⁶⁰² "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 31 Mar 1918" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 446

Throughout, the Chinese approach was simple: Since ambassador Kudashev had authorised the sales and the Russian consul in Harbin had signed off on them, these contracts could not be unilaterally revoked. Besides, the Chinese had a right to sail on the Amur based on the Aigun Treaty. If the confiscated ships were not released, the Russians would be made accountable for any losses.⁶⁰³ And if diplomatic efforts failed and push came to shove, the Manchurian authorities alerted border troops to resist any attempt to confiscate ships on the Chinese side of the river.⁶⁰⁴

The Foreign Ministry was jolted out of its usual leisurely pace and arranged an urgent meeting with Kudashev just before the April deadline. It presented the Chinese arguments and asked for the immediate retraction of the decree. Fortunately, Kudashev conceded that he was willing to uphold those contracts which had been signed by the Russian consul in Harbin, but he could not take responsibility for future sales. This was confirmed in a subsequent official letter from the embassy and by the Russian consul.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰³ “Letter from Guo Zongxi, 29 Mar 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong manager Wang Zaishan, 31 Mar 1919” “Letter to the Russian Embassy, 31 Mar 1919” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 10 Apr 1919” “Letter from the leader of the Heihe chamber of commerce Bai Liangdong, 15 May 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 443-444, 445-446, 447, 453-454, 499-500

⁶⁰⁴ “Telegram from Meng Enyuan and Guo Zongxi, 1 Apr 1919” “Telegram from Aigun foreign affairs officer Shi Shaochang, 5 Apr 1919” “Telegram from Heihe circuit intendant Shi Shaochang, 29 Apr 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 448, 450, 479

⁶⁰⁵ “Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 1 Apr 1919” “Letter from Kudashev, 4 Apr 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 447-448, 449

Kudashev's concession appeared to have averted the crisis and the merchants were instructed to prepare their sales contracts as proof.⁶⁰⁶ These began to pour in from various Chinese companies, including Wu Tong.⁶⁰⁷ Nevertheless, there were suspicions that a diplomatic solution alone was not enough. Writing to the State Council and Manchurian officials, the Foreign Ministry voiced its misgivings about Kudashev, saying that he had no real power and the tougher stance advocated by local authorities might have to be adopted.⁶⁰⁸ Sure enough, when March turned to April, Ivanov-Rinov began confiscating and auctioning off the ships regardless of whether they had been endorsed by the Russian consul in Harbin. Based on the reports from Chinese officials who crossed the river to deal with the confiscations, it became apparent that Kudashev's instructions were not being followed on the Russian side of the river.⁶⁰⁹

Coming as they did just as the trading season was about to begin, the confiscations provoked a strong response. This time the sentiment on the ground quickly soured.

The Heihe chamber of commerce was among those urging a show of force:

⁶⁰⁶ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 9 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 10 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" "Letter from Meng Enyuan and Guo Zongxi, 26 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 452-453, 453-454, 456-460, 476-477

⁶⁰⁷ "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 21 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 1 May 1919" "Letter from Bao Guiqing, 10 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 463-474, 479-482, 489-494. For an example of consular endorsement, see Appendix E.

⁶⁰⁸ "Letter to the State Council, 3 Apr 1919" "Telegram to Guo Zongxi, 5 Apr 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 9 Apr 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 448-449, 449-450, 451-452

⁶⁰⁹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 7 May 1919" "Letter to Kudashev, 7 May 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1919" "Telegram to Bao Guiqing, 9 May 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 May 1919" "Letter from the War Participation Bureau, 13 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 14 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 16 May 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 16 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 484-485, 485, 486, 487, 494, 494, 494-495, 502, 504-505

The river has opened and ships need to set sail urgently, but Russia has used military force to confiscate Chinese ships and violate its previous agreements. This is extremely tyrannical. They have picked a quarrel and used force to resolve the issue. Public anger has arisen and the situation is critical.⁶¹⁰

Wu Tong's ships had also been confiscated and the company sent its representative to speak with Ivanov-Rinov directly. The company also pushed Chinese officials to negotiate on its behalf. When this proved ineffective, however, it called for troops to be sent to protect their ships.⁶¹¹

The State Council itself turned hardline. In its correspondence with warlord Bao, the Council deemed Ivanov-Rinov's actions "unreasonable", "damaging to my country's prestige and bringing hardship to my merchants". Its language mirrored that of the merchants and local authorities, evoking as it did the twin concerns of national prestige and opportunism:

If Kudashev is evasive and China loses the opportunity of a thousand years, not only will Chinese merchants suffer losses, China's navigation rights will have no means of recovery. In confiscating Chinese ships, the Russians foolishly consider themselves a great power. If China retreats, disaster will result.⁶¹²

⁶¹⁰ "Telegram from Heihe chamber of commerce leader Bai Liangdong et al, 14 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 497. See also "Letter from the Heihe chamber of commerce leader Bai Liangdong, 15 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 499-500

⁶¹¹ "Letter from Wu Tong manager Wang Zaishan, 31 Mar 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 12 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 26 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 445-446, 456-460, 477-479, 486

⁶¹² The metaphor "Yelang zida", mentioned in footnote 348 in the previous chapter, is reprised here. "Letter from the State Council copying telegrams to Bao Guiqing, 16 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 503

As always, some members of Chinese officialdom suspected that the Japanese were behind all this, using Ivanov-Rinov as a puppet to thwart Chinese shipping.⁶¹³

By mid-May the matter was still hanging and public anger began to boil over.

Questions were posed in Parliament over the government's lack of success on the issue.⁶¹⁴ Once again, the deadlock was broken by the Manchurian authorities.

Fearing the diplomatic consequences of an actual troop deployment, Bao in Heilongjiang advocated a compromise solution that was no less hardline. Since Kudashev's words no longer had any impact in Russia, the Russian embassy in Beijing should be abolished. Meanwhile, all Russian ships berthed in China should be confiscated in retaliation. Having decided on this course of action, Bao promptly sent out patrols to prevent Russian ships from leaving the Chinese bank.⁶¹⁵

This was the ammunition Beijing's diplomats needed. The Foreign Ministry sent a strongly-worded protest to Kudashev and threatened to curb Russia's privileges on the China Eastern Railway.⁶¹⁶ Kudashev prevaricated, saying that according to the Russian interpretation, Chinese ships should not have been sailing on the Amur anyway. However, his response showed that the White stance had softened, for it provided an opening for further discussion:

⁶¹³ "Letter from the General Staff, 16 May 1919" "Letter from the War Council, 22 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 503, 516

⁶¹⁴ "Letter from the State Council, 31 May 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, pp 283-284

⁶¹⁵ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 14 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 19 May 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 19 May 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 May 1919" "Telegram to Meng Enyuan, 10 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 486-487, 497-498, 509, 509-510, 520, 532

⁶¹⁶ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 14 May 1919" "Letter to the Russian embassy, 14 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 495-496, 496-497

According to Article 18 of the 1881 treaty, Chinese ships that wish to travel [on the Amur] require prior negotiation between China and Russia. Now, a unified Russian government has not been formed and the matter cannot be dealt with... Travel on the Amur is Russia's prerogative and all infrastructure and repair fees related to shipping are met by Russia. If Chinese ships plan to enjoy this right, they should share in these responsibilities. This is the crux of the matter.⁶¹⁷

Kudashev argued that since no recognised Russian government existed at this time, no further headway could be made on the issue. Nevertheless, he agreed to get Omsk to halt the confiscations.⁶¹⁸ With the intervention of Horvath and the Kolchak regime, the confiscations came to an end in late May.⁶¹⁹ The confiscated ships, 28 in all, were released and reclaimed by their Chinese buyers - a favourable outcome that owed much to the efforts of warlord Bao.⁶²⁰

Ivanov-Rinov's confiscations and Kudashev's concession inspired the Chinese to act on other fronts. As before, it was the Manchurian warlords and merchants who kept up the pressure. Reflecting on the outcome of the confiscation dispute, Bao remarked on the Russians' intransigence and urged that a solution to the

⁶¹⁷ "Meeting between Zhu Hexiang and Kudashev, 14 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 496

⁶¹⁸ "Letter to the State Council, 16 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 16 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 20 May 1919" "Meeting between Kudashev and the acting foreign minister, 31 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 500-501, 501-502, 512-513, 527-528

⁶¹⁹ "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 19 May 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 23 May 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 24 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 26 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 28 May 1919" "Letter to the State Council, 28 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 509, 519, 520, 521, 523, 523-524

⁶²⁰ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 28 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 29 May 1919" "Meeting between Kudashev and the acting foreign minister, 31 May 1919" "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 23 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 522-523, 525, 527-528, 538

infrastructure issue should be found, and found quickly. Opportunism was the watchword of the day:

When conducting foreign policy in the past, advance preparations were not made. Only verbal protests were issued after an incident occurred. Hence we failed time and again. Now that some small results have been achieved on the Amur shipping issue, we have a golden opportunity which must be thoroughly grasped. Just as we tasted success, many obstacles arose. The matter must be pursued urgently and the only fear is being too late. Past mistakes cannot be made again.⁶²¹

His arguments were backed up by Wu Tong, which also called for the infrastructure issue to be solved once and for all. In July 1919, the company argued that this was the most opportune time to open talks, since Russia was at a disadvantage:

Now, just as Omsk is hoping for Allied recognition, the aforementioned issues of shipping rights and facilities can both be added to the demands in exchange for recognition. In this way the Russian demands will not be too excessive and it will be easier to get them to comply in the negotiations.⁶²²

The lack of a recognised Russian government hampered further negotiations.

Nevertheless, an opening could still be found. Kudashev's note indicated that a temporary solution was possible if the Chinese would contribute to the upkeep of shipping facilities. After the dust settled from the confiscations, therefore, the Foreign Ministry signalled the Chinese government's willingness to pay half the infrastructure costs on the Amur. The Russians were only too happy for the burden to be shared

⁶²¹ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 26 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 521. See also "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 9 Apr 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 452-453, 486-487

⁶²² "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 550

and quoted a sum of 43 million rubles, but neglected to specify how the figure had been derived or to provide a breakdown of the costs.⁶²³

Things were finally set in motion. A superficial study of the river facilities had already been commissioned in July 1918, but in May 1919 the Shanghai river inspector H.G. Garden was dispatched to the Amur to examine the situation further.⁶²⁴ In June, he sent in a digest of his findings from the 1918 and 1919 surveys, which showed that the operating costs for lighting, pontoons and warning markers came to only 150,000 rubles, although additional funds were needed for dredging and repairs.⁶²⁵ This was a far cry from the Russians' 43 million ruble quote. Garden also produced a set of draft shipping regulations based on the existing regulations in the treaty ports of Hankou and Jiujiang, both of which had a strong Russian presence.⁶²⁶

⁶²³ "Letter to the Russian embassy, 23 May 1919" "Meeting between Kudashev and the acting foreign minister, 31 May 1919" "Letter from the High Commissioner in Vladivostok, 18 Jun 1919" "Letter to the War Participation Bureau, 21 Jun 1919" "Letter to the Russian embassy, 1 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 4 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 8 Jul 1919" "Telegram to Shi Shaochang, 21 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 519, 527-528, 534-535, 535, 545, 547-548, 551, 604

⁶²⁴ "Letter to the Customs Department, 14 May 1919" "Letter from the Customs Department, 19 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 23 May 1919" "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 29 May 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 1 Jun 1919" "Letter from Harbin foreign affairs official Fu Jiang, 4 Jun 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 497, 510-512, 518-519, 525-526, 528, 529-530. Garden was a British employee of the Maritime Customs who did not long survive his posting to Manchuria. See Chinese Maritime Customs Project, University of Bristol. *British Staff in the Chinese Maritime Customs* [Online.] Available at <https://www.bris.ac.uk/history/customs/resources/servicelists/britishg.pdf> [Accessed 2 July 2015].

⁶²⁵ Another 391,000 rubles would be needed to set up an agency to monitor the waterways. "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Jun 1919" "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 12 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 539-542, 569-583

⁶²⁶ "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 15 Aug 1919" "Letter from Shi Shaochang, 19 Aug 1919" "Draft of Amur shipping regulations from Wang Chongwen and Fu Jiang, Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 587-591, 592-601, 616-618

Kudashev was promptly informed of the Chinese intention to start talks and officials were appointed to negotiate on the Chinese side.⁶²⁷ The Chinese team was also instructed to draw up its own proposed regulations alongside Garden's. A comparison between the two clearly reveals the Chinese preoccupation with sovereignty. Unlike Garden's regulations, which dealt extensively with technical matters such as permitted cargo, berthing procedure and customs checks, the members of the negotiating team put sovereignty and rights front and centre:

The current shipping negotiations are based on the Aigun Treaty and other subsequent treaties and their revisions, all of whose articles are still effective...

From the Argun to the Amur, to the mouth of the Sungari and the Ussuri, only Chinese and Russian ships are allowed to travel and freely load and unload Chinese and Russian passengers and goods. According to the Aigun Treaty, both countries are allowed to sail on these three rivers and live and trade along the banks...

Since, according to the treaty, the Amur is a shared river, all issues pertaining to maintaining order on the river is the responsibility of both countries. The sending of Chinese gunboats to aid in defence benefits both countries. This act of goodwill should be welcomed by the Russian government... China and Russia will honour the Aigun Treaty and not allow other countries to sail their ships. All owners of ships, whether companies or private persons, must declare their shareholders when registering and may not conceal any names... If another country's citizens use Chinese or Russian citizens as cover, flying Chinese or Russian flags fraudulently, the ships must be confiscated according to the Treaty and the persons punished... These regulations must not hinder or violate any of the rights and privileges accorded to China under the Aigun Treaty, and will not affect the exercise of these rights.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ The composition of the Chinese negotiating team changed many times. See Appendix A for a list of its members. "Letter to the Customs Department, 27 Jun 1919" "Instructions to Shi Shaochang, 27 Jun 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 4 Jul 1919" "Letter to the Russian embassy, 12 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 21 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 543-544, 544-545, 547, 553, 555

⁶²⁸ "Draft of Amur shipping regulations submitted by Wang Chongwen and Fu Jiang, Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 617-618

They also insisted that the demarcation of responsibility over river facilities was not merely a technical matter. Rather, it was an issue that “completely hinges on sovereignty” and Chinese ships should not be made to “obey foreigners”.⁶²⁹ Despite China’s best efforts, however, the hoped-for negotiations did not materialise.

Although Kudashev wrote in July 1919 that the Russians had assembled their own negotiating team,⁶³⁰ the Civil War meant that the Russians were unable to send their delegates to Harbin for negotiations and the matter stalled.⁶³¹

Chinese merchants reach the sea

The victory over the confiscation issue provided further fuel for Chinese opportunism. Other problems in need of a solution could be decisively tackled. In the matter of Chinese access to the sea, merchant initiative - embodied in the Wu Tong company - proved paramount. The company framed its mission to reach the sea in nationalist terms and, in so doing, enlisted the support of both local and central government officials.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Aigun and Petersburg treaties had left the question of sea-bound navigation vague. Although the treaty technically allowed both countries to sail along the entire stretch of the the Amur, the route to the

⁶²⁹ “Letter from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 28 Oct 1919” “Instructions to Fu Jiang, 13 Nov 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 732-733, 771-772

⁶³⁰ “Letter from the Russian embassy, 21 Jul 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 555

⁶³¹ “Instructions to Fu Jiang, 4 Oct 1919” “Letter from Fu Jiang, 5 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 691-692, 692-694; “Letter from the Khabarovsk vice-consulate, 30 Dec 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 383-384; “Letter from Dong Shi’en, 22 Mar 1920” “Telegram to Ji Jing, 3 Apr 1920” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Dec 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 49-50, 57, 152-154 (Dongbei bianfang); Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p 68

mouth of the river passed through Russian land on both banks. The Russians therefore insisted that Chinese ships sailing there were violating Russian sovereignty.⁶³² This put significant limits on China's initial gains. Although the *Qing Lan* and other Chinese ships were now plying the main stretch of the Amur, they were frequently stopped at Khabarovsk, where the river then passed through Russian territory.⁶³³

Hence in July 1919, the confiscation issue having been settled, Wu Tong proposed to literally test the waters by making a voyage all the way to the mouth of the Amur at Nikolaevsk. The company set about drumming up support for this endeavour. In Beijing, one of Wu Tong's managers, Xie Lin, raised the issue with Quan Shi'en, who had just been appointed the new vice-consul for Khabarovsk. Xie asked for Quan's support once he had taken up his post. On top of this, Wu Tong offered to take Quan to his post on a company boat to demonstrate the problem. The boat was promptly stopped at Khabarovsk by Russian customs.⁶³⁴

From the beginning, Wu Tong spoke of the push toward the sea in nationalist terms. The company argued that it would not only open up new trade routes, but also serve as a precedent for Chinese naval craft, broadcasting Chinese power and putting paid to Japanese ambitions.⁶³⁵ In the company's proposal to the Beijing government, Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi wrote:

⁶³² "Letter from Guo Zongxi and Wang Shuhan, 6 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 625-630

⁶³³ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 753-755

⁶³⁴ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 754

⁶³⁵ "Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 548

The future of the river facilities and waterways is bogged down by the treaties. They are controlled by others in every way. If they wish to cause even the slightest trouble, even though China has ships on the river, they will not be able to sail. This company has already been set up, but the road ahead is perilous and the danger is not past. If a consolidation plan is not worked out in time, great harm will be done to both private and public interests.⁶³⁶

