

Choosing “Hell”
Family Migrants from Shandong and Manchukuo’s Food
Rationing System in Harbin, 1942-1944

by
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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between migrations from Shandong between 1942 and 1944 and Manchukuo's food rationing system and the impact of rationing on the everyday life of migrants after their settlement in Harbin, the regional centre of North Manchukuo. Although Manchukuo's food rationing policies discriminated against Chinese residents by providing them with inferior grains in insufficient quantities, they were nonetheless an impetus rather than an obstacle to migration from Shandong, especially to those who had family and relatives living in Manchukuo. After settling in Harbin, migrants still faced issues related to food because the Manchukuo government revised its food policies and reduced quotas. Moreover, they also faced urban population evacuations and vagrant sweeping campaigns designed to serve the needs of the Japanese empire. Therefore, migrants living in Harbin either purchased grain illegally or left the city as strategies for coping with Manchukuo policies that were unfavourable to them. Employing such theoretical frameworks as "extraordinary everydayness" and a grassroots approach and drawing from oral interviews conducted in Harbin, this project emphasizes the interaction between the state (Manchukuo) and commoners (Shandong migrants). It also emphasizes how Shandong migrants perceived and reacted to Japanese dominion in Manchuria, with a particular focus on the coping strategies they employed to maximize their chances of survival. This thesis argues that although Shandong migrants faced ethnically discriminatory wartime food policies in Manchukuo, they developed different strategies to ensure their survival after settlement, and many migrated voluntarily rather than as a result of Japan's forced labour policy.

Keywords: family migrants; Manchukuo; food rationing system; illegal grain purchase; control law; urban population evacuation.

Dedication

To my grandparents and their generation.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

“My family would not have left Shandong if we’d had two meals of sorghum porridge to eat every day,” said by Li Deshan, a Shandong migrant from Penglai County to Manchuria in 1942.¹ This was a common response of interviewees to my question about the main reason why Shandong’s people left their hometowns between 1942 and 1944. Li’s father owned a silk shop in Harbin, and he knew that Manchukuo’s food rationing system granted a limited quota of food to every household once the household head had a legalized occupation in Manchukuo. Although the quota was far from sufficient to feed his Li’s family, it was still attractive because it was an improvement on the food shortage problems they faced in their hometown. Thus, Li’s father made the decision to move his wife along with all their children to Harbin in 1942.

Li was not the only person to give such a response. In fact, almost all the interviewees I visited for this study agreed that they chose to migrate to Manchuria when it was under Japanese control because of food shortages in Shandong. Another common characteristic of interviewees was that they all had families they could lean on, or at least had relatives who could provide assistance once they arrived, in Harbin. Therefore, I define this group of migrants as *family migrants*. Their stories and responses forced me to rethink the given narrative about migration during this time period (1942-1944) and further shape the content of this project. While oral history is the main methodology of this project and almost everyone had some stories to share about food, I also analyze documents from Manchukuo’s food policies, since food was crucial to everyone, as a window onto the experiences of Shandong migrants to Manchuria between 1942 and 1944.

Manchukuo was another name for Manchuria when it was under Japanese occupation between 1932 and 1945. It was in name an independent state, but a group from within the Imperial Japanese Army, named the Kwantung Army (KTA), was the de facto ruler of Manchukuo. Therefore, all of Manchukuo’s national policies served

¹ Interview with Li Deshan, May 3, 2019. All interviews were conducted by the author. In order to protect the privacy and anonymity of interviewees, pseudonyms are used throughout.

Japanese interests. One example of this is the food rationing system established in 1937, through which the government distributed grain to its subjects according to age, occupation, and ethnicity. The system mirrored the discriminatory nature of Manchukuo. The system changed continuously, but some the basics remained the same: Chinese subjects had access to grains such as sorghum, millet, and corn, but at low quotas of poor quality. Rice was for the Japanese only, and it was a crime for those Chinese subjects who had it. Also, even though the Japanese authorities were aware that quotas were too low to satisfy anyone's basic needs, the private purchase of extra grain to supplement government rations was illegal in Manchukuo. Both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars have highlighted these undeniable facts as evidence that Manchukuo was a human hell under Japanese occupation. As such, they argue that Manchukuo's food policy would have discouraged free or voluntary migration between 1942 and 1944.

For this study, I have chosen to focus on Harbin, the regional centre of North Manchuria, which attracted the largest population of migrants in Manchukuo between 1942 and 1944. While Manchukuo's food rationing system discriminated against Chinese residents by providing them with only inferior and insufficient grains, I argue that it was nonetheless an impetus rather than an obstacle to migration from Shandong, especially to those migrants who had family or relatives in living Manchukuo. I also argue that the effect of Manchukuo's "no rice to Chinese" policy has been overstated in previous studies because most people in Shandong in the 1940s never had rice as their main course anyway. Sorghum was in fact an acceptable—even favourable—grain to most Shandong migrants in Harbin, especially when compared to the lack of grains available in Shandong.