Clearly, Wu Tong was appealing to the need to protect Chinese sovereignty on the river and prevent “others” - namely Russia and Japan - from controlling the waterway. Such arguments were irresistible. Upon receiving the same proposal, the Manchurian authorities wholeheartedly endorsed it in the same nationalist language. The Jilin governor wrote:

If China can indeed navigate the lower reaches of the Amur to the sea, this will expand national power... All international rivers cannot bar passage to an upriver country's ships, although the mouth of the river may belong to a particular country. The residents of the lower floors of a house cannot stop the residents of upper floors passing through. There are precedents for this in international law... This was repeatedly disputed, but the Russian consul refused to allow it and the entire issue was unresolved. Now, however, the circumstances in both countries are different and Liang has a point. This should be included in the demands over recognising the Omsk government.⁶³⁷

The Foreign Ministry supported this, saying that although the Russians were likely to protest, China was allowed to sail to the sea under the terms of the Aigun Treaty. It encouraged Wu Tong to go ahead with its plans. Once again, Kudashev would be

⁶³⁶ “Letter from Wu Tong manager Liang Shiyi, 5 Jul 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 549

⁶³⁷ “Letter from Guo Zongxi and Wang Shuhan, 6 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 628

kept in the dark.⁶³⁸ In August 1919, Wu Tong reported that it had selected the *Nanxiang* for the journey and that the ship would soon set sail.⁶³⁹

True to form, the Russians attempted to block the ship's downriver journey. The *Nanxiang*, loaded with passengers and a cargo of Japanese grain, approached Khabarovsk in late August. Russian customs refused to allow it to pass before the requisite technical negotiations were held. Wu Tong appealed to the Foreign Ministry and the new vice-consulate in Khabarovsk to intervene, saying that the Russians were violating the Aigun Treaty. The river would be closing soon, which made the matter all the more urgent.⁶⁴⁰ Wu Tong's petition was replete with nationalist language:

We ask the Foreign Ministry to think of the loss of sovereignty involved. This will have a big impact on the bigger picture. We again ask the Foreign Ministry to negotiate, both national prestige and the company will benefit greatly.⁶⁴¹

The Foreign Ministry obliged, sending a memo to Kudashev to allow the *Nanxiang* to pass on the basis of China's treaty rights. Khabarovsk vice-consul Quan was also

⁶³⁸ "Reply to Wu Tong manager Liang Yansun [Liang Shiyi], 24 Jul 1919" "Letter to the Communications Ministry, 4 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 557-559, 563-564

⁶³⁹ Nanxiang is a historic town near Shanghai. "Letter from Wu Tong, 19 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 601-602. Leong's account of the sailing of the *Nanxiang* is inaccurate. He claims that the *Nanxiang* was allowed to pass due to its cargo of food, whereas this does not seem to have played a part in the Russians' calculations. Similarly, Leong neglects to mention subsequent voyages to the Amur mouth by other merchant ships. See Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, 67-68

⁶⁴⁰ "Letter from Wu Tong, 2 Sept 1919" "Letter from Liang Shiyi and Cao Rulin, 6 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Xie Lin, 6 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 11 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 15 Sept 1919" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 619, 630-631, 631, 644-645, 652, 753-755

⁶⁴¹ "Letter from Liang Shiyi and Cao Rulin, 6 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 631

instructed to negotiate with the Russians on the issue. Meanwhile in Vladivostok, ex-ambassador Liu Jingren - now China's Allied representative - prevailed on the White administration to discuss the matter with Omsk. Like the Foreign Ministry, Quan and Liu argued that China had the right to sail to the mouth of the Amur based on the Aigun Treaty.⁶⁴²

Wu Tong's timing could not have been more opportune, for in August-September 1919 the Kolchak regime was on its last legs. Kolchak's government, preoccupied with survival, could not divert much attention to a single Chinese merchant ship. On 14 September, therefore, a telegram from Omsk came permitting the *Nanxiang* to complete its journey to Nikolaevsk. The ship finally docked in Khabarovsk on 18 September. Although the local Russian authorities continued to trouble the ship, first by forcibly conscripting the ship's Russian captain and then by questioning its technical specifications, vice-consul Quan was able to settle these disputes fairly swiftly. When the *Nanxiang* set sail for Nikolaevsk six days later on 24 September, Wu Tong refused to leave anything to chance. Manager Xie Lin personally boarded the ship for its sea-bound journey. The company's worries proved unfounded, for the *Nanxiang* reached Nikolaevsk without incident on 30 September. According to a company report, it seems that the journey was rather profitable.⁶⁴³

⁶⁴² "Letter to the Russian Embassy, 6 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 6 Sept 1919" "Letter from Fu Jiang, 10 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 15 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 624-625, 630, 639-640, 652

⁶⁴³ "Letter from Wu Tong, 16 Sept 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 22 Sept 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 24 Sept 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 2 Oct 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 7 Oct 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 23 Oct 1919" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 654, 670-671, 672-673, 690, 698, 725, 753-755

The *Nanxiang's* success was immediately seized upon as a precedent for other Chinese ships.⁶⁴⁴ By November, the *Mingshan* - another Wu Tong ship - made the downriver journey from Khabarovsk to Slavyanka with a cargo of wood. Quan could look on this with satisfaction. "Wu Tong took advantage of the disorder in Russia to buy many ships, opening up the waterways westwards of Harbin to Mohe, and northwards to the mouth of the Amur, a total of more than 2,000 miles [sic]. The future of Chinese shipping on the Sungari and Amur is bright."⁶⁴⁵ The resolution of the sea-journey question aptly demonstrates the power of merchant opportunism and official support, united by nationalist imperatives.

From civilian to naval craft: The Amur flotilla

The second unresolved issue concerned China's right to sail not just merchant ships, but also military craft on the Amur. This was an altogether thornier problem, for the Aigun and Petersburg treaties did not explicitly mention gunboats at all, something even the Chinese were forced to acknowledge.⁶⁴⁶ And if the presence of Chinese merchants on the Amur River was already considered threatening to the Russians, the presence of Chinese troops would be nothing less than provocation.

Nevertheless, river security was a critical problem and the Russians could no longer be relied upon to protect merchant shipping. Piracy had already flourished after the collapse of tsarist state power; now it was combined with the atamans' arbitrariness.

⁶⁴⁴ "Letter to the Trade and Agriculture Ministry, 18 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 721

⁶⁴⁵ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 754-755

⁶⁴⁶ "Letter from Tyler, 1 Oct 1919" "Instructions to Fu Jiang, 7 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 687-689, 691-692; "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 15 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 18-19 (Dongbei bianfang)

On its return from Nikolaevsk in October 1919, the *Nanxiang* was attacked by “Russian bandits” in the area near Katar Lake, downriver from Khabarovsk. The ship was chased by the bandits, who opened fire and damaged the vessel’s hull, forcing it to berth in Khabarovsk for repairs.⁶⁴⁷ Perhaps frustrated by their inability to halt the *Nanxiang*’s downriver journey, the White administration in Khabarovsk threatened to burn the ship if it spent the winter in the harbour. Only after vice-consul Quan intervened was the ship allowed to stay till the spring thaw, but the local authorities refused to allow further voyages to the sea.⁶⁴⁸ Other ships were also attacked along the Amur, causing loss not only to property, but also to life. The Binjiang shipping guild provided a quick summary of the main incidents of piracy, arguing that it was a threat to trade and sovereignty:

Sadly, when Chinese shipping was still in its infancy, China sat back while its economic rights were lost. However, in recent years, we have not lacked either groups or individuals who were enthusiastic about the shipping issue and bought vessels... Now it seems that banditry on the river banks is growing and robbery is often heard of... A shadow has fallen over the market... If the banditry can be calmed and travelling merchants can be at peace, this will benefit more than just transport and the shipping trade.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 10 Nov 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong, 12 Nov 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong, 26 Nov 1919” “Letter from Sun Liechen, 26 Nov 1919” “Letter from Quan Shi’en, 12 Dec 1919” “Letter from Wu Tong, 16 Dec 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 768, 770, 778-780, 780-781, 796-797, 818-811

⁶⁴⁸ “Letter from Wu Tong, 26 Nov 1919” “Letter from Quan Shi’en, 27 Nov 1919” “Letter to Kudashev, 8 Dec 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 778-780, 782, 794-795

⁶⁴⁹ “Letter from the Binjiang China Shipping Guild, 4 Feb 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 33-34 (Dongbei bianfang)

Some sense of the scale of the problem may be seen in a March 1920 Wu Tong report, which estimated that the total losses to shipping due to “banditry” was as much as 10,000 yuan for the whole of 1919.⁶⁵⁰

As mentioned earlier, efforts had already begun in summer 1918 to beef up China’s military capabilities on the Amur and to form a working river patrol. Much work had already been done by the Manchurian warlords but, given the scale of the effort, the central government’s involvement was vital. Beijing had to be on board not only because it had resources that the Manchurian authorities lacked, but also because river defence would require a level of diplomatic negotiation that was beyond local officials. What followed was a three-pronged approach. The Beijing government directed the river defence cause diplomatically and through the provision of the necessary military hardware. In Manchuria, the warlords also came out in support. And on the ground, consuls and merchants worked in tandem to get Chinese gunboats on the Amur. On all three levels, nationalism proved to be a critical driving force.

The river defence force had its beginnings in July 1919 when, after months of deliberation, the State Council finally approved a Navy Ministry proposal to send some gunboats to the Chinese Sungari. They would be headed by naval officer Wang Chongwen, who had previously participated in the abortive 1908 shipping

⁶⁵⁰ “Letter from Xu Nailin and Bao Guiqing, 11 Mar 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 45-46 (Dongbei bianfang). Again, Leong’s account of the Amur flotilla contains certain inaccuracies. For example, the flotilla was not allowed to pass merely due to humanitarian reasons. Chinese negotiations secured a firmer basis for their voyage to the Sungari and the vessels remained at their base for almost a decade. Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp 66-67

talks.⁶⁵¹ Four boats were selected: the *Jiang Heng*, *Li Jie*, *Li Chuan* and *Li Sui*. These four ships had a truly transnational past. The *Li Sui* and *Li Jie* were small German gunboats - formerly the *Vaterland* and the *Otter* - which had formed part of the Kaiser's Pacific Fleet based in Qingdao. Both ships were confiscated when the Chinese joined World War I in 1917. The *Jiang Heng*, also a gunboat, had been constructed in 1907 in the Kawasaki factory in Kobe, Japan, commissioned by the Qing-dynasty viceroy Wei Guangtao. It was previously used to patrol the rivers in the south of China. The *Li Chuan* was a tug, constructed in the Jiangnan Shipyards in Shanghai in 1916. All four ships had to be modified to make the sea journey from Shanghai to Vladivostok. They were not built for the icy conditions of the Russian Far East. Most of their 300-member crew, moreover, were southern Chinese unused to the cold.⁶⁵²

The Foreign Ministry was tasked with laying the diplomatic groundwork for this initiative. Unsurprisingly, China's initial overtures were summarily rejected by the Russians, from the Kolchak administration in Omsk to White officials in the region. To a man, they argued that the presence of Chinese military vessels violated Russian sovereignty, since the gunboats would have to travel through Russian territory to

⁶⁵¹ "Telegram from Guo Zongxi, 24 Apr 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 9 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 16 Jul 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Omsk consul Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 14 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 474-475, 552, 555, 561, 711-716

⁶⁵² "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Omsk consul Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 26 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 561, 680-681, 703

reach their Sungari base.⁶⁵³ Nevertheless, the Navy Ministry - also inspired by the general spirit of opportunism - did not wait for Russian approval. The *Jiang Heng*, *Li Jie*, *Li Chuan* and *Li Sui* arrived in Vladivostok on 29 July with Wang Chongwen. They planned to take up coal and water there and then sail up the Amur to the Sungari before the river froze in October.⁶⁵⁴

The storm broke with the arrival of the flotilla. Horvath, Kolchak's plenipotentiary in Vladivostok, was only informed the day before the ships came. He promptly issued a protest, claiming that their voyage violated Russian territorial waters. In response, Liu Jingren argued that the reason for sending the flotilla was purely to protect merchants along the river. The gunboats would enter the Chinese Sungari, in Chinese territory. They would not patrol Russian waters.⁶⁵⁵ The Russians replied that the Aigun and Petersburg treaties only accorded shipping rights to merchant vessels and not to military craft. Moreover, negotiations on shipping regulations had not been concluded, so the Chinese were technically not supposed to be sailing on the Amur in the first place. If China were to recognise Omsk, these talks could be held at

⁶⁵³ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 9 Jul 1919" "Letter from Kudashev, 24 Jul 1919" "Reply to Wu Tong manager Liang Yansun [Liang Shiyi], 24 Jul 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 4 Aug 1919" "Meeting with Kudashev, 16 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 552, 557, 557-559, 564, 591-592, 703-706

⁶⁵⁴ "Telegram from Wang Shuhan, 10 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 568-569

⁶⁵⁵ "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Omsk consul Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 2 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 4 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 5 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 10 Aug 1919" "Letter to the Russian Embassy, 11 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" "Meeting between the vice-minister and Japanese ambassador Obata, 8 Sept 1919" "Meeting between the vice-minister and US ambassador Reinsch, 9 Sept 1919" "Meeting between the vice-minister and French ambassador Boppe, 10 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 561, 562, 562, 564-565, 568, 569, 632-633, 634-635, 635-636, 642

once.⁶⁵⁶ No less a figure than Kolchak himself expressed dissatisfaction with the Chinese naval presence and warned that it would “affect the relations between both countries”.⁶⁵⁷

What followed through July and August was a concerted diplomatic effort to get the gunboats up the Amur.⁶⁵⁸ In response to Russian objections, the Chinese insisted on a far more expansive reading of the Aigun and Petersburg treaties.⁶⁵⁹ The Foreign Ministry argued that if Chinese ships were allowed to travel on the Amur according to the Aigun Treaty, this should also include military craft. If not, why was Russia not preventing Japanese naval vessels from sailing there?⁶⁶⁰ The new consul in Omsk, Fan Qiguang, and his Army Ministry colleague Zhang Silin were also enlisted in the campaign.⁶⁶¹ Fan kept to the Foreign Ministry line, arguing on the basis of the Aigun

⁶⁵⁶ “Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 6 Aug 1919” “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 10 Aug 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 27 Aug 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 28 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 566, 568, 612-613, 613

⁶⁵⁷ “Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 5 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 624

⁶⁵⁸ “Letter to the Navy Ministry, 18 Aug 1919” “Letter to the State Council, 20 Aug 1919” “Letter to the Communications Ministry, 21 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 592, 602, 603-604

⁶⁵⁹ “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 21 Aug 1919” “Letter from the State Council, 29 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 605-606, 683-684

⁶⁶⁰ “Letter to the Russian embassy, 26 Jul 1919” “Telegram to Liu Jingren, 4 Aug 1919” “Letter from the Communications Ministry, 16 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 559-560, 562-563, 591. The Russians countered that the Japanese were only “temporarily” using ships seized from the Reds and would return them soon. “Letter from the Russian embassy, 4 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 564

⁶⁶¹ “Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919” “Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 6 Aug 1919” “Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 13 Aug 1919” “Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 15 Aug 1919” “Letter to the Communications Ministry, 5 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 561, 566, 585, 586-587, 623

Treaty and protesting the presence of the Japanese.⁶⁶² The Russians were far from convinced. Moreover, the collapse of the White front absorbed all of Omsk's attention. Apart from continuing to express their disapproval, the Russians were in no mood to negotiate.⁶⁶³

Faced with this setback, the Chinese responded with their usual nationalist indignation. In Omsk, Zhang Silin saw Kolchak's arguments as evidence of jealousy on the part of the Russians, since they were losing ground in the geopolitical competition:

In previous years, our country had lost out many times to the Russians. Now that we have added consulates in several areas and recently also sent a flotilla, it seems that the rights that we had lost are gradually being recovered. The Omsk government cannot but view this with envy. We should take this opportunity to send troops and station them in key areas. This would supplement the strength of the border and make negotiations easier to handle.⁶⁶⁴

Opportunism always came mixed with fear. Behind the Russians' intransigence, the Chinese saw the heavy hand of Japanese intervention. Rumours reached Beijing about the extent of the Japanese presence along the river, which was already creating trouble for Chinese merchant ships.⁶⁶⁵ "I have heard that Japan has

⁶⁶² "Telegram from Fan Qiguang to Liu Jingren, 12 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 27 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 585, 612-613

⁶⁶³ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 28 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 613

⁶⁶⁴ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 5 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 624

⁶⁶⁵ "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Omsk consul Fan Qiguang, 1 Aug 1919" "Letter from the State Council, 12 Aug 1919" "Letter from the State Council, 23 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 561, 584, 609

instigated this, because if not, Russia would not have made it an issue,” wrote river defence chief Wang Chongwen.⁶⁶⁶ Wang reiterated his worries in a later message:

Ever since Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk have fallen into the Japanese sphere of influence, there have been rumours of a secret treaty allowing Japan to set up a police force along the river in Russian territory. The truth will out before long. Therefore, Japan is intentionally destroying China’s plans for river defence so that it may seize the whole region in one fell swoop. Japanese ambition is overweening and nothing is too farfetched for them.⁶⁶⁷

Liu Jingren agreed: “Omsk would not have been intransigent if not for the machinations of another country.”⁶⁶⁸ His negotiations with the Japanese Political Affairs chief, Matsudaira Tsuneo, also revealed that the Japanese were not happy with the Chinese flotilla.⁶⁶⁹ This paranoia was endorsed by the State Council: “The Russians are purposely dragging their feet. They have always been cunning in their methods. Moreover, others are making use of the circumstances.”⁶⁷⁰ This shared fear of Japan added urgency and cohesion to Chinese efforts.