This project does not praise Manchukuo's food rationing system, and I do not consider migration to Manchuria to be an unproblematic solution to the food shortages Shandong migrants faced. After settlement in Harbin and other areas of Manchukuo, migrants still faced food problems because the Manchukuo government revised its food policies and reduced already insufficient quotas. Thus, migrants living in Harbin had to risk engaging in illegal grain purchases in order to survive. Other difficulties they faced included urban population evacuations and vagrant sweeping campaigns designed to

serve the needs of the Japanese empire. All of these policies from 1942 to 1944 not only reduced the quota of food rations for certain groups—such as unemployed youth, the elderly, and merchants—but exposed some to the very real danger of becoming forced labourers once they were deemed “useless” to Manchukuo’s urban industrial complex. Therefore, some migrants started their second migration: they left the city as a strategy to combat Manchukuo’s national policies that were unfavourable to them.

This study is mainly based on oral interviews I conducted in Harbin from May to July 2019. I visited more than fifty now elderly migrants and recorded and transcribed twenty-four of those interviews as the basis for this study. These twenty-four interviewees were primarily Shandong migrants to Manchuria between 1942 and 1944; they had families and relatives in Harbin and lived in the city for a while; and they had stories to share about Manchukuo’s food policy. There are some exceptions: some interviewees came from other regions of North China such as Hebei and Tianjin, and some were born in Harbin or moved there earlier than the time period I am focused on. However, in these cases, their memories are so vivid that I include their stories here since the impact of Manchukuo’s food policies on the everyday lives of Harbin residents is my core question.

An Everyday Approach

In this project, I focus on Shandong migrants’ everyday life experiences, particularly those related to food after their migration to and settlement in Harbin. According to historian Hanchao Lu, commoners were people who “had to work to making a living,” “possessed little or no political power over others,” and “had a limited social circle or network.”² Lu also believes that previous scholarly works about everydayness may pay too much attention to dramas, movies, and newspapers that were “not related enough to the daily lives of the common people” and ignore some of the

² Hanchao Lu, “Out of the Ordinary: Implications of Material Culture and Daily Life in China,” in *Everyday Modernity in China*, ed. Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstein (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 23–25.

most important necessities of everyday life, such as food.³ I emphasize migrants' everyday life related to food because I agree with Lu's conclusion. As eating on a daily basis is the desire of, if not the norm, for all people, nothing is more "everyday" than food.

But focusing on ordinary lives does not mean neglecting the state. Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson propose grassroots history as "both a methodological starting point and an objective structure of society."⁴ Based on this theory, a "focus on everyday life means taking what people actually did as a starting point rather than starting with what top officials wanted people to do or to think."⁵ Grassroots historians pay more close attention to ordinary people's everyday lives, including their strategies to cope with government policies that were not favourable to them. According to a grassroots history approach, state policies definitely play a significant role in commoners' everyday life. In this study, all interviewees were commoners who had little power to confront the mighty government when they moved to Harbin and its nearby areas. It is impossible to provide a comprehensive analysis of their behaviours without any consideration of Manchukuo's state policies.

Sheila Fitzpatrick's work *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* is a magnificent example of the interaction between commoners and a totalitarian government. As the leading scholar of modern Russia's social history, Fitzpatrick does not deny the importance of the Stalinist state to everyday life, and she argues that "everyday interaction ... in some way involved the state."⁶ According to Fitzpatrick, scarcity was a defining feature of this period, when the Soviet government controlled all of life's necessities in order to manipulate the masses. To survive such a difficult time and despite their fear of the state, commoners had to take some risks, such as engaging in business activities and exchanges that were illegal.

³ Lu, "Out of the Ordinary," 25, 32.

⁴ Jeremy Brown and Matthew D. Johnson, *Maoism at the Grassroots: Everyday Life in China's Era of High Socialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 5.

⁵ Brown and Johnson, *Maoism at the Grassroots*, 2.