As negotiations dragged on and summer turned into autumn, the Chinese began to panic. All four ships were not suited to cold weather. Besides, the river would be closing soon.⁶⁷¹ By late August, therefore, the Navy Ministry once again attempted to

⁶⁶⁶ “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 5 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 564-565

⁶⁶⁷ “Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 633

⁶⁶⁸ “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 10 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 568

⁶⁶⁹ “Telegram from Liu Jingren, 2 Sept 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 620

⁶⁷⁰ “Telegram from the State Council to Liu Jingren, 13 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 585

⁶⁷¹ “Telegram from Wang Shuhan, 10 Aug 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 19 Aug 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 568-569, 601

run the gauntlet and instructed the ships to set sail despite the ongoing negotiations. The flotilla left Vladivostok on 20 August for Nikolaevsk, arriving at the mouth of the Amur in early September.⁶⁷² The Russians immediately cried foul, once more accusing the Chinese of violating Russian sovereignty. This time, however, their disapproval took a more belligerent turn:

Before an understanding is reached, the ships should be asked to wait for further information at Nikolaevsk. If they do not await a proper negotiated solution, an incident may occur. The military officers along the Amur deal with matters in a crude fashion and they may set up torpedoes to block the ships.⁶⁷³

Rozanov, Horvath's replacement and widely regarded as a Japanese pawn, personally threatened to use armed force against the flotilla. At the same time, the Japanese warship stationed in Vladivostok began tailing the Chinese craft, and four Japanese gunboats docked in Nikolaevsk suddenly commenced patrolling the harbour. Japanese troops took over the manning of the battery facing the sea. These were all moves that the Chinese considered extremely suspicious.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷² "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 21 Aug 1919", "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 21 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 604-605, 606, 613-614, 632-633

⁶⁷³ "Telegram from Liu Jingren to Fan Qiguang, 21 Aug 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 605. See also "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919", Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 632-633

⁶⁷⁴ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 29 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 7 Sept 1919" "Telegram from the State Council to Liu Jingren, 9 Sept 1919" "Letter from the State Council conveying a telegram from Wang Chongwen, 15 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 26 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 613-614, 632-633, 633, 636, 650-651, 680-681; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 8 Aug 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 11 Oct 1919" Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2)*, p 434, 530

Because of these threats, the flotilla did not dare to enter Nikolaevsk directly. Instead, all four ships docked at Tatar Island, an uninhabited islet at the mouth of the Amur close to Nikolaevsk. They could not have chosen a less promising spot. The *Li Sui*, *Li Jie* and *Li Chuan* had been damaged and there was no fuel, food or drinking water to be found on the island. No tugs dared take the ships into the harbour. Due to the damage to the three ships, it would be very dangerous for the flotilla to return to Vladivostok - to say nothing of a voyage back to China.⁶⁷⁵ Worse still, Wang and the ships were cut off from Vladivostok, the nerve centre of Chinese diplomacy. Contact with the ships was lost.⁶⁷⁶

Now that the flotilla was dangerously out of the Beijing government's reach, the consulates and chambers of commerce stepped in. On 24 August, Wang met with Khabarovsk vice-consul Quan and the chamber of commerce chairman Sun Zuode to discuss how to get the ships into Nikolaevsk. They decided that the first step should be to find out if Nikolaevsk harbour had been mined, as was rumoured. However, Wang and Quan were too visible to the Russians and Japanese. Others would have to take over. In their speech to the chamber of commerce, they appealed to nationalist sentiment to secure the merchants' cooperation:

We had to appoint a competent and brave Chinese citizen to secretly cross over to Nikolaevsk. There, he could discuss with other Chinese citizens how to buy over the Russian officials. If they discovered that there were no torpedoes, they could immediately hire a tug to take the Chinese ships into the

⁶⁷⁵ "Telegram from Wang Chongwen to Liu Jingren, 3 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 8 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 10 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 16 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Minister, 22 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 620-621, 634, 641, 645-646, 653-654, 667-668

⁶⁷⁶ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 6 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 632-633, 695-696

harbour. Once this is achieved, the whole matter may be considered a success.⁶⁷⁷

The appeal worked. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the chambers themselves were no strangers to nationalist rhetoric. Chairman Sun volunteered for the task, since he had been in Russia for more than 20 years, dealt extensively with Russian officials and was friendly with the chamber leader in Nikolaevsk. A team was assembled to supply and assist the ships, comprising Sun, Wang's adjutant Liu Xunming and consular charge d'affaires Luo Zhongwen. They were to guide the ships to Nikolaevsk, help them enter the harbour and to allow them to sail to Khabarovsk if the torpedo threat proved false.⁶⁷⁸ Sun and the two officials promptly left for Nikolaevsk on 25 August and reported on the movements of Japanese troops and gunboats in the harbour. However, they were less successful in their mission to guide the ships into the harbour. The group returned to Khabarovsk on 8 September.⁶⁷⁹

The chamber of commerce reports provided useful ammunition for the Foreign Ministry's efforts to get the flotilla inland. For one, the Ministry was finally able to back up its protests with incontrovertible proof about the presence of Japanese gunboats.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 632

⁶⁷⁸ "Telegram from Wang Chongwen to Liu Jingren, 30 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 615, 645-646

⁶⁷⁹ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 7 Sept 1919" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 632-633, 633, 753. Liu was subsequently attacked by a Russian soldier in Khabarovsk, although the incident may have been unrelated to the gunboats issue. "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 8 Oct 1919" Li, Li, Xu, Guo, and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya*, pp 561-562

⁶⁸⁰ "Letter to the Russian embassy, 10 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 636-637

Using the chamber's intelligence as proof that Japanese ships were indeed on the Amur, the acting foreign minister attempted to enlist the US ambassador's help. He was able to play up the Japanese threat:

China is one of the Allies and there is no reason why it cannot send ships to the Sungari to protect its merchants from being harmed by the Reds. On the surface, the Russians are opposing this, but in reality it is Japan... Many indications show that Japan sees itself as the successor of Germany in Shandong and of Russia in North Manchuria. This is not critical at the moment, but in future it could cause a serious problem.⁶⁸¹

The Khabarovsk chamber of commerce was not alone in its display of patriotic spirit. In Nikolaevsk itself, the local chamber of commerce also reported on the position of Japanese ships and was instructed to supply the naval flotilla.⁶⁸² Initially, however, whatever relief they had managed to organise was confiscated by the Russians before it could reach Tatar Island. By early September, therefore, the flotilla's food was beginning to run out.⁶⁸³ This time, Wang called for the ships to be allowed to enter the Amur on humanitarian grounds.⁶⁸⁴

But even at this critical moment, humanitarianism was not the only concern. From its conception, the river defence project had been a nationalist cause. Rightly or

⁶⁸¹ "Meeting between the vice-minister and US ambassador Reinsch, 9 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 636

⁶⁸² "Telegram from Wang Chongwen to Liu Jingren, 30 Aug 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 18 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 26 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 615, 645-646, 657-659, 678

⁶⁸³ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 10 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 15 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing to Liu Jingren, 17 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 18 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 641, 645-646, 652, 655, 657-659

⁶⁸⁴ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 16 Sept 1919" "Telegram from the Navy Ministry to Liu Jingren, 16 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 653-654, 654

wrongly, the Beijing government had decided that the time was ripe to test Russia's resolve on the Amur. This limited the range of options that the Chinese were willing to take in a crisis. Facing starvation and stranded on a deserted island, on ships unsuited to the harsh environment, the crew proposed to make the journey back to Vladivostok. To Chinese officials however, this represented a supreme loss of Chinese prestige. It had to be avoided at all costs.⁶⁸⁵ Wang put the matter in no uncertain terms:

In order to fight for the country's shipping rights, the sailors have not shirked from sacrificing their lives, sailing these thin, shallow-water craft across thousands of miles of heavy seas. Now they will imminently run out of food. How can the Foreign Ministry bear to sit and watch them without coming to the rescue? Moreover, these shipping rights are set out in the treaty, if they are forced to return to Vladivostok, where will our national prestige be then?⁶⁸⁶

Such considerations made Wang and the Navy Ministry hesitate over authorising a return to Vladivostok. It also led the Chinese to reject other compromise solutions, even though it would have eased the sailors' plight. On 18 September, for example, Omsk conceded that the flotilla could be allowed to dock in Nikolaevsk provided the Chinese submit a written promise not to sail farther upriver. The Chinese rejected this as an infringement of their rights.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁵ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 16 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 653-654

⁶⁸⁶ "Letter from the State Council conveying a telegram from Wang Chongwen, 15 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 650

⁶⁸⁷ "Letter from the Frontier Defence bureau, 21 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 22 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 22 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 664, 668-670, 670. The Japanese claimed to be behind Omsk's concession. See "Meeting with the Japanese ambassador, 2 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 689-690

Because of this, no headway was made until the crew took matters into their own hands. In mid-September, a chamber of commerce relief boat finally brought coal and food to the flotilla, but the small craft could no longer brave the wind and ice. It also seems that several of the crew had died during the wait on Tatar Island. They therefore resolved to force their way into Nikolaevsk and winter there.⁶⁸⁸ The departure of the Japanese gunboats was the signal for the flotilla to enter the harbour, which they promptly did on 24 September after paying a hefty premium for a tug.⁶⁸⁹

Once there, the ships were again supported by the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce and its leader Sun. Together with vice-consul Quan, an extraordinary assembly of the chamber was called and the merchants pooled 530,000 rubles and more than 3,000 *pud* of flour (almost 50 tonnes) for the ships. Once again, this proved the persuasiveness of nationalist discourse:

The difficulties faced by the ships in Nikolaevsk were almost indescribable and the loan in Khabarovsk was requested out of absolute necessity. It is already unusual that the merchants could lend such a sum, much less collect so much flour. Food is scarce in Khabarovsk and the 3,000 *pud* came out of the merchants' own winter supplies, from which they sacrificed half to relieve the sailors. Their public spiritedness is to be lauded.⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁸ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 18 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 18 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 22 Sept 1919" "Telegram from the Communications Ministry to Liu Jingren, 24 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 26 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 657-659, 660-661, 667-668, 676, 680-681, 703

⁶⁸⁹ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 26 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 27 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 29 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 29 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 1 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 681, 682, 682-683, 684, 687

⁶⁹⁰ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 4 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 753

But this was only a temporary solution, since the river itself was due to freeze and the ships were not capable of dealing with the ice. Moreover, the successful entry into Nikolaevsk had whetted the Chinese appetite and both the Manchurian warlords and Wang himself began speaking of a “show of force” on the Sungari.⁶⁹¹ Wang’s opinion paper on the subject was hawkish in the extreme, displaying a classic combination of national pride and opportunism:

For China, this is indeed the opportunity of a thousand years. For Russia, these will be painful concessions. They are a strong race in East Asia. Seeing China recover its navigation rights, they will naturally be jealous and seek to hinder this. Consider Nikolaevsk. It is a trading port, which is why Chinese gunboats were not allowed to enter. But Russia had no strength to resist and prevent us from entering Nikolaevsk or sailing upriver. Their cowardice can be seen from this.⁶⁹²

These views were endorsed by both the Navy Ministry and the State Council.⁶⁹³ The flotilla’s next move, therefore, was motivated by a combination of self-preservation and opportunism. Barely two weeks after the ships reached Nikolaevsk, the Foreign Ministry asked consul Fan to negotiate their inland journey with Kolchak. When Omsk again replied that this was a breach of the Aigun Treaty, Fan replied that the gunboats would sail upriver regardless.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹¹ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 6 Oct 1919” “Letter from the State Council, 9 Oct 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 27 Oct 1919” “Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 6 Nov 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 696, 700-701, 703-706, 730-731, 762-764

⁶⁹² “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 11 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 704

⁶⁹³ “Letter from the State Council, 14 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 716-718

⁶⁹⁴ “Telegram to Fan Qiguang, 6 Oct 1919” “Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919” “Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 29 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 695, 702-703, 735-736. A request was also sent to Liu Jingren in Vladivostok and ambassador Kudashev. See “Draft to Kudashev, 11 Oct 1919” “Telegram to Liu Jingren, 13 Oct 1919” “Meeting with Kudashev, 17 Oct 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 706-707, 707, 719-720

This was clearly a breach of Omsk's earlier goodwill and provocative in the extreme. The Russian response was predictably unyielding: If the flotilla did indeed force its way inland, it would be attacked and sunk.⁶⁹⁵ In Vladivostok, Rozanov informed Liu Jingren that the gunboats would most definitely not be allowed to proceed, and repeated his earlier threat to fire on the ships.⁶⁹⁶ With the water levels falling and food and fuel in short supply, however, time seemed to be running out. On 18 October, three of the four gunboats lifted anchor and sailed into the Amur, expecting to reach Khabarovsk in a week's time. The *Li Chuan* was left in Nikolaevsk as it could not handle the shallow water. It seems that the order to set sail had come from the Navy Ministry, but neither local Chinese officials nor the Russian authorities had been informed beforehand. Once again, the gunboats were cut off from regular contact.⁶⁹⁷

Determined to match this naval brinkmanship, the Russians began setting up artillery and torpedoes 20 miles downriver from Khabarovsk, under the command of no less notorious an officer than Kalmykov. Mines had also been laid in the river to halt the flotilla's advance.⁶⁹⁸ Finally, the Chinese thought twice. The Foreign Ministry wrote

⁶⁹⁵ "Telegram from Fan Qiguang, 11 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Russian embassy, 29 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 702-703, 739

⁶⁹⁶ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 16 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 25 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 719, 728

⁶⁹⁷ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 25 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 25 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 26 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 26 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry conveying a telegram from Lin Jianzhang, 28 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 29 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 19 Nov 1919" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 27 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Navy and Army Ministries to Li Jia'ao, 2 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 727-728, 728, 729, 729, 732, 736-739, 772-774, 782-784, 789-792

⁶⁹⁸ "Telegram from Liu Jingren, 26 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 26 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 27 Oct 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 19 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 729, 729, 730, 772-774

urgently to Kudashev to prevent a misunderstanding and instructed Quan to smooth things out in Khabarovsk. Quan desperately asked the Khabarovsk chamber of commerce to send a messenger to warn the gunboats about the mines.⁶⁹⁹ But this was too late to prevent an incident. As the flotilla neared Khabarovsk on 25 October, Kalmykov's troops opened fire with blank rounds. The Chinese gunboats returned fire, but immediately turned back to Nikolaevsk. On the way, the *Jiang Heng* ran aground in shallow water and had to be towed.⁷⁰⁰

Confusion reigned for a few days as both Beijing and local officials sought reliable information on the condition and whereabouts of the ships, an effort hindered by the chaotic state of communications.⁷⁰¹ Eventually, news reached Khabarovsk vice-consul Quan that the four gunboats had returned safely to Nikolaevsk on 3 November, where they were forced to winter as the river froze. It also emerged that the order to open fire had originated with Rozanov. Kalmykov, whose troops perpetrated the attack, had also condemned the voyage in the harshest terms, saying that if the Chinese ships wished to come to Khabarovsk, they would have to

⁶⁹⁹ "Letter to Kudashev, 30 Oct 1919" "Letter to the Frontier Defence Bureau, 31 Oct 1919" "Telegram to Quan Shi'en, 1 Nov 1919" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 27 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 742, 744, 745, 782-784

⁷⁰⁰ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 29 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 30 Oct 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 30 Oct 1919" "Telegram to Quan Shi'en, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 3 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 6 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 19 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Navy and Army Ministries to Li Jia'ao, 2 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 736-739, 743, 744, 745, 750, 762, 772-774, 789-792; "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 7 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 8-10 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁰¹ "Telegram to Quan Shi'en, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram to Quan Shi'en, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram from the Navy Ministry to Li Jia'ao, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao to Bao Guiqing, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao to Quan Shi'en, 1 Nov 1919" "Telegram from the River Defence Bureau to Li Jia'ao, 2 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao to the Navy Ministry, 4 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en to Li Jia'ao, 5 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 745, 746, 746, 747, 748, 748, 755-756, 758

do so “from the bottom of the river”.⁷⁰² More fuel was added to the fire when it emerged that Kolchak had commended Rozanov for his actions.⁷⁰³

This time, the gunboat issue well and truly became a nationalist *cause celebre*.

Public condemnation reached fever pitch and came from all quarters. The outcry demonstrated the clear and widespread perception that the Amur navigation question was a nationalist one. On 18 November, the Harbin *Guoji Xiebao* published an article titled “The Impact of the Gunboat Affair on River Defence”, which in effect was a treatise on Chinese sovereignty:

River defence is one of the most critical aspects of national sovereignty. The patrolling of gunboats on the river frontier is but an expression of national sovereignty and an exercise of its river defence mission. These actions are righteous and heroic. There was no ulterior motive of spying or aggression. All military authorities in Russia should have respected this and honoured the prestige of our Chinese overseas flotilla. However, the authorities neglected to do so on the basis that they had not been informed in advance. Not only did they not provide cover and guide the ships, they violently infringed on international law and attacked the ships with armed force... This is no less than a complete usurpation of a sovereign country’s river defence mission.⁷⁰⁴

⁷⁰² “Telegram from Quan Shi’en, 3 Nov 1919” “Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 3 Nov 1919” “Telegram from Li Jia’ao to the River Defence Bureau, 3 Nov 1919” “Letter to Kudashev, 6 Nov 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 6 Nov 1919” “Telegram from the Navy Ministry to Li Jia’ao, 7 Nov 1919” “Letter from Quan Shi’en, 27 Nov 1919” “Letter from the Navy and Army Ministries to Li Jia’ao, 2 Dec 1919” “Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 6 Dec 1919” “Letter from Canlu, 12 Dec 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 750, 752, 752, 760, 760-762, 767, 782-784, 789-792, 793-794, 797; “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 7 Jan 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 8-10 (Dongbei bianfang); “Telegram from Li Jia’ao, 11 Jan 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 12-13

⁷⁰³ “Letter from the Navy Ministry conveying a telegram from Wang Chongwen, 29 Nov 1919” “Letter from the Navy Ministry, 4 Dec 1919” “Letter to Kudashev, 9 Dec 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 788, 792-793, 796. On the Russian press response, see Appendix G.

⁷⁰⁴ “Letter from the River Defence Bureau to Li Jia’ao, 29 Nov 1919” Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 785. For the *Guoji Xiebao* articles, see Appendix F.

Going further, the article compared the gunboat issue to other key dates in China's calendar of victimhood: the loss of Chinese control over Outer Mongolia and the Blagoveshchensk massacre of 1900. All this, the article claimed, was part of the "slaughter of our brethren" and "invasion of national territory" by the "great Slav race".⁷⁰⁵

In Shanghai, the National Peace Association criticised the government for its weak response to the incident, which they framed as a matter of sovereignty.⁷⁰⁶ Questions were raised in Parliament about the attack on the flotilla, also by appealing to the issue of sovereignty:

This brutal and unreasonable behaviour not only shows utter contempt for our treaties, but disregard for humanity and bilateral relations as well... The government has abandoned the ships like worn-out shoes, but this is a matter of sovereignty and human life. It must be fought... Now several months have passed since the incident and the state of the government's negotiations is unknown. By law, we can only lodge this question and ask the government to give us a clear reply within five days, to put the public's suspicions to rest.⁷⁰⁷

Special hatred was reserved for Kalmykov, the immediate perpetrator of the incident. The commander of Chinese forces in Russia declared that Kalmykov was "brutal to the Chinese, pure and simple". In Vladivostok, consul Shao termed him "a special enemy of China". Warlord Bao, now military governor of Jilin province, called Kalmykov "the mastermind of the attack... His crimes are great and China has no

⁷⁰⁵ "Letter from the River Defence Bureau to Li Jia'ao, 29 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 786-787

⁷⁰⁶ "Telegram from the Shanghai All-China Union, 19 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 22 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁰⁷ "Letter from the State Council, 8 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 12-13 (Dongbei bianfang)

reason to show leniency". The chambers of commerce in Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Nikolsk-Ussuriisk simply deemed him "evil".⁷⁰⁸

Diplomacy was discarded in favour of measures that were altogether tougher and coordinated along nationalist lines. Already in September 1919, Heilongjiang warlord Sun Liechen had initiated an embargo on food to shake up the Russians and secure the flotilla's entry from Tatar Island to Nikolaevsk. Now other warlords joined in. In Jilin, Bao proposed to withhold flour shipments from Harbin to Vladivostok over the attack on the ships.⁷⁰⁹ And in Fengtian, Manchurian overlord Zhang Zuolin pulled no punches:

I was unaware of the preparations leading up to the voyage and hence made no plans myself. Now that the ships have taken the risk to sail to Khabarovsk and been fired upon, the whole matter may fail at the final hurdle and the danger is immense... Lately the Russians have no real strength and there is nothing to worry from them... If they block Chinese ships, China should instruct the troops along the river to occupy strategic points and halt all shipping. From now on their ships will not be allowed to sail into the Sungari. I sincerely believe this will be enough to send them to their deaths.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁸ "Letter from Canlu, 12 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 797; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 3 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 113, 120-121; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 20 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 55-56

⁷⁰⁹ Wang had kept the Manchurian authorities apprised of the flotilla's difficulties. "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 18 Sept 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 29 Oct 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 660-661, 683-684. See also "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 15 Sept 1919" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Guo Zongxi, 22 Sept 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 650-651, 666-667

⁷¹⁰ "Telegram from Zhang Zuolin, 1 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 747

The Navy Ministry supported this wholeheartedly. In its proposal to the State Council, the Ministry suggested using the upswell of nationalist sentiment to diplomatic advantage:

This matter affects not only border defence, it also involves national prestige... Merchants along the river in Heilongjiang and Jilin have been harmed by the Reds and Red bandits, and are especially eager for the ships to protect them. Because Russia has violated the treaty and stopped the ships, the people are enraged. The governors of the provinces adjacent to Russia should be informed to pursue an embargo actively, in order to show resistance by not supplying Russia with food and clothes. Diplomatic proceedings should be published in Chinese and foreign newspapers, so that peace-loving Chinese and other foreigners may judge.⁷¹¹

The Navy Ministry went as far as drafting a newspaper article which put forward China's case, dramatised the plight of the sailors, publicised the Manchurian embargo and threatened military action. Both the article and the Ministry's proposals were approved by the State Council.⁷¹²

Given the level of public anger, it is not surprising that the embargo received widespread support. Again, this was framed as a nationalist issue and received support on both sides of the Sino-Russian border. In Blagoveshchensk, the chamber of commerce and Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association set up a committee to coordinate the trading ban, openly demanding that the gunboats be allowed to reach the Sungari.⁷¹³ The chamber of commerce in Bayan County, near Harbin, issued an

⁷¹¹ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 5 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 757

⁷¹² "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 5 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 6 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), pp 756-758, 764-765

⁷¹³ "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 29 Jan 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 1 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 20-21, 22-23; "Letter from Kudashev, 21 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 23-24 (Dongbei bianfang)

announcement alongside their embargo notice which was charged with nationalist fervour:

The newspapers have said that the Chinese river defence fleet were *en route* when they were fired upon and halted by Russian troops. This disregard for treaty rights has enraged the entire nation. The Bayan merchants are also citizens. Hearing this dire news, we are deeply angered. We immediately held a meeting and resolved to temporarily halt trade in food, etc to Russia. In sum, for every day that the fleet does not reach its headquarters, the prohibition on trade will not be abolished. How could we not do this out of love for our brethren?⁷¹⁴

The Foreign Ministry's reply to the Parliamentary question also mentioned the embargo as its chief response to the incident.⁷¹⁵

The embargo worked. In mid-November, Vladivostok consul Shao reported that the city only had enough food to last a week and that the White administration was asking specifically for shipments from Harbin. The Navy Ministry recommended that this should be denied, since sending food to Vladivostok would be tantamount to "repaying hatred with kindness". Only when the flotilla received permission to sail to the Sungari would the embargo be lifted. This was duly conveyed to Shao, who urged that the embargo be announced officially, not just tacitly encouraged. Both the State Council and the Foreign Ministry agreed to do so.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁴ "Letter from Kudashev, 21 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 24 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷¹⁵ "Letter to the State Council, 13 Jan 1920" "Letter to the State Council, ministries and provincial governors, 2 Feb 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 16-17, 32 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷¹⁶ "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 19 Nov 1919" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 20 Nov 1919" "Telegram to Shao Hengjun, 21 Nov 1919" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 18 Dec 1919" "Letter from the State Council, 31 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 775, 775-776, 776, 811, 829; "Telegram to Li Jia'ao, 6 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 5

This, coupled with the final collapse of White power, gave the Chinese the opening they needed. Following Rozanov's ouster in January 1920, the new regime headed by zemstvo chairman A.S. Medvedev was eager to court Chinese approval and proved more flexible on the gunboats issue. In February, therefore, Li Jia'ao felt himself on firmer ground and requested official permission for the flotilla to sail to Khabarovsk and the Sungari at last. On 9 March, he finally managed to secure the Medvedev government's approval for the voyage.⁷¹⁷ In Khabarovsk itself, Kalmykov was ejected by the Reds in February and the new soviet leader bitterly condemned his attack on the Chinese gunboats. Vice-consul Quan therefore successfully obtained a soviet promise that the flotilla would be able to pass.⁷¹⁸

As before, however, the issue of sovereignty was still a sticking point and the Chinese were not willing to settle for half-measures. The written approval issued by the Vladivostok zemstvo and the Khabarovsk soviet maintained that the flotilla's voyage was technically impermissible under their interpretation of the Aigun Treaty. In allowing it to set sail, the Russians were making an exception for humanitarian and diplomatic reasons. Their concession should therefore not be used as a precedent. The Chinese considered this inadequate and further negotiations were necessary to

⁷¹⁷ "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 19 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 9 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 20 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 43, 45, 49 (Dongbei bianfang); "Telegram from Li Jia'ao, 2 Mar 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 15 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 117, 416-419

⁷¹⁸ "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 24 Mar 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 10 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 51-52, 59-62 (Dongbei bianfang)

reiterate China's right both to sail military vessels on the Amur and to reach the sea unhindered.⁷¹⁹ As Bao argued:

The provisional government has added further limits and wishes to prevent China from benefiting in the long term. How is this sincere? The matter will have a great impact on sovereignty and if China does not establish some diplomatic foundations now, Russia will use the pretext of our violating the treaty in future. Then sovereignty will be lost and there will be no end to this.⁷²⁰

Nevertheless, the final act in the flotilla's torturous journey to the Sungari had yet to be played out. In March 1920, just as the Russians had finally given their approval to the voyage, the gunboats were caught up in the fighting between the Japanese and the Reds in Nikolaevsk. Some of the sailors in the *Li Sui* were injured in the fray. Moreover, the Chinese merchants who had supplied the sailors were forced to flee, leaving the flotilla even more isolated than before.⁷²¹ Unfortunately for the crew, the Reds recaptured the town in late March and massacred its Japanese inhabitants. After reclaiming Nikolaevsk, the Japanese accused the gunboats of aiding the Reds by giving ammunition to them and opening fire on Japanese troops.⁷²² According to Wang Chongwen, Japanese newspapers were carrying stories of a diary, found in a

⁷¹⁹ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 13 Mar 1920" "Letter from Li Jia'ao, 26 Mar 1920" "Letter to Li Jia'ao, 3 Apr 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 10 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 46, 52-53, 57-58, 59-62 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²⁰ "Letter from Xu Nailin and Bao Guiqing, 17 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 65 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²¹ "Telegram from Lin Jianzhang, 24 Mar 1920" "Letter from the Navy Ministry conveying a telegram from Lin Jianzhang, 6 Apr 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 1 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 159, 180, 369; "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 26 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 88 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²² "Letter from the Navy Ministry conveying a telegram from Lin Jianzhang, 29 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 364-365; "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 29 Mar 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 30 May 1920" "Telegram from Shao Hengjun, 23 Jun 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 28 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 53, 84, 86, 88-91 (Dongbei bianfang)

dead Japanese soldier's pocket, accusing the Chinese sailors of firing machine guns to help the Reds. The Khabarovsk soviet's concession on the gunboats issue was seen as further proof that the Chinese were in league with the Reds.⁷²³ Wang dismissed these claims. In actual fact, the gunboats had been involved in a humanitarian mission, towing Chinese and other refugees away from Nikolaevsk. But these rumours were sufficient pretext for the Japanese to lodge further obstacles to their voyage. They called for a joint investigation into the flotilla's involvement in the Nikolaevsk incident. This only delayed the gunboats further as yet more negotiations carried on into the summer.⁷²⁴

By this time, the gunboats had been unable to reach their destination for almost a year. With the 1920 shipping season now imminently closing, the crew faced the prospect of yet another winter in Nikolaevsk. This was not a pleasant prospect:

Both officers and men were not equipped with winter clothes, moreover the weather was extremely cold and it was not possible to increase the fire in the ships for warmth. Therefore, many of the crew have fallen ill.⁷²⁵

With this latest setback, the mood turned ugly. Already in spring 1920, the crew had gathered en masse to ask their captains to sail home. They had to be calmed by their commanders and mollified by Nikolaevsk vice-consul Zhang Wenhuan. When the

⁷²³ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 28 Jun 1920" "Telegram from Wang Chongwen, 28 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 88-91, 91-93 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²⁴ "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 28 Jun 1920" "Telegram from Wang Chongwen, 28 Jun 1920" "Letter from the Frontier Defence Bureau, 30 Jun 1920" "Meeting with the Japanese ambassador, 1 Jul 1920" "Letter from Nikolaevsk charge d'affaires Zhu Dexin, 26 Aug 1920" "Letter to the State Council, 7 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 8 Sept 1920" "Letter from the Vladivostok representative of the *Shanghai Shishi Xinbao*, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 88-91, 91-93, 93, 94, 121-124, 126, 126-127, 127-129 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²⁵ "Letter from Nikolaevsk charge d'affaires Zhu Dexin, 26 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 123 (Dongbei bianfang)

Japanese caused further delay, the crew became even more hostile, threatening to do battle if the Japanese attempted to interfere with their departure. Alternatively, the crew proposed to abandon their mission completely and take merchant vessels to Khabarovsk. The captains could only buy time by saying that an order to set sail would come any day. By August, there was genuine fear of a mutiny and even the troops' families in Fuzhou issued an appeal:

The crew has been held up for a long time and negotiations have not borne fruit. The river will soon freeze and the soldiers are angry. We ask the government to consider the greater good, the lives of hundreds of troops and thousands of overseas Chinese, and to get the diplomatic corps to help with negotiations so that the gunboats may leave Nikolaevsk before the river closes and the troops may be calmed.⁷²⁶

News of this reached the Chinese press in Vladivostok and was milked for all its patriotic potential:

Japan's constant, obstructive plotting is no less than a fear that once Chinese ships set sail, China will thereafter be able to recover its navigation rights on the Sungari and Amur. Japan's evil intention to inherit Russian privileges is known to all... Stuck in the ice and snow, seeking shelter from a hail of bullets, the Chinese ships will not be able to recover if Japan succeeds in its plans again... The latest is that the long-suffering Chinese sailors stationed in the far north have been baselessly slandered by Japan and are forced to be held up overseas, unable to set sail. They are all extremely angry and wish to reach a final reckoning with Japan. Their spirits are agitated and they will be unpredictable. If this leads to another incident, Japan should take full responsibility, because Chinese citizens were forced into this by Japan.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁶ "Letter from the State Council, 31 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 124 (Dongbei bianfang). See also "Letter to the State Council, 7 Sept 1920" "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 14 Sept 1920" pp 126, 129 in the same volume.

⁷²⁷ "Letter from the Vladivostok representative of the *Shanghai Shishi Xinbao*, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 128 (Dongbei bianfang)

Eventually, it was the phased withdrawal of the Japanese army from Siberia that broke the impasse. The Japanese requested that the gunboats be used as an escort for their retreat to Harbin and even provided coal for the journey.⁷²⁸ The flotilla finally set sail from Nikolaevsk, reaching Khabarovsk on 30 September and leaving for the Sungari on 5 October. At long last the gunboats reached their Sungari headquarters on 8 October 1920 - almost a year and a half after they first arrived in Vladivostok on 29 July 1919.⁷²⁹

The immediate impetus for the establishment of a river defence fleet was to protect merchant shipping, especially in the vacuum left by the collapse of Russian administration. Underlying it, however, was the nationalist rhetoric of sovereignty, national prestige and rights. At every stage of the flotilla's journey and with every setback, this foundation was laid bare. It channelled Chinese decision-making away from compromise and into opportunism. Furthermore, although the key player in the river defence project was the Beijing government, these nationalist ideas resonated among the overseas Chinese and their compatriots on the border. In Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk the chambers of commerce assisted the gunboats directly, taking up where the Beijing government left off. In Blagoveshchensk and Vladivostok, Chinese merchants initiated an embargo to force the Russians to come to terms. They spoke a shared nationalist language which was immediately intelligible on both sides of the border. Although the flotilla's path to the Sungari was a long and arduous one, it

⁷²⁸ "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 7 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 135-137 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷²⁹ "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 5 Oct 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 5 Oct 1920" "Telegram from Wang Chongwen, 12 Oct 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing, 14 Oct 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 135, 135, 136-137, 137 (Dongbei bianfang); "Telegram from Quan Shi'en, 23 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 247

eventually succeeded in its mission. Once again, this was enabled by the unifying power of opportunistic nationalism.