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

Fitzpatrick argues that an “everydayness” approach cannot be used to analyze such a historical period as Stalinist Russia because it emphasizes everyday life but ignores the importance of the state. Moreover, she argues that Stalinist Russia is not a time that historians should perceive as “ordinary” given the government’s application of extreme policies to control everything. Thus, Fitzpatrick refers to her approach as “extraordinary everydayness” in order to highlight in her analysis the prominent role of the authoritarian government in shaping the extraordinary conditions of commoners’ lives.⁷

Migrants from Shandong to Harbin between 1942 and 1944 faced a very similar situation. The outbreak of the Pacific War thrust Manchukuo into total war, which meant that the government applied stricter control laws, which had been established even before the wider war began, to every life necessity, particularly food. In such a situation, most residents in Harbin had to purchase food on the black market to meet their basic needs. And when urban life became too difficult in the extreme, some migrants chose to leave the city for rural zones as a survival strategy. I analyze all these behaviours and decisions through a grassroots approach and Fitzpatrick’s notion of extraordinary everydayness. Most residents in Harbin were politically powerless, so they had to engage in “illegal” activities or make decisions against their will to maximize their chances of survival.

Methodologies and Sources

Oral history has been marginalized in historical studies for a long time. As Peter Novick points out, “work in oral history was often marked by uncritical overidentification with informants and the privileging of their perspective. And without effective mechanisms for critical review, exaggeration and bias frequently proceeded unchecked.”⁸ Joan W. Scott, a leading scholar in gender history, also criticizes the uncritical use of personal experience as historical evidence since it is subjective and

⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 2.

⁸ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 513.

idiosyncratic.⁹ It is fair to say that many historians still regard oral history as less reliable and accountable in recovering the objective truth of the past.

However, historians should not overlook the use of oral history in research. Rather than viewing oral narratives as empirical, objective fact, oral historians have emphasized the subjectivity of such narratives, which provides insight into individuals' interpretations of the past through the lens of storytelling.¹⁰ As Amy Shuman argues, oral historians follow narrative cues and discern points of interest provided by interviewees/narrators.¹¹ Few oral historians treat oral history as a truth-telling process, but a meaning-making process that emerges from, and contextualizes, the act of narration. Interviewees' narrations are not something historians must avoid. Instead, they are valuable to reconstructing dominant narratives by adding multiple perspectives about the past. Individuals made their decisions based on various reasons and motivations.

Under political pressure from the government, Chinese scholars are unlikely to provide much detail about the Shandong migrants who fled from Shandong's Communist-occupied areas. Timothy Brook criticizes the moral binary based on Chinese nationalist ideas about heroic resistance and cowardly collaboration and obedience.¹² According to Brook, survival, not a glorious death for some abstract ideal such as nationalism or patriotism, was the major concern of most Chinese commoners. Chinese nationalism seemed irrelevant in most interviewees' narratives about their migrations. If being a colonial slave under Japanese rule in Manchukuo meant survival, then most commoners would not have considered "being Chinese" an obstacle in their decision to leave Shandong for Harbin, especially when Chinese authorities had failed to provide welfare and protection. In this situation, oral history becomes such an invaluable source

⁹ Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 777.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, "Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 1998), 345.

¹¹ Amy Shuman, "Oral History," in *Oral Tradition* 18, no.1 (2003): 130-31.

¹² Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 12, 246–48.

of information to understand why most migrants in Manchuria chose Japanese-controlled zones, a topic that is unlikely to be discussed in Chinese sources.

I primarily located appropriate interviewees through community offices in Harbin. I visited some community offices during my research and benefitted from the help of some kind and friendly community directors. One community director helped me to interview five people in her community within one day. Another place I found many interviewees was in nursing homes. One friend of my auntie is the manager of a state-owned nursing house. She introduced me to residents of this nursing home, and later introduced me to another nursing home where I conducted more interviews. Last, I had a chance to talk with some interviewees based on my family social networks. Many friends of my grandparents and parents helped me to find additional interviewees, whom I cannot thank enough.

Another important source for this project is Harbin's local newspaper, *Binjiang Ribao* (Binjiang Daily). When the Manchukuo government began to strictly supervise the media, this was only Chinese newspaper available in each province, playing the role as the government mouthpiece. Rana Mitter describes *Shengjing Shibao*, the largest newspaper in Manchukuo and mainly published in the New Capital, as "a crude propaganda organ for the Japanese presence in the region."¹³ *Binjiang Ribao* played a similar role. Most headlines of this newspaper were flattering and exaggerated praise of the greatness of Japan and Manchukuo. One typical example is a March 1, 1943, article titled "Huang'en haodang, jinzi donglai" (Infinite royal graciousness, the purple air comes from the East), used high-blown words to eulogize the Japanese Army's great victories on the battlefield, predicting that the defeat of such evil enemies as the United

¹³ Rana Mitter, "Evil Empire? Competing Construction of Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria, 1928-37," in *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945*, ed. Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 156.