China consolidates its gains

As White power was progressively swept away in 1920, the stage was set for a settlement of the Amur shipping question. Throughout the spring and summer, Wu Tong's ships were still running into obstacles, this time mostly from the Japanese. In May, the company sent the *Yixing* and *Yanghu* to rescue overseas Chinese caught up in the fighting in Nikolaevsk, but both ships were held up in Khabarovsk by the Japanese. The *Yixing* was eventually allowed to set sail to Nikolaevsk, but only as an exception and only if it flew the Red Cross flag. That same month, the company also reported that another of its ships, the *Shanghai*, had been stopped by the Russians en route to Blagoveshchensk.⁷³⁰ Finally, in July, Wu Tong brought news that the Japanese had issued their own shipping regulations in Khabarovsk, and that it was the Japanese military authorities who were putting pressure on the Russians to obstruct Chinese ships. The vice-consulate in Nikolaevsk reported that the Japanese authorities were causing difficulties for other relief ships - not just Wu Tong's - which had been sent to supply and repatriate Chinese refugees. Naturally, all these were

⁷³⁰ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 14 May 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 17 May 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 21 May 1920" "Letter from Dong Shi'en, 5 Jun 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 13 Jul 1920" "Letter from Wu Tong, 29 Jul 1920" "Letter from Wu Tong, 29 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 76, 77, 78, 85, 97, 101-103, 132-133 (Dongbei bianfang); "Letter from the State Council, 15 Jun 1920" "Letter from Quan Shi'en, 10 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, pp 388, 416-419; "Letter from Zhang Shouzeng, 14 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 167-168

seen as infringements of China's fundamental right to navigation on the Amur and an unwelcome encroachment of Japanese influence.⁷³¹

But with the Reds back in power and the Japanese on their way out, a solution was soon at hand. In May 1920, Heihe circuit intendant Zhang Shouzeng - the architect of the first shipping agreement with the Reds two years ago - was able to reopen talks with the incoming soviet administration in Blagoveshchensk.⁷³² Zhang, joined by the new Blagoveshchensk consul Ji Jing, persuaded the soviets to restore the old 1918 agreement. Once again, the Russians would no longer inspect or stop Chinese ships on the Amur and official documents to that effect were exchanged. The Foreign Ministry considered this a diplomatic breakthrough confirming China's navigation rights on the Amur.⁷³³ And although inspections occurred sporadically over the summer as the Reds continued their campaign against the Japanese, Zhang was able to reach an understanding with the soviets. The final round of talks took place in August, when Zhang lodged an official protest against the checks. The Blagoveshchensk soviet accused the Chinese of transporting Japanese troops and weapons, a charge that Zhang strenuously denied.⁷³⁴ Eventually, an agreement was

⁷³¹ "Letter from Wu Tong, 29 Jul 1920" "Letter from Wu Tong, 31 Jul 1920" "Letter from the State Council, 13 Aug 1920" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 23 Aug 1920" "Letter from Nikolaevsk charge d'affaires Zhu Dexin, 26 Aug 1920" "Letter from Sun Liechen, 29 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 101-103, 103-104, 112-114, 120-121, 121-124, 131-132 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷³² "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 7 Apr 1920" "Telegram to Sun Liechen, 10 Apr 1920" "Telegram from Ji Jing, 11 Apr 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 58-59, 62, 62 (Dongbei bianfang); "Letter from Zhang Shouzeng, 14 Jun 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 167-168

⁷³³ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 21 May 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 26 May 1920" "Telegram from Sun Liechen, 13 Aug 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 58, 81-82, 109-110 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷³⁴ "Telegram from Zhang Shouzeng, 6 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, p 125 (Dongbei bianfang)

reached on 17 September to abolish inspections on Chinese ships once and for all. It seems that from then onwards, the Reds stuck to their promise and no further complaints were received from Chinese merchant ships.⁷³⁵

Unlike many of its other rights-recovery endeavours - say, for example, the return of Shandong or defaulting on Boxer Indemnity payments - the Chinese proved extremely successful on the Amur shipping question. Issues that had been outstanding since the Aigun Treaty of 1858 were effectively resolved, thanks to a combination of Russian weakness and Chinese activism. In three years, Chinese merchant ships gained the ability to sail on the Amur without hindrance, plying both banks of the river. They had constructed the beginnings of an Amur merchant fleet and secured the route to the sea. Most importantly, a river defence fleet had been established on one of the Amur's tributaries, giving China a military presence on a river that had once been completely off limits. These were all goals that the Chinese framed in nationalist terms. The gains were not merely financial or military - they were national.

China's successful resolution of the Amur shipping issue is testament to the power that nationalism exerted over multiple social groups. This rhetoric, which combined fear and opportunism, thus acted as a broad cohesive force. Merchants and local officials spoke the same language and led the initiative to restore China's presence on the river. They worked together to make real strides in merchant shipping. When the Beijing government took centre stage, as in the gunboats issue, nationalism bound local actors to the larger enterprise, supporting diplomatic manoeuvres and

⁷³⁵ "Telegram from Zhang Shouzeng, 24 Sept 1920" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 31 Dec 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 131, 155-158 (Dongbei bianfang)

extending the government's reach. This made it possible for the Chinese to exploit Russian weakness as effectively as they did over this issue.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than with the Wu Tong Shipping Company, formed as it was out of warlord initiative, local merchant capital and a powerful network of managers with influence in Beijing. Throughout this period, Wu Tong combined nationalist imperatives with a keen sense of Russian weakness. It took advantage of the instability of the Russian Civil War to construct a merchant fleet almost overnight, pioneering merchant shipping on the Amur. It was able to test Russian resolve by unilaterally sailing to the river mouth. Financial considerations played their part but, in fact, Wu Tong was never very profitable.⁷³⁶ Instead, it seems that nationalist language lay behind all of the company's initiatives.

Moreover, Wu Tong undertook projects that were not merely mercantile in nature. In February 1920, with the flotilla stilled holed up in Nikolaevsk, the company offered to refit three of its own ships and sell them to the river defence bureau. Its rationale was that banditry was hurting trade and river defence would help secure China's navigation rights. Warlords Bao and Sun urged Beijing to make the purchase, but the government held out on making a decision for months due to concerns about the costs involved.⁷³⁷ The company also pitched in to help the overseas Chinese and their officials. One of its ships, the *Shaoxing*, was used to transport consular troops

⁷³⁶ "Letter from Wu Tong, 6 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 68-69 (Dongbei bianfang). The company eventually folded in 1925 due to poor financial performance. Leong claims that after 1920, the Soviets continued to prevent the Chinese from sailing to the sea, but Wu Tong's repeated voyages seem to disprove this. Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p 242

⁷³⁷ "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Xu Nailin, 9 Feb 1920" "Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Sun Liechen, 13 Feb 1920" "Letter from Xu Nailin and Bao Guiqing, 11 Mar 1920" "Letter from the Navy Ministry, 20 Mar 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 36-37, 41, 45-46, 49 (Dongbei bianfang)

from Blagoveshchensk.⁷³⁸ It sent other ships to aid Chinese refugees, and at a financial loss:

When the overseas Chinese in Khabarovsk and Nikolaevsk were in danger from the war, the company sent ships with great risk to rescue them, repatriating several thousands from Khabarovsk. Along the way many dangers were encountered, which disrupted shipping, but the company did not bother. The overseas merchants are our brethren and Wu Tong must do its best to help them.⁷³⁹

Therefore, Wu Tong was not just a commercial concern. It formed a nexus between merchants, officials and the Beijing government, channelling their shared nationalist aspirations towards a common goal.

The critical role played by Wu Tong was acknowledged even by its detractors. The last chapter has mentioned the controversy over the allocation of Semenov's gold. When the dispute over Ivanov-Rinov's confiscations had been resolved, Wu Tong requested compensation for its losses.⁷⁴⁰ Because the ships had been detained through March, April and most of May 1919, they could not be deployed in time and missed out on half a month's shipping after the river opened. Factoring in the lost revenue, Wu Tong asked for almost 938,000 yuan in damages.⁷⁴¹ On top of this, the company requested 7,500 yuan in compensation for the October 1919 attack on the

⁷³⁸ "Telegram from Ji Jing, 4 Jul 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian*, p 482

⁷³⁹ "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 232

⁷⁴⁰ "Telegram from Shi Shaochang, 29 May 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, p 525

⁷⁴¹ "Letter from Wu Tong, 16 Dec 1919" "Letter from the Communications Ministry, 22 Dec 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 809-810, 815-819

Nanxiang.⁷⁴² The Foreign Ministry informed Kudashev that the Russians would be held responsible for this, but Kudashev insisted that the matter could not be discussed until a recognised Russian government had been established.⁷⁴³

Frustrated at Kudashev's stonewalling, Beijing decided to compensate Wu Tong out of the gold confiscated from Semenov.⁷⁴⁴

As we have seen, this decision caused controversy among the merchants who had actually been robbed by Semenov. They demanded to know why Wu Tong's claims were given preference over their own legitimate ones.⁷⁴⁵ Beijing's justification was clear: Wu Tong's key role in the navigation rights issue. The Foreign Ministry explicitly termed the company "a pioneer in Manchurian shipping".⁷⁴⁶ In Manchuria, warlords Bao and Sun also supported compensation for Wu Tong on the basis that "the company has not shirked from adversity, sailing a thousand miles from the Argun to Nikolaevsk, laying the foundation for Chinese shipping and taking the first step to

⁷⁴² "Letter from Wu Tong, 6 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 68-69 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁴³ "Letter to Kudashev, 12 Nov 1919" "Letter from Wu Tong, 26 Nov 1919" Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2)*, pp 769-770, 778-780; "Letter to Kudashev, 16 Jan 1920" "Letter from Kudashev, 24 Jan 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 19-20, 25 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁴⁴ "Letter to the ministries of Communications and Trade and Agriculture, Zhang Zuolin, Bao Guiqing and Sun Liechen, 21 May 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 78-79 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁴⁵ "Draft to the State Council, 31 Mar 1920" "Letter from Wu Tong, 13 Apr 1920" "Letter to the Finance Ministry, 17 May 1920" "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 21 May 1920" "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, pp 69-70, 89-90, 125-126, 134-136, 225-235

⁷⁴⁶ "Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920" Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 231

recovering navigation rights”.⁷⁴⁷ Even the aggrieved merchants conceded that Wu Tong had “revived shipping and fostered trade”.⁷⁴⁸

Wu Tong found itself having to justify its claim to the merchants. The company reiterated its mission in terms that would have resonated with its audience:

In opening up international rivers to shipping - both the up- and downriver stretches of the Amur, Ussuri and Argun - over thousands of miles we have repeatedly run into bandits and robbers and experienced many losses. But to recover the nation’s shipping rights and bring benefits to Chinese merchants, Wu Tong did not have the least intention of retreating. It proceeded with vigour.⁷⁴⁹

Given that Wu Tong’s board members were influential in Beijing, it is unsurprising that the government would have favoured the company in its decision over Semenov’s gold. But the company’s nationalist credentials could not be denied, even by the merchants involved. Wu Tong was therefore a symbol of Chinese nationalist opportunism, bringing together disparate groups in pursuit of one goal: to recover lost rights.

The Amur shipping question illustrates certain important trends in Chinese nationalism. Across the Sino-Russian frontier, merchants and officials alike made reference to the same historical memories. They both appealed to the idea of victimhood and the fear of further losses. This allowed them to frame the Russian

⁷⁴⁷ “Telegram from Bao Guiqing and Sun Liechen, 30 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang*, pp 133 (Dongbei bianfang)

⁷⁴⁸ “Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 234

⁷⁴⁹ “Letter from the Vladivostok chamber of commerce, 9 Sept 1920” Guo, Wang, Tao and Li (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe*, p 232

Civil War in similar ways: As another chapter in China's continuing narrative of humiliation, and the "opportunity of a thousand years" to redress past grievances. Such rhetoric resonated on both sides of the border, drawing together the overseas Chinese and their compatriots back home in pursuit of common goals. Merchants and warlords collaborated in the realm of merchant shipping. Consuls and chambers of commerce in Russia supplied the Amur flotilla and put pressure on the Russians to let it pass. When combined with the very real weaknesses of the Russians, this unity of purpose could lead to significant victories.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown how Chinese nationalism was heightened during the chaotic years of the Russian Civil War, on *both* sides of the Sino-Russian border. The collapse of Russian state power reshuffled the geopolitical deck, prompting fears of renewed imperial contestation between China, the Whites and the Japanese. At the same time, it stoked an opportunistic desire for revival among the diaspora and officials alike. By the end of 1920, however, the deck was rearranged yet again. Red power re-established itself across the Far East and the Japanese came to a *modus vivendi* with the soviets. Both Moscow and the Far Eastern Republic began to make solid diplomatic overtures to the Chinese, in stark contrast to the complete lack of state-to-state contact of the past three years. Disorder gave way to gradual soviet consolidation and the Chinese were no longer able to exploit the confusion.

In emphasising the importance of nationalism, the thesis realigns the historiography of the overseas Chinese in Russian Far East with the sources generated by the community and its officials. Recent scholarship, based largely on Russian sources, has tended to view the diaspora Chinese as a transcultural group which adopted and adapted to Russian customs. By contrast, the Chinese sources display few signs of such cultural convergence. Instead the language of nationalism is evident throughout, spoken by merchants, consuls, local authorities and warlords alike. This language remained central to diaspora identity, shaped its attitude to the events in Russia and informed its approach to the Civil War. Hence, this thesis has attempted to resurrect the internal discourses of the overseas Chinese, their cross-border compatriots and their officials. In so doing, the thesis has reinstated the centrality of Chinese nationalism in this frontier region and in the historiography as a whole. It

argues that the Chinese diaspora in the Russian Far East was influenced not only by the new environment they were in, but by their relationship to historical narratives in China as well.

More specifically, this thesis has argued for a particular strain of “Chinese nationalism with Russian characteristics”. Nationalist rhetoric was not unique to the Chinese along the Sino-Russian frontier. Within China itself, nationalism was growing in force. It was evident among the Chinese diaspora in America, in the wake of the Exclusion Act. It was present throughout the diaspora in Southeast Asia in response to Japanese expansionism. Furthermore, certain motifs were shared among these disparate Chinese communities: Narratives of “national humiliation” and “victimhood”, as well as fear of future losses. Li Anshan has characterised such sentiments as a “combination of abhorrence and veneration, tinged with varying degrees of envy, fear, self-abasement, and adoration... The reactions of a once-glorious empire to foreign aggression, national defeat, and the possibility of salvation”.⁷⁵⁰

What set the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East apart was their position at the epicentre of imperial competition. Scholars of the Sino-Russian border have repeatedly emphasised its contested and unstable nature. Both Russia and China claimed the frontier territories as an integral part of their geo-bodies.⁷⁵¹ By the late 19th century, Japan too was muscling in. The collapse of Russian state power in 1917 and the Civil War that followed only added fuel to the fire. The Whites looked set to inherit the mantle of tsarist imperialism, while the Japanese seemed all too willing to fish in troubled waters. This lent an added intensity and urgency to Chinese

⁷⁵⁰ A. Li, “The Miscellany and Mixed”, pp 510-511

⁷⁵¹ S.C.M. Paine, “Russo-Chinese Myths and their Impact on Japanese Foreign Policy in the 1930s”, *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 21 (2004), pp 15-17

nationalism in the region. Given the upheavals of war, Allied intervention and economic collapse, the fear of imperialist encroachment was only too real. At the same time, the possibility of national revival was even more immediate. All along the far eastern frontier, alarm bells rang at the prospect of a White-Japanese alliance. Calls to action were made not just in self-defence, but also to take advantage of the “opportunity of a thousand years”.

Nationalist rhetoric, therefore, orientated the overseas Chinese in the storm of the Civil War. It served as an effective rallying cry, drawing together officials and civil society groups. Diplomatic obligations notwithstanding, the Chinese favoured whichever side appeared to pose the least threat to their interests in Russia - or promised the greatest scope for national revival. By the end of 1920, this had led to a definite shift away from the Whites and towards the Reds, at least for the time being. Taking advantage of Russia's inability to protest, they formed new diaspora organisations to protect themselves and negotiate directly with the authorities. The Beijing government, too, seized the chance to expand its consular network. Finally, multiple communities cooperated successfully across the Sino-Russian border to restore China's presence on the Amur. Success was achieved through coordinated effort on both the civilian and naval fronts.

Hence, the rhetoric and activism of the Chinese in the Russian Far East calls into question the primacy of the transcultural school. Throughout the period, there is clear evidence that China's prestige, sovereignty and territorial integrity were important to the diaspora, at least among elite-merchant groups. They continued to identify as overseas Chinese, with clear links to their compatriots across the border and with the Chinese polity as a whole. Finally, their opportunism placed them in direct conflict

with the Russians. Time and again, the overseas Chinese and their officials defined their aims in opposition to the Russians. Their self-professed goal was to exploit Russian weakness to further Chinese aims. As much as the diaspora Chinese took on the outward trappings of Russianness, they maintained an inner nationalist “core”.

Hence, this thesis builds on the transcultural school in two important ways. First, it has sited the overseas Chinese in Russia within the context of the *global* Chinese diaspora. Scholars of the Chinese diaspora such as Philip Kuhn, Pal Nyiri and Prasenjit Duara explicitly detach nationalism from the territorial borders of the nation-state. Instead, they argue for a flexible regional or “global Chineseness” that maintains certain cultural and historical motifs despite - or, in fact, because of - the need to adapt to foreign societies.⁷⁵² Nyiri has called this the “deterritorialisation of the nation-state”, in which “the cultural narrative that formulates the shape of the nation is much more significant”.⁷⁵³ This does not mean that one should retreat to the old stereotype of the diaspora Chinese as clannish, xenophobic, introverted and unassimilable subdivisions of a “global tribe”.⁷⁵⁴ The current focus on transculturalism must be balanced with a nuanced understanding of diaspora identity. Thus far, the historiography of the overseas Chinese in Russia has emphasised the adaptive practices of the diaspora community over its cultural narratives. By

⁷⁵² Kuhn, *Chinese Among Others*, pp 230-231, 261, 278-281; P. Nyiri, “Chinese in Hungary and their Significant Others: A Multi-Sited Approach to Transnational Practice and Discourse”, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9(1) (2002), pp 75-78, 81-83; P. Duara, “Transnationalism and the Challenge to National Histories”, in T. Bender (ed.) *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp 33, 43

⁷⁵³ P. Nyiri and J. Breidenbach, *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Internationalism* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), pp 32-33, 37

⁷⁵⁴ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, pp 1, 18. For an example, see Datsyshen, “Historical and Contemporary Trends of Chinese Labor Migration into Siberia”, pp 21-23

examining this narrative more deeply, however, we can shed light on the position of the community in the wider issue of Chinese diaspora nationalism as a whole.

Second, apart from reconceptualising and re-contextualising the question of diaspora identity, the thesis argues that this identity exerted a definite influence on Chinese actions. Memories of “victimhood” and the desire for national revival guided Chinese attitudes towards the warring factions in Russia. This, in turn, explained the opportunistic Chinese response to the Civil War. Although scholars such as Sarah Paine and Bruce Elleman have drawn clear links between China’s nationalist “myths” and its approach to international relations, more work remains to be done.⁷⁵⁵ It may be fruitful to look to international relations theory to further develop the relationship between historical myth, social perceptions and state action.⁷⁵⁶ Putting nationalist rhetoric at the forefront of cross-border Chinese identity thus opens up new avenues to explore the concrete effects that cultural narrative can have. The Amur shipping question, which linked nationalist motivations with opportunistic activism, is a case in point. One could even argue that nationalism better explains Chinese actions than transcultural factors do.

Moving away from the transcultural school, the thesis offers potential new insights into the scholarship of the Russian Civil War. On one level, it illuminates an important aspect of the Civil War in the Far East: That competing factions had to contend with the sensitivities of a frontier region. Existing scholarship has, thus far, focused on the

⁷⁵⁵ Paine, “Russo-Chinese Myths and their Impact on Japanese Foreign Policy in the 1930s”, *passim*; Paine, *Imperial Rivals*, pp 8-14; B. Elleman, *Wilson and China: A Revised History of the Shandong Question* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2002), pp 1-6; Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception*, pp 1, 17-19

⁷⁵⁶ See, for example, V.E. Teo, *Memories and the Exigencies of National Interest: An Analysis of Post Cold War Sino-Japanese and Sino-Russian Strategic Relations and Perceptions*, PhD, London School of Economics and Political Science (2007), pp 184-188

Russians and the Japanese. The sheer number of overseas Chinese in the far eastern regions, however, and the immense length of the Sino-Russian border meant that both Reds and Whites had to take Chinese interests into account. We have seen how both sides in the conflict recruited Chinese soldiers and relied on Chinese food supplies. The Whites, in particular, hoped to use Chinese territory as a safe haven. But it was the Reds' more skilful use of anti-imperialist rhetoric that, for the time being at least, gave them a decisive diplomatic advantage.

On another level, this thesis provides an avenue for comparing Chinese and cossack warlordism during the Civil War period. Willard Sunderland, Norman Pereira and Arthur Waldron have drawn explicit parallels between the lawlessness of the *atamanshchina* and the warlord period in China.⁷⁵⁷ Such an approach emphasises the regional dimensions of imperial collapse and the resulting diffusion of power. Nevertheless, important differences have been highlighted by this thesis. Sunderland seems to have hit upon a critical point when he says that the Chinese warlords were “by and large, more successful” than their White colleagues, but returns to the regional theme by arguing that as the Russian and Chinese empires came to an end, the meaning of the Sino-Russian border itself began to erode.⁷⁵⁸ This obscures an important point: The Manchurian warlords were more successful because they continued to participate in the historical narrative that imbued the border with meaning in the first place. By participating in the rhetoric of nationalism, they were able to obtain the support of not only the Beijing government, but civil society groups as well. We have seen how local warlords and their border garrisons aided the

⁷⁵⁷ Pereira, “Siberian Atamanshchina”, p 129; Waldron, “The Warlord”, pp 1086-1087.

⁷⁵⁸ Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak*, pp 156-157. Sunderland seems to acknowledge, however, that Chinese border officials did persist in seeing the border as a “sovereign divide”. See, for example, page 168 in the same volume.

diaspora community. The Manzhouli border garrison, for example, negotiated with Semenov over the Dauria confiscations. Heilongjiang military governor Bao Guiqing kept in close contact with the Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese Association and channelled its grievances to Beijing. Before the Amur flotilla was dispatched, Bao and his counterpart in Jilin beefed up river defences and set up new checkpoints.

This is not to say that Manchurian warlords such as Bao Guiqing, Meng Enyuan, Sun Liechen and Zhang Zuolin were altruistic nationalists. Similarly, it is possible that - in some cases at least - the warlords were using the language of nationalism purely instrumentally. But as this thesis has shown, they continued to participate in a shared nationalist discourse that commanded the loyalty of many Chinese groups. Unlike the cossack atamans, therefore, the Manchurian warlords could speak a language that was intelligible to Chinese officials and merchants. They were able to draw a common historical narrative that, in turn, enabled coordinated action. Semenov *et al* wielded no such rhetorical power.

This tempers the rather bleak view of Chinese warlordism that has dominated the historiography of the Republican period. After all, the warlords have been attacked for their self-seeking behaviour, lack of personal ethics and nepotism. They have, by turns, been characterised as premodern vestiges of anarchic militarism, vulgar confucians or even nihilists.⁷⁵⁹ Some warlords certainly did fit this mould. The Manchurian warlords' activities during this period may well be the exception that proves the rule. But, as this thesis has shown, a more nuanced study of the

⁷⁵⁹ J. Ch'en, "Defining Chinese Warlords and their Factions", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31(3) (1968), pp 565, 572, 579; Chi, *Warlord Politics in China*, pp 56, 219; Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China*, pp 195-197; D. Bonavia, *China's Warlords* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995), p 59; McCord, *The Power of the Gun*, pp 264-266; Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, p 105; Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, p 61-63

interaction between Chinese nationalism and warlordism is needed. It would bring to light how the cossack warlords failed where the Chinese militarists succeeded, since the former lacked the centripetal force that nationalism exerted. Going further, one could compare the trajectory of nationalism among the Chinese diaspora with the nostalgia of the White emigration. As far as the writer is aware, no such study has yet been attempted.

The title of this thesis, “Among Ghosts and Tigers”, encapsulates how the overseas Chinese in the Russian Far East saw the war around them. Imperialist threats of differing intensity loomed on all sides, with the Whites acting as the catspaw of Japan. Hence the *atamanshchina* was not just an outbreak of lawlessness and misery. What it inflicted on the diaspora, it inflicted on national sovereignty and prestige. Chinese cultural narrative, hypersensitive to historic wrongs, could not but see the Civil War as the latest in a long series of humiliations. This narrative, in turn, spurred the Chinese on both sides of the Sino-Russian border to protect themselves and pursue common goals - with varying results.

By 1921, with the Whites in Siberia largely vanquished and the Japanese on their way out, the political landscape changed again. The Soviets, eager to gain diplomatic recognition, shrewdly promised a slew of anti-imperialist concessions. This brought the Chinese to the negotiating table but, as Soviet power grew stronger, the concessions turned out to be illusory.⁷⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the gains that the Chinese had wrought for themselves proved more lasting and real. The Chinese continued to sail

⁷⁶⁰ Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp xv-xvi, *passim*; Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception*, pp 49-50, 136-138, 240-241

without hindrance on the common waters of the Amur until 1923. Even then, when a dispute arose, it was due to the Chinese tightening their grip on the Amur's tributaries. At any rate the 1923 conflict was soon resolved and merchant shipping on the river continued apace, although the Wu Tong Shipping Company eventually folded in 1925 due to financial mismanagement.⁷⁶¹ Similarly, the Amur flotilla could not be dislodged from its Sungari base and more vessels were eventually added to its contingent. Its four pioneering ships even took part in the border war against the Soviets in 1929, when the *Jiang Heng*, *Li Jie* and *Li Chuan* were sunk.⁷⁶² The new consulates in Chita, Blagoveshchensk and Nikolaevsk operated until the late 1920s at least, while the consulate in Khabarovsk exists till this day.⁷⁶³ Although increasingly overshadowed by Chinese workers' organisations, the overseas Chinese associations also continued functioning.⁷⁶⁴ Even after the Russian Civil War, therefore, the Chinese continued to reap the fruits of nationalist activism. It took the terror of Stalinism, far worse than anything the Whites could have imagined, to wipe them off the map.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶¹ Q. Zheng, *Haerbin Wu Tong hangye gongsi dalou* [Online.] Available at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_539817d50100c58e.html [Accessed 16 June 2015]; Y. Zhu, "Wu Tong gongsi de xing yu wang", *Tsinghua Business Review* 5 (2014), *passim*; Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations*, pp 242-244

⁷⁶² Chinese Warship Museum, *Dongbei jian dui yu Zhong-Su haizhan* [Online.] Available at <http://60.250.180.26/ming/2501.html> [Accessed 16 June 2015]. The Museum seems somewhat confused about the exact names of the ships sunk in the 1929 engagement, however it is clear that three out of the four ships in the original flotilla were put out of action.

⁷⁶³ Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth*, p 93; M. Share, *Where Empires Collided: Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007), pp 64-65; M. Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p 310

⁷⁶⁴ Li and Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu", pp 85-86; Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", pp 114-115

⁷⁶⁵ Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism*, p 27; Alexeeva, "Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East", p 24; Xie, "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", p 117

Appendix A: Dramatis Personae

Siberia and the Russian Far East

Blagoveshchensk

Consul

Ji Jing (July 1919 to October 1920)

Consular staff

Qiu Fenling

Amur Oblast' Overseas Chinese

Association

Leaders: Yang Hongyu

Song Yuntong

Sun Hezuo

Yin Dianzhen

Wang Shanwen

Ma Jianzhang (from August 1919)

Liang Demao (from August 1919)

Gao Guoyu (from August 1919)

Ma Zhaokun (from August 1919)

Chita

Consul

Guan Shangping (July 1919 to May 1921)

Consular staff

Wang Zhixiang (until September 1920?)

Military liaison officer

Zhang Tianyi (from Oct 1919)

East Siberian Overseas Chinese

Association

Leaders: Hong Yao

Tang Yuchuan

Irkutsk

Consul

Guan Shangping

Wei Bo (May 1918 to December 1919)

Zhu Shaoyang (June 1920 to May 1921)

Consular staff

Wu Mingjun

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Jin? (From November 1918)

Wang Junqing [Huiqing?] (also acting consul)

Khabarovsk*Vice-consul*

Quan Shi'en (June 1919 to October 1921)

Consular staff

Liu Xunming

Luo Zhongwen

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Wang Yichen (in Aug 1918)

Sun Zuode

Jiang Wen

Manzhouli*Garrison commanders*

Che Qingyun

Geng Yutian (appointed November 1919)

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Zhang Hongxi

Nerchinsk*Overseas Chinese Association*

Leader: Qu Fucheng

Nikolaevsk*Vice-consul*

Zhang Wenhuan (November 1919 to October 1920)

Consular staff

Zhu Dexin

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Sun Shengcai

Amur Flotilla

Jiang Heng captain: Chen Shiyong

Li Sui captain: Wang Shouting

Nikolsk-Ussuriisk*Travelling consul*

Bi Wenqi (July 1920 to June 1924)

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Gao Pengju

Zou Jijun (until July 1920)

Zhang Qichun

Omsk*Consul*

Fan Qiguang (June 1919 to November 1919)

Military representative

Zhang Silin

Sretensk*Overseas Chinese Association*

Leader: He Yongli

Verkhne-Udinsk*Overseas Chinese Association*

Leaders: Yu Enbo

Yang Fengshan

Ding Wenlai

Yang Yuhua

Jing Lianwen

Vladivostok*Consul*

Lu Shiyuan (May 1914 to March 1918)

Shao Hengjun (March 1918 to March 1921)

Allied high commissioners

Civilian: Liu Jingren (September 1918 to September 1919)

Li Jia'ao (September 1919 to May 1920)

Military: Lin Jianzhang (military)

Chamber of commerce

Chairman: Zhang Daoyou

European Russia**Petrograd***Ambassador*

Liu Jingren (September 1911 to September 1918, left Russia February 1918)

Chen Guangping (from Oct 1920)

Embassy staff

Zheng Yanxi

Li Shizhong (seconded to Italy)

Chen Guangping

Li Baotang (also Li Jia'ao's nephew)

Overseas Chinese Association

Chairman: Liu Zerong

Vice-chairman: Liu Wen

Chamber of commerce

Secretaries: Jin Erli, Zhang Yongkui

Chairman: Bai Liangdong

Moscow

Overseas Chinese Association

Leaders: Liu Wen

Zhu Shaoyang

Jilin

Military governor

Meng Enyuan (June 1913 to July 1919)

Bao Guiqing (July 1919 to March 1924)

China

Civilian governor

Heilongjiang

Military and civilian governor

Guo Zongxi (November 1917 to October 1919)

Bi Guifang (May 1916 to June 1917)

Xu Nailin (October 1919 to September 1920)

Bao Guiqing (July 1917 to July 1919)

Sun Liechen (July 1919 to March 1921)

Bao Guiqing (September 1920)

*Heihe circuit intendant and Aigun
foreign affairs official*

*Binjiang (Harbin) circuit intendant and
Harbin foreign affairs official*

Zhang Shouzeng (December 1917 to
November 1918)

Li Hongmo (March 1916 to October
1917)

Shi Shaochang (December 1918 to ?)

Shi Shaochang (October 1917 to April
1918)

Zhang Shouzeng

Li Jia'ao (April 1918 to January 1919)

Heihe garrison commander

Fu Jiang (January 1919 to December
1919)

E Shuangquan

Ba Ying'e (appointed April 1918)

Dong Shi'en (December 1919)

Binjiang shipping guild

Leaders: Wang Jianguan, Xie Lin

River Defence Bureau

Commander: Wang Chongwen

Fengtian*Military and civilian governor*

Zhang Zuolin (April 1916 to June 1928.

Appointed Inspector-general of the

Three Eastern Provinces September

1918)

Xinjiang*Military and civilian governor*

Yang Zengxin (May 1911 to July 1928)

China Eastern Railway*Manager*

Guo Zongxi (December 1917 to August

1919)

Bao Guiqing (August 1919 to June

1920)

Song Xiaolian

Guard commander

Bao Guiqing (August 1919 to June

1920)

Heilongjiang garrison commander

Zhang Huanxiang (February 1918 to

September 1918)

Che Qingyun (September 1918 to ?)

Geng Yutian (June 1919 to October

1919)

Jilin garrison commander

Tao Xianggui (December 1917 to July

1919)

Foreign Ministry*Minister*

Lu Zhengxiang (Dec 1917 to Feb 1920)

Yan Huiqing (August 1920 to July 1922)

Vice-minister

Chen Lu (May 1918 to Sept 1920, also

acting minister in Lu's absence,

November 1918 to January 1920)

Secretaries

Zhu Hexiang

Diao Zuoqian

Shi Lüben

Zhu Xingyuan

Trade advisor

Wu Peiguang

Communications Ministry*Minister*

Cao Rulin (July 1917 to June 1919)

Ye Gongchuo (August 1920 to May
1921)*Vice-minister*Ye Gongchuo (July 1917 to October
1918)**Wu Tong Shipping Company***Board of directors*

Liang Shiyi

Wei Shaozhou

Cao Rulin

Ren Fengbao

Zhang Ben

Chen Wei

Xie Lin

Ye Gongchuo

Supervisors

Fu Jiang

Chen Taoyi

General manager

Xie Lin

Manager

Wang Zaishan

Shipping negotiation teamShi Shaochang (June 1919 to August
1919)

Wang Chongwen (August 1919)

W.F. Tyler (August 1919)

Fu Jiang (September 1919 to December
1919)Xu Shizhen (September 1919 to
November 1919)

Dong Shi'en (December 1919)

Zhang Shouzeng (December 1919)

中國工黨同胞聽者

我輩之土地被野心之日本侵略迨盡山東省已被歐州和會議決完全歸日本處置將來不知幾千萬同胞將爲他人奴隸如我華人同胞不能設法衛護身家使我兄弟姊妹免爲詭詐之日本所奴隸則吾華人尙何面目自居爲我中華民國之國民

華人同胞幸勿以勢孤自餒俄人農工兩界刻與俄國資本家帝制派所組之西伯利亞軍隊力爭者亦正與我華人深表同情故對於罷工要求等事幸毋畏首畏尾俄國工黨必當竭力贊成維持緣俄人現與西伯利亞政府所爭者非僅爲己身之利益與自由實爲爭全球被制人種之自由所起見

即以中東鐵路而論刻間我輩經濟困難之情形已達極點工作之繁超乎人力之外而所得鐵路俄人之報酬不過毫無價值之空低數張此項紙幣並非俄國全國政府所發行不過一部分之攘奪權利者違反民意擅行濫發加以野心之日本從中維持欲使俄國人民亦爲彼等之奴隸一如我華人同胞華人同胞須知西伯利亞政府不久即將消滅其所發之紙幣不久亦將毫無價值矣故我輩手持此項紙幣不久即將有凍餒之憂是以深望同人幸毋收用西伯利亞紙幣必須向鐵路官長要求工價一律發放大洋我輩華人須知我同人俄國工黨必當贊成我輩之要求然我輩對於俄國同人遇有需我輩維持之處亦當隨時襄助