States and the United Kingdom was just a matter of time.¹⁴ Thus, from the official Chinese perspective, *Binjiang Ribao* was a traitorous newspaper in 1940s Harbin.¹⁵

This does not change the fact that *Binjiang Ribao* is one of the most important sources to study Manchukuo's history in Harbin. It is particularly useful in the investigation of Manchukuo's food rationing system since it functioned as the main vehicle for the government to issue quota announcements and policy changes in a written format. Also, since food was important to everyone's life, it was not uncommon to find some articles complaining about the system. In one example, from January 10, 1942, an article grumbled that cooking oil was insufficient for everyday use when the last distribution happened four months ago, and the journalist criticized the government incapacity and inefficiency for failing to provide basic necessities to residents.¹⁶ Based on my review of *Binjiang Ribao* from 1942 to 1944, it is clear that hatred for and dissatisfaction with Manchukuo's food rationing system was omnipresent. A propaganda tool such as *Binjiang Ribao* cannot hide this fact.

Other sources for this study include Manchukuo's official gazetteers and statistics, Chinese government reports (from both Nationalist and Communist governments), and archival collections such as *Dongbei jingji lièduo* (Japanese economic looting in Northeast China) and *Weiman xianjing tongzhi* (Manchukuo's Police Dominion), compiled by Zhongyang dang'an guan (National Archives Administration of China) and other archival agencies in China. These sources provide essential information about government policies, which is crucial for my analysis of commoners' behaviour, especially since Manchukuo's control laws were everywhere.

I divide this project into three chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the historical background for the migration of people from Shandong to Harbin

¹⁴ "Huanggen haodang, ziqi donglai" [Infinite royal graciousness, the purple air comes from the East] *Binjiang Ribao*, March 1, 1943, 1.

¹⁵ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuan hui (Heilongjiang Gazetteer Office), *Heilongjiang shengzhi: baoye zhi* [Heilongjiang gazette: newspaper] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1993), 83.

¹⁶ "Douyou heri peiji? Qijin reng wu queqi" [What was the date for soy-bean oil distribution? Still no exact date to be given] *Binjiang Ribao*, January 10, 1942, 3.

between 1942 and 1944. Chapter 2 focuses on the establishment of Manchukuo's food rationing system and on how migrants living in Harbin perceived it. I focus especially on re-evaluating the meaning of the "no rice to Chinese" policy in light of interviewees comments that it was less important to them. Chapter 3 focuses on how, after migrating and settling in Harbin, migrants and their families adopted coping strategies such as illegal grain purchases and leaving the city.

Chapter 1.

Why Manchuria? Why Harbin?

Wei Zhonglin was eight years old in 1942. His hometown was a village named Nanda Tun (Big South Village) in Dezhou County, Shandong. Wei's hometown had experienced a drought in 1941 and locusts in 1942, making food scarce for everyone. Also, Wei's mother's maternal uncle joined the guerrilla forces led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Guerrilla actions could place local populations in jeopardy. Japanese reprisals after guerrilla actions were often extremely terrible. When Japanese raids on Communists' Shandong base areas became frequent, Wei's mother also worried about the family's safety. Wei was the second child, and he, his older brother, and sister all lived with their mother. Wei's father owned a pastry shop in Harbin, the largest city in North Manchuria. Wei had few childhood memories of his father. Wei's father used to return to Nanda Tun with money for the family, but stopped after 1940 because he had already married another woman in Harbin. However, he was the first person Wei's mother thought about when hometown life became insufferable. Wei still remembered what his mother said: "your father abandoned me, but he would not abandon his own children." Thus, Wei's mother made the decision to move to Harbin in 1942.¹

For a single mother with three young children, Wei's mother preferred to travel with other migrants to Manchuria. One distant relative led the migration team, consisting of seventeen people, bound for Manchuria. They might choose different cities to settle in, but most of them were migrants who had families in Harbin. As an eight-year-old boy at the time, Wei did not recall too many details about the trip during our interview, but one detail remained vivid: the terrible condition of the train coach they took. It was a boxcar, without fresh air and containing too many people. Wei still remembered that during the trip he actually sat next to a bunch of "horseshit." Because of this experience, Wei was

¹ Interview with Wei Zhonglin, May 18, 2019.

positive that the previous passengers in the coach were not humans but some stinky animals.²

Wei hated his father for a good reason. After their arrival, his father refused to support them because he had already formed a new family. Thus, Wei's mother chose to live on the Seventh street in Daowai, a Harbin slum where many newcomers chose to settle. Fortunately, Wei's irresponsible father was not his only relative in Harbin: Wei's mother's older cousin lived in Daowai with her husband, who ran a restaurant. One of her brothers was also working at the Chick-Duck Company (*ji ya gongsi*), a meat product factory in Harbin. Soon after their arrival, Wei's uncle helped his sister (Wei's mother) to get a job in this factory, where she worked for another thirty years.

Many Shandong migrants moved to Manchuria between 1942 and 1944 because they, like Wei's family, had family and relatives there. Most Shandong migrants who headed to Manchuria at this time experienced unlivable conditions in their hometowns. Natural disasters and Japanese threats were common factors pushing people to abandon their beloved hometowns. When staying in one's hometown often meant waiting to die, leaving and finding relatives in Manchuria was the only choice for many migrants. In the first section of this chapter, I provide a historical background for the Shandong migration between 1942 and 1944, discussing, in general, the reasons most Shandong migrants decided to head to Manchuria. Next, I focus on a particular group of migrants, which I refer to as family migrants, and the significance of studying this group. Finally, in the last section, I give specific reasons for why I have chosen Harbin as a geographic focus for this study; these include the significance of the railway, the nature of Harbin as the site of a Shandong migrant community, and Manchukuo's national policy of promoting large-scale migrations to North Manchuria.

² Interview with Wei Zhonglin, May 18, 2019.

Why They Left: Natural Calamities and Man-Made Misfortunes in Shandong

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters and man-made misfortunes provided the push factors and changing migration policies in Manchukuo provided the pull factors that led Shandong's struggling people to migrate to Manchukuo. Natural disasters were a powerful push factor for people leaving their hometowns. The year 1942 was a disastrous year for many Shandong people, but the entire first half of the 1940s treated Shandong people harshly. Locusts, as in Wei's story at the start of the chapter, were one of the most devastating forces to Shandong farmers. According to entomologist Wu Fuzhen, locusts often raided crops in at least forty counties in Shandong, frequently causing severe famine.³ Zhang Xuezheng, Zheng Jingyun, and Fang Xiuqi have also confirmed that plagues of locusts happened every year in Shandong since the late nineteenth century, varying only in their severity.⁴ Locusts showed up, ate everything, and left quickly, leaving farmers in desperation.

Another major natural disaster in the Shandong countryside from 1941 to 1944 was drought, which Wei's family also experienced in 1942. From 1941 to 1943, most counties and villages in North and West Shandong experienced extreme drought: the annual precipitation rate was 418, 478, and 505 millimetres.⁵ In North Shandong, not a single raindrop landed in 150 consecutive days in 1942.⁶ Rivers and water wells ran dry, and millions of people had no food to survive. Consequently, migration to Manchuria was higher in these years. In Jinqiu County in central Shandong, the population of

³ Wu Fuzhen, *Zhongguo de feihuang* [China's locusts] (Shanghai: Yongxiang yinshu guan, 1951), 49.

⁴ Zhang Xuezheng, Zheng Jingyun, Fang Xiuqi, and Xiao Lingbo, "Shandong huangzai de yunlüxing jiqi yu qihou bianhua de guanxi" [The rhythm of locust plagues and its relationship with climate change in Shandong Province, 1470-1949], *Qihou yu huanjing yanjiu* 12, no. 6 (2007): 788-94, <https://doi.org/10.3878/j.issn.1006-9585.2007.06.09>.

⁵ Wei Guangxing and Sun Zhaomin, *Shandong ziran zaihai shi* [Shandong's natural disaster history] (Beijing: Dizhen chubanshe, 2000), 114.

⁶ Wei and Sun, *Shandong ziran zaihai shi*, 115.

420,000 in 1934 was reduced to 380,000 in 1939 and 210,000 in 1942. Extreme drought from 1940 to 1942 caused thousands of its residents to flee from their hometowns.⁷

Regardless of the type of natural disaster, the direct consequence was extreme famine. From 1939 to 1943, every year, more than 900,000 Shandong people chose to leave their hometowns by heading to Manchuria. When natural disasters decreased in 1944 and 1945, the migration number declined dramatically: from 930,000 in 1943 to 600,000 in 1944 and 400,000 in 1945.⁸ Natural disaster was not the only reason for the large-scale migration to Manchuria, but it was often an important driving force.

Man-Made Misfortunes

Man-made misfortunes in Shandong since 1940 usually referred to Japan's brutal domination of and reprisals against the countryside, especially in CCP base areas. A state of war endured into the 1940s, when the Japanese, Nationalists, and Communists all had presences in Shandong, even if all the major cities were under Japanese control since 1937. Before 1940, the Japanese army perceived Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army to be the main enemy and considered CCP forces to be a minor threat. However, the situation had changed after August 1940, when the CCP launched a large-scale raid, known as the "One Hundred Regiments Campaign," on North China's railway system. This caused significant losses to the Japanese transportation system. As a response, military commanders of the Japanese Army in North China, such as Ryūkichi Tanaka and Yasuji Okamura, proposed "total annihilation" (later referred to as the "Three Alls Policy": Kill all, burn all, and loot all) of the Communist base areas so that "the enemy

⁷ Hu Huanyong, *Zhongguo dongbu, zhongbu, sibu sandai de renkou jingji he shengtai huanjing* [Population, economy, and ecological environment of East China, Middle China, and West China] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989), 142.