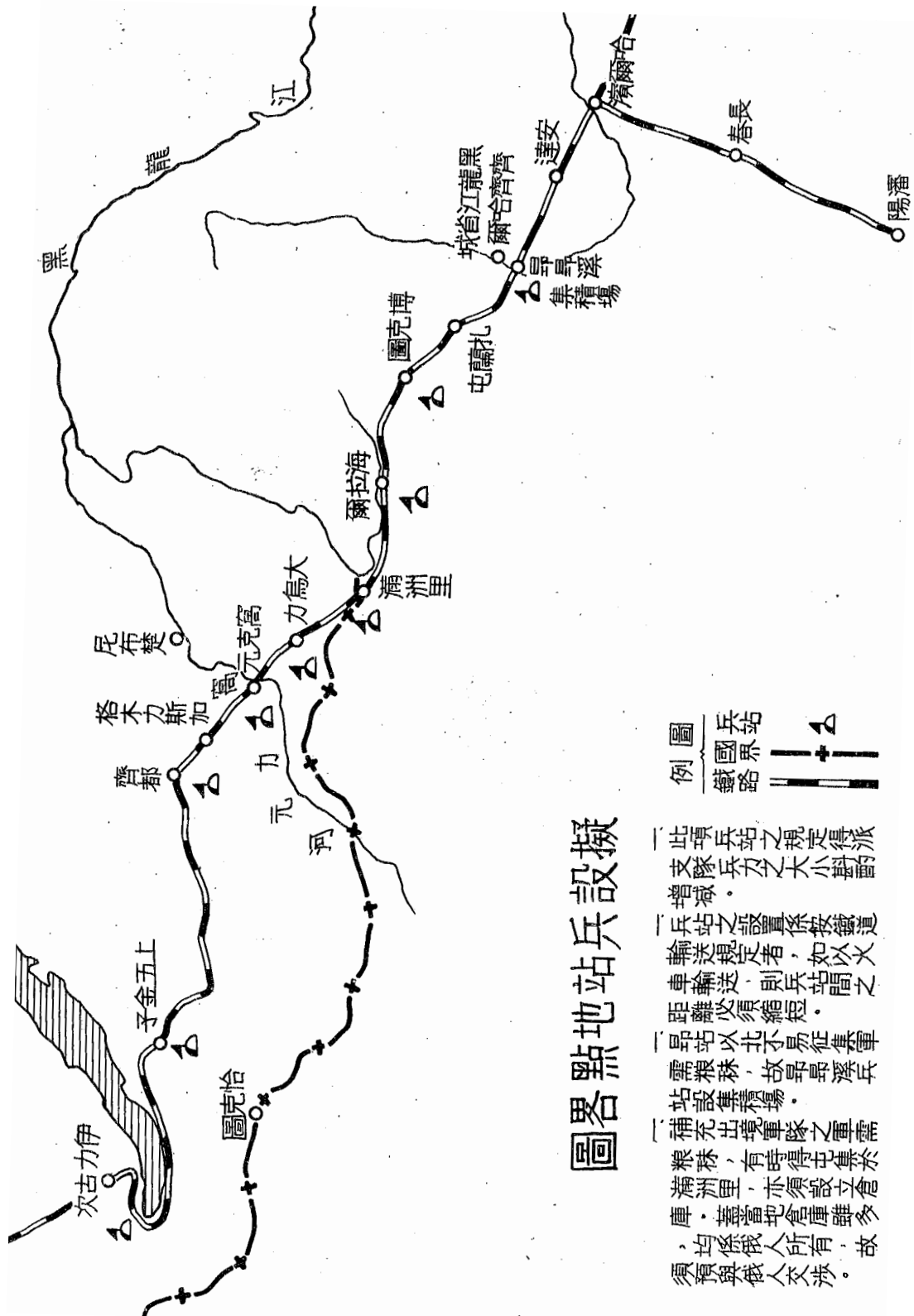
我輩華人同胞須知將來罷工一事非僅哈埠一隅東西兩路亦必同時響應務望同心協力對於反對派須表示我華人亦爲人種之一對於應享權利自當設法力爭

中俄兩國工黨結合團體萬歲

抵制野心日本

⁷⁶⁶ Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 475

Appendix C: Bao Guiqing's 1919 Military Plan⁷⁶⁷

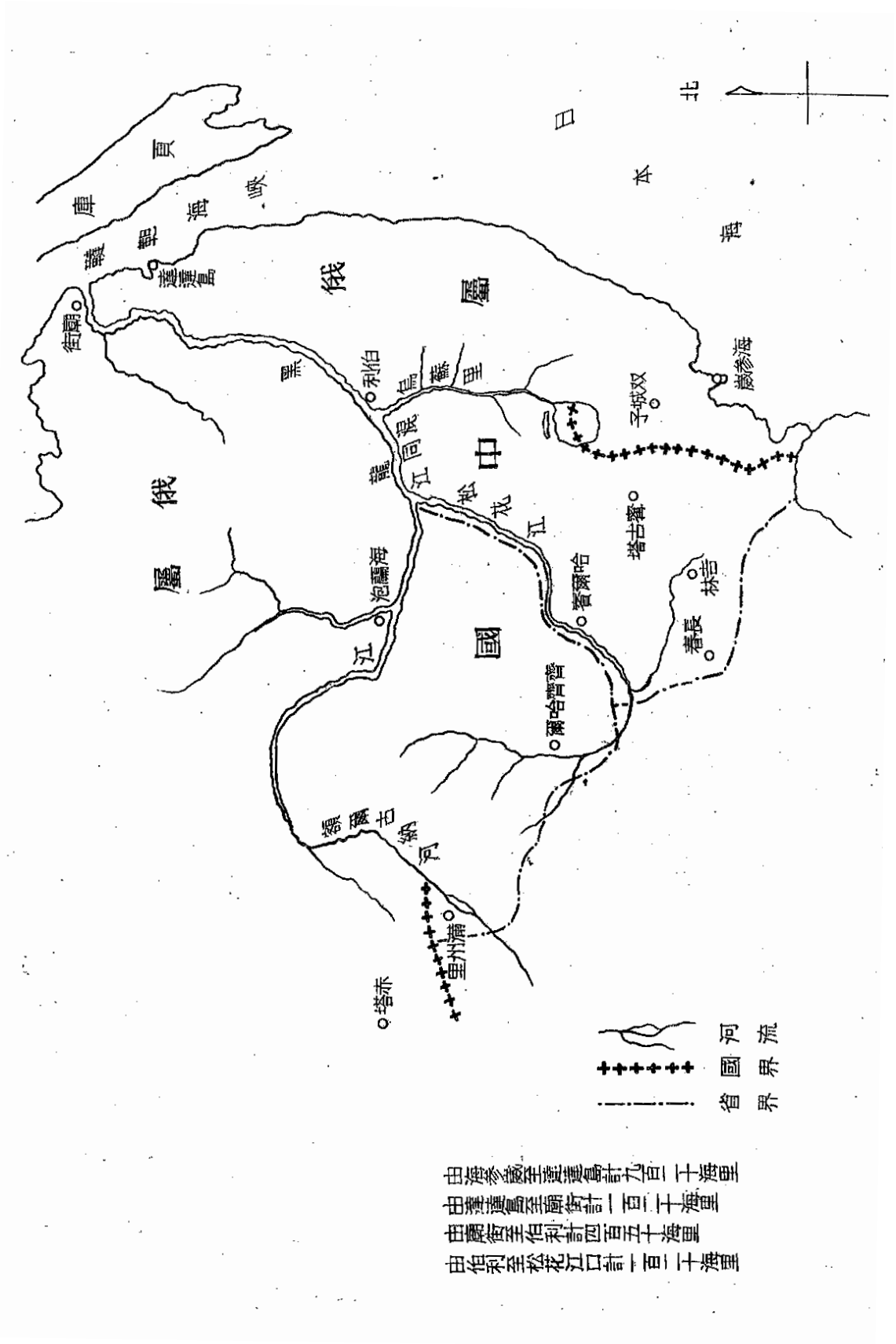


圖畧點地站兵設擬

- 〔此項兵站之規定得派支隊兵力之大小斟酌增減。〕
- 〔兵站之設置係按鐵道輸送規定者，如以火車輸送，則兵站間之距離必須縮短。〕
- 〔昂站以北不易征集軍需糧秣，故昂昂溪兵站設集積場。〕
- 〔補充出境軍隊之軍需糧秣，有時得屯集於滿洲里，亦須設立倉庫。蓋當地倉庫雖多，均係俄人所有，故須預與俄人交涉。〕

⁷⁶⁷ Wang, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe* (2), p 354

Appendix D: The Navy Ministry's Map of the Amur River⁷⁶⁸



⁷⁶⁸ Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 764

Appendix E: Ship Sales to the Guang Xin Company⁷⁶⁹

Российское Генеральное Консульство
 в г. Харбинь.
 12/25 мая 1918 года.
 № 1749.

Удостоверение

Российское Генеральное Консульство в
 Харбинь, сие удостоверяет, что пароход
 "Генералъ Пондратенко" значащийся по
 списку управления Водныхъ Путей
 Амурского бассейна за № 9/26, принадлежащий
 В. А. Вильвану и А.
 М. Кабанову, — и на основании
 договора явленного в российском
 Генеральномъ Консульствѣ по реестру
 № 1717, перешелъ в полное владѣ-
 ніе Китайскаго гражданина Сюйган-
 даи.

управляющій Генеральн. Консульствомъ

Российское Генеральное Консульство
 в г. Харбинь.
 12/25 мая 1918 года.
 № 1750

Удостоверение

Российское Генеральное Консульство
 в г. Харбинь, сие удостоверяет, что
 башка "Анастасіи" значащийся по
 списку управления Водныхъ Путей
 Амурского бассейна за № 75/26,
 принадлежащий В. А. Вильвану и
 А. М. Кабанову, и на основании
 договора явленного в российском
 Генеральномъ Консульствѣ по реестру
 № 1717, перешелъ в полное владѣ-
 ніе Китайскаго гражданина Сюй-
 гандаи.

управляющій Генеральн. Консульствомъ

龍艦案與江防之關係

(復生)

砲艦被擊為中俄邦交不幸發生之變例國人觀之
則與談判之勝利與外交當局交涉之方針

果能一一符合不耶國家因俄艦邊陲防
止俄亂籌辦吉黑江防正為保持中俄邦交起見江

防為最高國權支配之一部艦隊巡
弋江河流域乃代表國權執行江防

之使命其行動光明俊偉既不含有關謀或戰
之秘密性質凡在俄國軍政當局應如何表示敬禮尊

重我中華民國海外艦隊之威信乃
不於事前聲明迴避復不於臨機掩護引導尊悍然違

背公法加以攻伐之暴行是否受人唆使姑不具論直
不魯我我國權托命之江防而根本推

翻之江防毀國家主權隨之以亡撥
謹出兵援俄本意既不免種以怨報

德之因對外一部之國家最高行政
權至此亦將一蹶不振而傳聞此次交涉

結局不日要求賠償損害即日仍以駛赴
目的地「伯力港」為依據嗚呼信如斯說當

目的地「伯力港」為依據嗚呼信如斯說當

局之喪權辱國罪無可道國人寧能
忍隱不如其量以糾彈之耶

查前清咸豐八年中俄協定界
條約內載黑龍江

松花江左岸由額爾古納河至松花江海口作為俄羅
斯國所屬之地右岸順江流至烏蘇里河作為大清國

所屬之地由烏蘇里河往彼至海所有之地此地如同
接連兩國交界明定之開地方為大清國俄國界其

管之地由黑龍江松花江烏蘇里河此後只准大清國
俄羅斯兩國行船各別外國不准由此江行走等語

夫約內既聲明由烏蘇里河往彼至海如同接連則我
船由海溯江在黑龍江松花江流域之中雖經過

俄屬亦屬依據條約行事並無觸犯
約章之舉且明明載稱只准中俄兩國行船不准

各別外國行船則中俄兩國船隻均有自由行動之權
約章賦與之最高權利彼此均經承

認繼承有效即當然無阻止拒絕之
餘地此理固甚明瞭則達烏蘇里河為烏蘇里河分支

流域俄竟無端拒絕引港致我艦停留
於荒曠之區斷我煤糧接濟勢成坐

困之局更進一步強迫駛回廟街倘不幸中途遇
難則艦艇毀於堅冰人士化為餓殍獨

獨藐視條約如弁髦且公然置人道

主義於不顧脫非即以其人之道還治其人之
身是極東少數無狀俄國軍人營壘擾至於何地耶

自中東路敷設以還俄人藉侵入松嫩兩江航路歷
來軍需探悉專視此為運糧孔道即如此次東俄亂事

俄人軍餉民食之接濟又靡不取給於我華商三省當
局為重視隣誼計在在示以通融挹

注之德善隣之道可謂仁至義盡乃
俄人不以我為德友以砲火擊我江艦殺我軍人正滋

友邦且表示不平之論外交當局前坐令俄使遲延
宕不予以正確之解決詎非以狡獪預手

段陰思和緩國人之憤慨耶記者於此
竊有兩疑問願以質之秉政當局

(一)江防艦隊與吉黑邊防遠東華僑
有安危休戚之關係此後能否根據

約章活動於沿江流域並增以嚴重
固之保障

(二)駐京俄使久日失其代表俄羅斯
之資格是否指俄遠東政府之能力

並保證今後不再演此暴行
由前之說當援引舊約關吉黑軍政當局與遠東俄

國最高機關重立一宗尊重江防之新
協定俾為將來修正約文之張本由後之

說明俄使直一私人資格認為無交涉

此案之能力我當局應準備一相當報復主義於消滅其權備供給藉示抵制或聞或促列判公平裁判之局嗚呼外蒙自治傷心在內黑河冤魂聞夜猶哭國華悲獨不憶及夫斯拉夫族慘殺同種侵略國土之痛劇耶哀哉

哈爾濱國際協報

社說

對俄交涉之聲

(復生)

嗚呼吾人對於今日之外交部歷來擁護其對外信任之威重每至茹苦忍痛不敢有偏激之責備者亦已久矣若由今之道而不變今之俗則神州大陸將斷送於冥冥罔覺之中而當局者或以吾等茹苦忍痛有所不敢之國民誠為可欺而無所忌憚矣

最近中俄間之交涉(一)如沃木斯克政府虐待華僑及華僑財產損失案(二)如前線撤回之俄國傷兵分駐中東路沿綫案(三)俄人砲擊華艦繼續交涉案之三者皆藐視公法背棄信義大反乎親仁善隣之本旨者而尤以砲艦被擊一案足以釀成中俄邦交之反感全案論斷詳述於十三日一砲艦交涉國應急籌對待十八日一砲艦案與江防

之關係。兩論被獨行踴躍目無國際信睦之俄公使。以支吾顛預態度應之外交當局。雖一度嚴厲詰責與警告。度渠必無補。以指揮遠東臨時政府。並以全力解決此項非常國際事件。故當局欲以口舌文書之力乞靈於無權公使之側。因而樹樹。玷折衝之功。為我被擊砲艦被殺華僑。以紓憤憤而鳴不平者。誠為不可能之事。俄獨吉黑江防今後無行使國權之地。恐東北大局益將蹂躪而不可收拾。一言以蔽之。此外部當局者之罪而已。

凡禍之起必有其自來。涓涓不絕乃成江河。星星之火可以燎原。誠使外交當局者有窺見咫尺之明。則收回外蒙領事案。私人資格待遇。俄使案。一以報復已往。懲惡外蒙。獨立。革命時代俄外交家所為。陰謀。以暫行停止。俄條約効力率。一年前對俄經過之手續。與成績者。也。當時以全力振作吉黑江防。整頓中東路全綫警備。邊陲治安。與沿江水上權當同時兼程。併進。務使俄屬亂黨不敢南犯。國門一步更由吉黑

當道與遠東臨時執政大員根據援俄防亂大旨。釐定一明確法制之約束。以範圍彼國之行動。則今茲發見重大案件。皆吉黑當局與江防司令直接交涉之職務。否則咨行李高等委員。務所在。地本國領事談判。磋商據約抗爭。亦正在情理之中。不幸展轉延擱。成一種麻木不仁之相。上下承轉貽誤。既多。時變幻。或權愈甚。竊疑當局者。誤於國際甘言。而過信以為人不負我。及其專機。漸迫則亦委而置之。以聽其自然之趨勢。迨至周隄之禍。已成萬不得已。僅照普通形式之成文。提出一片之抗議。而止。嗚呼。吾人所要求於當局者。第一仿日本加藤外相發表對美交涉始末之例。請外部公開此次對俄交涉全案。以告國人。第二則請當局者。從其政治上之信義。良心。上之責任。求解除此項秘密之罪惡。勿使辱及個人。而並辱及團體。則幸甚。抑又聞之。新國會頗有質問當局之權。然則新國會尚無恙乎。新國會議員尚無恙乎。



В И З Н Ъ

№ 3013

Атаманъ Калмыковъ и китайскія канонерки.

Въ связи съ сенсационными слухами, принимающими въ городѣ Хабаровскѣ и его окрестностяхъ самую уродливую форму, освѣдомительный отдѣлъ штаба атамана Калмыкова — по приказанію атамана — излагаетъ вкратцѣ истинное положеніе вещей:

Три китайскихъ канонерки, нарушивъ суверенныя права Россійскаго государства о плаваніи по рѣкѣ Амуру и, игнорируя соответствующимъ заявленіемъ краевой власти — въ октябрѣ мѣсяцѣ сего года вошли въ устье Амура и направились вверхъ по рѣкѣ.

Въ связи съ полученной отъ главнаго начальника края задачей — не пропускать канонерокъ — атаманъ Калмыковъ выставилъ сильную береговую батарею и когда канонерки—25-го октября — показались ввиду батареи, направляясь къ Хабаровску,—атаманъ приказалъ открыть предупредительный огонь, заставивъ, такимъ образомъ, канонерки, давшія около десяти отвѣтныхъ выстрѣловъ, осадить назадъ. вмѣстѣ съ тѣмъ атаманъ Калмыковъ, узнавъ, что канонерки остановились у села Вятскаго,—послалъ телеграмму слѣдующаго содержания:

«Военная. Въ всякой очереди. Командиру китайскихъ канонерокъ.