⁸ Exact data for Manchuria's population is impossible to access because before their retreat, Japanese authorities destroyed most of Manchukuo's population data. Thus, Lu Yu, an expert in Shandong migration history in China, estimated this data based on some unofficial reports and scholarly works both in Chinese and Japanese. see Lu Yu, *Qingdai he Minguo Shandong yimin Dongbei shilüe* [History of the Shandong migration in the Qing and Republican eras], 57–58; Liu Dake, "Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Shandong lunxianqu nongcun jingji" [The rural economy of occupied Shandong during the War of Resistance against Japan], *Jinnan daxue xuebao* 6 (2000): 55.

could never use them again.”⁹ As a consequence, Japanese forces killed millions of Chinese living in CCP base areas across North China within a few years.¹⁰

The CCP was incapable of protecting people in Japanese-targeted base zones. Under the pressure from both the Japanese and Chinese Nationalists’ increased anti-Communist attacks after 1940, most CCP forces were limited to distant and mountainous areas such as Yimeng and Taishan districts in central and southern Shandong from 1940 to 1943.¹¹ As the weakest force in Shandong, the CCP forces needed to retreat suddenly and frequently, making it impossible to protect their subjects. Sun Dahai was fifteen years old in 1942 and lived in Qixia County in Shandong, which had been a CCP base area since 1940. Sun did not favour CCP’s administration, as, according to his memory, CCP’s taxation was even heavier than the previous Nationalist government and they could not offer any social welfare and military protection when the Japanese army was approaching. “They [CCP soldiers] did not have any bullets,” Sun said. He continued, “they ran fast when the Japanese were coming, letting the Japanese destroy everything.”¹² Lei Yongfa, another interviewee from Ye County, Shandong, also shared similar experiences of Communist guerrillas retreating and leaving commoners with no alternative but to flee on their own. Two bullets hit Lei’s left leg in his escape in 1944. He showed me two horrible scars, maintaining that this was the reason he left Shandong a few months after his injury.¹³

Sun and Lei’s stories provided valuable information about Shandong’s living conditions from 1942 to 1944. Chinese literature such as Mo Yan’s *Hong gaoliang* (Red sorghum) and Liu Zhixia’s *Tiedao youji dui* (Railway guerrilla) about the Resistance War

⁹ Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001), 366.

¹⁰ There is no exact number of casualties available from different sources. According to CCP’s official statistics, the Japanese Army was directly responsible for 732,000 deaths in the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu border regions (CCP’s base areas in Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong, and Henan) and 726,488 in the Jin-Cha-Ji (Shanxi, Chahaer, and Hebei) border region during the war. See Dagfinn Gatu, *Village China at War: The Impact of Resistance to Japan, 1937-1945* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2008), 360.

¹¹ Elise A. De Vido, “The Survival of the Shandong Base Area, 1937-1943: External Influence and Internal Conflicts” in *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937-1945*, ed. Feng Congyi and David Goodman (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2000), 177.

¹² Interview with Sun Dahai, May 24, 2019.

¹³ Interview with Lei Yongfa, May 4, 2019.

in Shandong tend to romanticize the resistance and suggest that, except for a few collaborators, all Chinese commoners supported the CCP wholeheartedly, even if they needed to sacrifice their lives.¹⁴ This was not quite the case for most commoners. The CCP forces in Shandong were incapable of maintaining an administration: without military security in their base areas, the CCP could not stabilize their administration and foster commoners' loyalty to their government. In Shandong, commoners often felt threatened when their new government could not offer protection, and migration to an occupied zone such as Manchuria was preferable to risking their lives under Japanese swords in CCP areas of Shandong.

Family Migrants: A Forgotten Group

Family migrants from Shandong to Manchuria from 1942 to 1944 have scarcely been examined by scholars. In China, the two most influential works about Shandong migration history are Lu Yu's *Qingdai he Minguo Shandong yimin Dongbei Shilie* (History of Shandong migration during the Qing and Republican eras) and Liu Dezeng's *Shandong yimin shi* (The history of Shandong migration). These two works either omit Shandong migration to Manchuria during the 1940s or state that it was a nightmarish experience of forced migration.¹⁵ Mark Driscoll argues that the Manchukuo government treated Chinese migrants as free forced labourers, whose "living only to work" laid the foundation for Manchukuo's necropolitics, arguing that the Chinese "worked to death" for Japan's interests with no consideration for their welfare.¹⁶ David Tucker also believes that forced labour was the defining characteristic of Manchukuo migration history and that the rise of Chinese nationalism in North Manchuria made few people willing to be family migrants.¹⁷ Yamamuro concludes that there was no harmony in Manchukuo

¹⁴ Liu Zhixia, *Tiedao youji dui* [Railway guerrilla] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2013); Mo Yan, *Hong gaoliang* [Red sorghum] (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2004).

¹⁵ Liu Dezeng, *Shandong yimin shi* [The history of the Shandong migration] (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2011); Lu Yu, *Qingdai he Minguo Shandong yimin Dongbei shilie*.

¹⁶ Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 55.

¹⁷ David Tucker, "Labour Policy and the Construction Industry in Manchukuo: System of Recruitment, Management, and Control," in *Asian Labour in the Wartime Japanese Empire: Unknown Histories*, ed. Paul H. Kratoska (New York: Routledge, 2005).

because, for the Japanese, harmony meant “assist[ing] the Japanese,” and “ethnic harmony” thus meant “assisting the Yamato people in their invasion of China.”¹⁸ Thus, according to these scholars, almost all migrants from North China were cheap forced labourers, and voluntary migration was very unlikely.

Some scholarly works have also addressed the characteristics of the Shandong migration to Manchuria in the 1940s. According to Irene B. Taeuber, the Shandong migration was still seasonal in the 1940s even if the settlement rate had increased over time.¹⁹ Thomas Gottschang also argues that most migrants were temporary labourers rather than settlers, and he refers to this seasonal migration as a process of circular migration. Thus, Gottschang believes that “the (Shandong) migration was part of an ongoing process of adjustment by households in North China to a new set of income-earning possibilities generated by the expansion of the modern sector (Manchuria).”²⁰ Gottschang believes that most Shandong migrants from 1891 to 1942 were not refugees, but seasonal labourers looking for more income to back to their hometowns.²¹

In 2000, Gottschang worked with Diana Lary to produce a more comprehensive analysis of North China migrants to Manchuria. Along with economic factors, cultural and hometown attachment are also highlighted. As Gottschang and Lary suggest, Shandong people had strong attachments to their hometowns and believed that “the family had to be preserved in its native place at all costs, close to the graves of ancestors.”²² Thus, Gottschang and Lary claim that the Shandong migration to Manchuria

¹⁸ Shin’ichi Yamamuro, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 202.

¹⁹ Irene B. Taeuber, “Manchuria as a Demographic Frontier.” *Population Index* 11, no. 4 (1945): 262.

²⁰ Thomas R. Gottschang, “Economic Change, Disasters, and Migration: The Historical Case of Manchuria,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 35, no. 3 (1987): 462.

²¹ Thomas R. Gottschang, “Migration from North China to Manchuria: An Economic History, 1891-1942” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1982).

²² Thomas R. Gottschang and Diana Lary, *Swallows and Settlers: The Great Migration from North China to Manchuria* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 70.

was a temporary process and that more than two-thirds of Shandong migrants chose to return their hometown after the war.²³

Although it is largely accurate that most Shandong migrants during the Manchukuo era were forced labourers and that their migration was only temporary, a significant group of migrants have received little attention. Almost all the people I interviewed in Harbin in 2019 were migrants from Shandong to Manchuria between 1942 and 1944, and none of them were forced labourers when they arrived in Harbin and its nearby towns.²⁴ All of my interviewees were migrants from North China in the early 1940s. They were the children, fiancés, and relatives of migrants who had settled in Harbin and its nearby towns prior to 1942. They were not forced to leave, but rather were family migrants looking for better conditions to survive in Harbin.

Studying family migrants, many of whom were dependent on others, can offer a different perspective on Manchuria's migration history. When young adult males were targeted as forced labourers for the construction of Manchukuo, women, children, and adolescents were not because of their sex and age. For instance, Manchukuo issued orders for compulsory labour service, creating a national labour system, on September 10, 1941, meaning that “all subjects were workers.”²⁵ However, only males between the ages of twenty and twenty-three years were required to work on the state construction of airplanes, military fortifications, and roads for twelve out of every thirty-six months.²⁶ In 1945, the final year of Manchukuo, the government revised the scope of the law to apply to those aged twenty-one to thirty-six years, but still required males only.²⁷ Thus, women and children were less directly affected by the labour law of Manchukuo. Their stories

²³ Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, 97–103, 119–24.