Именемъ Всероссійскаго правительства требую немедленно удалиться въ Николаевскъ на Амурѣ,—въ противномъ случаѣ—канонерки со всѣмъ десантомъ потоплю. 2030. Атаманъ Калмыковъ».

Въ отвѣтъ на эту телеграмму на имя атамана Калмыкова послѣдовала странная телеграмма за подписью «Капитанъ С. У. Бленъ», въ которой атаману предлагается вести переговоры съ Пекинскимъ правительствомъ, а канонеркамъ разрѣшить пройти въ Хабаровскъ или остаться на зимовку въ Вятскомъ; причемъ телеграмма гласитъ: «...зимовка въ Николаевскѣ невозможна за отсут-

ствиемъ пищевыхъ продуктовъ. Вашимъ сегодняшнимъ предупрежденіемъ мы согласны удалиться, но вслѣдствіе недостатка угля и мелководья, слѣдовать до Николаевска невозможно...»

Атаманъ отвѣтилъ: «Военная. Въ всякой очереди. Командиру китайскихъ канонерокъ.

Никакихъ переговоровъ вести не уполномоченъ и подтверждаю свое категорическое требованіе немедленно удалиться въ Николаевскъ на-А. Ни отсутствіе угля, ни какия либо другія причины—мною приняты не будутъ.

Стрѣльба моихъ орудій 25-го октября была только предупрежденіемъ, почему и не имѣла печальныхъ для васъ послѣдствій. Ваше пребываніе въ Вятскомъ или другомъ мѣстѣ, кромѣ Николаевска, а также движеніе вверхъ по Амуру—можетъ быть только на днѣ или по дну Амура. Всѣ мѣры мною приняты, о чемъ васъ и предупреждаю 2032. Атаманъ Калмыковъ».

Канонерки немедленно снялись и ушли въ Николаевскъ на-А.

По донесеніи о случившемся во Владивостокъ—атаманъ получилъ телеграмму слѣдующаго содержания:

«Хабаровскъ. Атаману Уссурийскаго казачьяго войска генерал - майору Калмыкову.

Поздравляю васъ съ безукоризненнымъ—выше всякихъ похвалъ — исполненіемъ правительственно - государственной задачи по защитѣ суверенныхъ правъ Россіи, ея чести и достоинства. Вполнѣ согласенъ со всѣми вашими распоряженіями и взятой вами линіей поведения въ послѣднихъ событіяхъ. Остается лишь добиться ухода канонерокъ въ Николаевскъ. Владивостокъ, № 20216-р 26 октября 1919 года. Нач. край. Ген. лейт. РОЗАНОВЪ».

ОСВѢДОМИТ. ОТДѢЛЪ.

⁷⁷¹ Deng, Guo and Hu (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang* (2), p 784

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Wang, Yujun; Guo, Tingyi; and Hu, Qiuyuan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (1), Minguo liunian zhi banian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960.

Wang, Yujun; Guo, Tingyi; and Hu, Qiuyuan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian yu yiban jiaoshe (2), Minguo liunian zhi banian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960.

Deng, Ruyan; Guo, Tingyi; and Hu, Qiuyuan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (1), Minguo liunian zhi banian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960.

Deng, Ruyan; Guo, Tingyi; and Hu, Qiuyuan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Dongbei bianfang (2), Minguo liunian zhi banian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1960.

Guo, Tingyi; Wang, Yujun; Tao, Yinghui; and Li, Jianmin (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: E zhengbian, Minguo jiuinian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1968.

Guo, Tingyi; Wang, Yujun; Tao, Yinghui; and Li, Jianmin (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: yiban jiaoshe, Minguo jiuinian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1968.

Guo, Tingyi; Wang, Yujun; Tao, Yinghui; and Li, Jianmin (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: Zhongdonglu yu Dongbei bianfang, Minguo jiuinian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1969.

Li, Nianxuan; Li, Zuohua; Xu, Shuzhen; Guo, Tingyi; and Hu, Qiuyuan (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi shiliao: chubing Xiboliya, Minguo liunian zhi banian*. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1984.

Secondary Sources

Alexeeva, Olga. "Chinese Migration in the Russian Far East: A Historical and Sociodemographic Analysis". *China Perspectives* 2008/3, 2008.

Asada, Masafumi. "The China-Russia-Japan Military Balance in Manchuria, 1906-1918". *Modern Asian Studies* 44(6), 2010.

Ben-Canaan, Dan; Grüner, Frank; and Prodöhl, Ines (eds.) *Entangled Histories: The Transcultural Past of Northeast China*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014.

Bender, Thomas (ed.) *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Benton, Gregor. *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Bisher, Jamie. *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Bonavia, David. *China's Warlords*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Brovkin, Vladimir N. *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: The Revolution and the Civil Wars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Carter, James Hugh. *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Chang, Felix B. and Rucker-Chang, Sunnie T. (eds.) *Chinese Migrants in Russia, Central Asia and Eastern Europe*. London: Routledge, 2012.

Ch'en, Jerome. "Defining Chinese Warlords and their Factions". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 31(3), 1968.

Chen, Joseph T. *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai: The Making of a Social Movement in Modern China*. Leiden: Brill, 1971.

Chen, Zhongping. *Modern China's Network Revolution: Chambers of Commerce and Sociopolitical Change in the Early Twentieth Century*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Chi, Hsi-sheng. *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1976.

Chiasson, Blaine R. *Administering the Colonizer: Manchuria's Russians under Chinese Rule, 1918-29*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.

Chinese Maritime Customs Project, University of Bristol. *Chinese Maritime Customs Project* [Online.] Available at <http://www.bris.ac.uk/history/customs>.

Chinese Warship Museum. *Dongbei jiandui yu Zhong-Su haizhan* [Online.] Available at <http://60.250.180.26/ming/2501.html>.

Clausen, Søren and Thøgersen, Stig. *The Making of a Chinese City: History and Historiography in Harbin*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

Connaughton, R. M. *The Republic of the Ushakovka: Admiral Kolchak and the Allied Intervention in Siberia, 1918-1920*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Datsyshen, Vladimir D. "Problemy kitaiskoi migratsii v Sibiri na sovremennom etape razvitiia Rossii". *Mezhdunarodnye issledovaniia: obshchestvo, politika, ekonomika* 1(1), 2009.

Dickinson, Frederick R. *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999.

Duara, Prasenjit. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Dunscomb, P.E. *Japan's Siberian Intervention, 1918-1922: 'A Great Disobedience Against the People'*. Lanham, M.D.: Lexington Books, 2011.

Elleman, Bruce A., and Stephen Kotkin. *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2010.

Elleman, Bruce A. *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1927*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997.

—. *Wilson and China: A Revised History of the Shandong Question*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

Gamsa, Mark. "The Russian-Chinese Encounter in Harbin, Manchuria, 1898-1932". Thesis (D.Phil.) University of Oxford, 2003.

—. *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

Goodman, Bryna. "Improvisations on a Semicolonial Theme, or, How to Read a Celebration of Transnational Urban Community". *The Journal of Asian Studies* 59(4), 2000.

Gottschang, Thomas R. and Lary, Diana. *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2000.

Gottschang, Thomas R. *Currencies, Identities, Free Banking, and Growth in Early Twentieth Century Manchuria* [Online.] Available at College of the Holy Cross Economics Department Working Papers, http://crossworks.holycross.edu/econ_working_papers/97 [Accessed 4 June 2015]

Guan, Guihai and Luan, Jinghe (eds.) *Zhong-E guanxi de lishi yu xianshi (di'er ji)*. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2009.

Guo, Junsheng (ed.) *Zhongdonglu yu Zhongdonglu shijian*. Liaoning: Liaoning People's Press, 2010.

Hou, Zhongjun. "Beijing zhengfu chubing Xiboliya yu Zhong-Ri waijiao jiaoshe zaiyanjiu". *Shixue yuekan* 10, 2011.

Hsu, Chia Yin. "A Tale of Two Railroads: 'Yellow Labor', Agrarian Colonization, and the Making of Russianness at the Far Eastern Frontier, 1890s-1910s". *Ab Imperio* 3, 2006.

Hsü, Immanuel C. Y. *The Ili Crisis: a Study of Sino-Russian Diplomacy, 1871-1881*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

Huenemann, Ralph William. *The Dragon and the Iron Horse: The Economics of Railroads in China, 1876-1937*. Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1984.

Isitt, Benjamin. *From Victoria to Vladivostok: Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.

—. "On the Borders of Bolshevism: Class, Race, and the Social Relations of Occupied Vladivostok, 1918-19". *Comparativ* 22, 2012.

Ji, Zhaojin. *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

Jiang, Yu. "State Building, Capitalism, and Development: State-Run Industrial Enterprises in Fengtian, 1920-1931". Thesis (Ph.D.) University of Minnesota, 2010.

Jiang, Zhenghua. *Danganguan waijiaodang zhong zhi huaqiao ziliao*. [Online.] Available: <http://archives.sinica.edu.tw/wp-content/uploads/f10.pdf> [Accessed 20 June 2015]

Kotkin, Stephen, and David Wolff (eds.) *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1995.

Kuhn, Philip A. *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

Kwan, Man Bun. *The Salt Merchants of Tianjin: State-Making and Civil Society in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001.

Larin, Alexander G. "Chinese Immigration in Russia (The Contribution of Chinese Immigrants to Russia's Far East)". *Jindai Zhongguo shi yanjiu tongxun* 16, 1993.

—. "Chinese Immigration in Russia, 1850s-1920s". *Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 24, 1995.

Lary, Diana (ed.) *The Chinese State at the Borders*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

Lattimore, Owen. *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*. Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y.: Capitol Publishing Company, 1951.

Lee, Robert H. G. *The Manchurian Frontier in Ch'ing History*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Leong, Sow-Theng. *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917-1926*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976.

Li, Nianxuan. "Haluan yu Zhongdong tielu: Habu E dangren zhengluan yu Zhongguo zai Zhongdong luqu quanshi de fuzhang", *Jindai lishi yanjiusuo jikan* 9, 1980

Li, Yongchang. *Lü E huagong yu shiyue geming*. (1988) [Online.] Available at E shangwu zhinan: Kommercheskii, http://www.swzn.ru/ns_detail.asp?id=500074&nowmenuid=500025 [Accessed 31 October 2014]

—. “Zhongguo jindai fu E huagong shulun”. *Jindaishi yanjiu* 38, 1979.

Li, Zhixue and Xie, Qingming. “Shiyue geming qianhou Beiyang zhengfu dui lü E qiaomin de shiling baohu”, *Nanjing zhengzhi xueyuan xuebao* 164, 2012.

Liu, Hong (ed.) *The Chinese Overseas, Volume I* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Lü, Yiran. “Qingdai he Minguo shiqi de Zhongguo Zhong-E guanxishi yanjiu shuping”. *Heilongjiang shehui kexue* 6, 2000.

Lukin, Alexander. *The Bear Watches the Dragon: Russia's Perceptions of China and the Evolution of Russian-Chinese Relations since the Eighteenth Century*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

Ma, Dazheng and Shan, Patrick Fuliang. “Frontier History in China: A Scholarly Dialogue Across the Pacific Ocean”. *The Chinese Historical Review* 19(1), 2012.

Malozemoff, Andrew. *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War*. New York: Octagon Books, 1977.

Marks, Steven G. *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1991.

Marten, Kimberley. “Warlordism in Comparative Perspective”. *International Security* 31(3), 2006-2007.

Matsuzato, Kimitaka (ed.) *Regions: A Prism to View the Slavic-Eurasian World, Towards a Discipline of "Regionology"*. Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, 2000.

Mawdsley, Evan. *The Russian Civil War*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008.

McCord, Edward Allen. *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

McCormack, Gavan. *Chang Tso-Lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928: China, Japan, and the Manchurian Idea*. Folkestone, Eng: Dawson, 1977.

Mitter, Rana. *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

— . *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Munholland, J. Kim. "The French army and intervention in Southern Russia, 1918-1919". *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 22(1), 1981.

Nathan, Andrew J. *Peking Politics, 1918-1923: Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.

Nyíri, Pál, and Breidenbach, Joana (eds.) *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 2005.

Nyíri, Pál. *Chinese in Eastern Europe and Russia: A Middleman Minority in a Transnational Era*. London: Routledge, 2007.

—. "Chinese in Hungary and their Significant Others: A Multi-Sited Approach to Transnational Practice and Discourse". *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9(1), 2002.

Paine, S. C. M. *Imperial Rivals: China, Russia, and their Disputed Frontier*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996.

—. "Russo-Chinese Myths and their Impact on Japanese Foreign Policy in the 1930s". *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 21, 2004.

Palmer, James. *The Bloody White Baron*. London: Faber, 2008.

Pereira, N. G. O. *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.

Quisted, R. K. I. *"Matey" Imperialists?: The Tsarist Russians in Manchuria, 1895-1917*. Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1982.

—. *Sino-Russian Relations: A Short History*. Boston: G. Allen & Unwin, 1984.

Ryzhova, Natalia. "Informal Economy of Translocations. The Case of the Twin City of Blagoveshchensk-Heihe". *Inner Asia* 10, 2008.

Shan, Fuliang Patrick. "The Development of the North Manchuria Frontier, 1900-1931". Thesis (Ph.D.) McMaster University, 2003.

Share, Michael B. *Where Empires Collided: Russian and Soviet Relations with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2007.

Sheridan, James E. *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949*. New York: Free Press, 1975.

Shipitko, Ulyana. "Rediscovering Russia in Northeast Asia". *Ritsumeikan Annual Review of International Studies* 9, 2010.

Siegelbaum, Lewis H. "Another Yellow Peril: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917". *Modern Asian Studies* 12(2), 1978.

Smele, Jon. *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Smith, Canfield F. *Vladivostok Under Red and White Rule: Revolution and Counterrevolution in the Russian Far East, 1920-1922*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975.

Sorokina, Tatyana N. "Liquor and Opium: Joint Efforts to Control Contraband Along the Russia-China Border at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century". *Inner Asia* 16, 2014.

Steinberg, John W.; Marks, Steven G.; Menning, Bruce W.; Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David; Wolff, David and Yokote, Shinji (eds.) *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero, Volume II*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Stolberg, Eva-Maria. "The Siberian frontier between 'White Mission' and 'Yellow Peril,' 1890s-1920s". *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 32(1), 2004.

Suleski, Ronald Stanley. *Civil Government in Warlord China: Tradition, Modernization and Manchuria*. New York: P. Lang, 2002.

Sunderland, Willard. *Baron Ungern, Toxic Cosmopolitan*. Washington, DC: National Council for Eurasian and East European Research Title VIII Program, 2005

—. "The Last of the White Moustaches: Recent Books on the Anti-Bolshevik Commanders of the East", *Kritika* 9(3), 2007

—. *The Baron's Cloak: A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014

Tang, Peter S. H. *Russian and Soviet Policy in Manchuria and Outer Mongolia, 1911-1931*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1959.

Teo, Ee-Leong Victor. "Memories and the Exigencies of National Interest: An Analysis of Post Cold War Sino-Japanese and Sino-Russian Strategic Relations and Perceptions". Thesis (Ph.D.) London School of Economics and Political Science, 2007.

Timofeev, Oleg Anatol'evich. *Rossiisko-kitaiskie otnosheniia v Priamur'e ser. XIX - nach. XX vv.* (2003) [Online.] Available at the Mezhdunarodnyi institut gumanitarno-politicheskikh issledovani, http://www.igpi.ru/center/lib/hist_tradit/east/china/timofeev1.html

Unger, Jonathan. *Chinese Nationalism*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996.

Varneck, Elena. *The Testimony of Kolchak and Other Siberian Materials*. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.

Wade, Rex A. "The Revolution at Ninety-(One): Anglo-American Historiography of the Russian Revolution of 1917". *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography* 1, 2008.

Waldron, Arthur. *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924-1925*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

—. "The Warlord: Twentieth-Century Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism". *The American Historical Review* 96(4), 1991.

- Waley-Cohen, Joanna. *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Wang, C.C. "The Sale of the Chinese Eastern Railway". *Foreign Affairs*, October 1993.
- White, John Albert. *The Siberian Intervention*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950.
- Whiting, Allen S. *Soviet Policies in China, 1917-1924*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1954.
- Wolff, David. *To the Harbin Station: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Xie, Qingming. "Shiyue geming qianhou de lü E huagong ji Su'e xiangguan zhengce yanjiu", *Jiangnan xueshu* 33(2), 2014.
- Xu, Guoqi. *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Xue, Xiantian. *Zhongdong tielu hulujun yu Dongbei bianjiang zhengju*. Hebei: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1993.

Yen, Ching-Hwang. *Coolies and Mandarins: China's Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch'ing Period (1851-1911)*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, National University of Singapore, 1985.

Zatsepine, Victor Vladimirovich. "Beyond the Black Dragon River: Encounters and Decline of the Qing and Russian Empires: 1860-1917". Thesis (Ph.D.) University of British Columbia, 2006.

Zhao, Zhongfu. "Jindai Dongsansheng yimin wenti zhi yanjiu". *Jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 4(2), 1974.

Zheng, Qi. *Haerbin Wu Tong hangye gongsi dalou* [Online.] Available at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_539817d50100c58e.html [Accessed 16 June 2015]

Zhu, Yingui. "Wu Tong gongsi de xing yu wang". *Tsinghua Business Review* 5, 2014.