²⁴ Although most interviewees are Shandong migrants, some were migrants from other places in North China such as Hebei and Tianjin.

²⁵ Manshū rekishi kankō-kai, *Manzhou guoshi zonglun* [Manchukuo's history: Introduction], trans. Heilongjiang sheng shehui kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo (Heilongjiang: sheng sheke yuan, 1990), 825; David Tucker, “Labour Policy and the Construction Industry in Manchukuo: System of Recruitment, Management, and Control,” in Kratoska, *Asian Labor*, 50.

²⁶ Manshū rekishi kankō-kai, *Manzhou guoshi zonglun*, 825.

²⁷ Li Binggang, Wang Xinhua, and Yan Zhenmin, *Riben nuyi zhongguo laogong zuixing tuzheng* [Picture evidence of Japan's enslavement of Chinese labourers] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 35.

were quite different from forced labourers, whose stories have been highlighted by previous scholarly works, and they were less worried about being forced labourers since they lived in Harbin.

I do not mean that these migrants were not influenced by the war. It was a total war for China and Japan. No person and place could escape the influence of the war. In this study, I use Manchukuo's policies regarding food, since food was crucial to everyone, as a window onto the experiences of family migrants in the early 1940s. Food quotas varied based on the occupation and nationality of the head of each household, and food quotas largely determined people's chances of survival. Although they were not worried about being arrested and forced to be labourers, these family migrants were still confronted with many problems caused by the war. One common problem was food shortages. The situation was even worse for those whose relatives were no longer in Harbin, as without an employed family member they were disqualified from receiving a quota of rationed food.

Studying these family migrants provides valuable information about the history of Manchuria's urban population change. Wang I-Shou argues that the increase of Manchuria's population before the 1930s mainly took place in rural areas, but the settlement pattern had changed after the 1930s, when major cities became the destination of new migrants.²⁸ It was accurate that most of Manchukuo's residents remained as farmers. However, the percentage of the population living in urban areas of Manchukuo was much higher than that of the average for all of China. If the data from the 1940 census of Manchukuo is accurate—Manchukuo's population was recorded as 43,202,880 and the urban population ratio was 21.2 percent—then Manchukuo's urban population was more than 9.1 million.²⁹ Thus, as historian Qu Xiaofan argues, Manchuria

²⁸ Wang I-Shou, "Chinese Migration and Population Change in Manchuria, 1900-1940" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1971), 214-15.

²⁹ Li Qiang, *Weiman shiqi Dongbei renkou yanjiu* [Studies on the population of northeast China in the period of the puppet Manchukuo] (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 2012).

experienced the fastest growing urban population among all regions of China during the war.³⁰ Family migrants played a significant role in this phenomenon.

Harbin had the largest urban population in North Manchuria, and the largest population in the city was North China migrants, especially from Shandong. Harbin was located in Binjiang Province (largely today's southern Heilongjiang Province). The urban population of Binjiang Province (30.7 percent) was 1,300,244 in 1941, and its ratio was also significantly higher than that of the average for Manchukuo (21.2 percent).³¹ As the regional centre of North Manchuria, Harbin's population continued to increase in the early 1940s. According to the first census of Harbin in 1934, the Manchukuo government reported that there were 500,256 residents in Harbin on December 1, 1934.³² The 1940 census of Manchuria indicated that in 1941, Harbin had 135,768 households and a population of 661,984.³³ In 1942, Harbin's population reached 721,958.³⁴ Zhu Tiezhen, an expert in China's urban demography, also estimates that Harbin's population likely exceeded 750,000 in 1943.³⁵ It was clear that Harbin's population increased more than 150,000 from 1934 to 1940, and another 100,000 from 1940 to 1943.

Evidence of an increasing settlement rate is found in the increasing number of households (*hu*). In 1940, there were 126,768 households in Harbin, which grew to 165,443 in 1944.³⁶ Historian Xue Lianju also illustrates that the sex ratio and the percentage of children (0 to 15 years) increased during the 1940s even though it was still far away from a normal distribution.³⁷ The sex ratio in Harbin remained imbalanced in

³⁰ Qu Xiaofan, *Jindai Dongbei chengshi de lishi bianqian* [Historical changes of northeast cities in modern times] (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 362.

³¹ Li Qiang, *Weiman shiqi dongbei renkou yanjiu*, 117.

³² Haerbin shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui bian, *Haerbin shizhi: renkou* [Harbin population gazetteer] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1999), 461–62.

³³ The 1940 census of Manchukuo started in 1940, and Harbin's population was published in *Zhengfu gongbao* on July 5, 1941.

³⁴ “Hashi renkou zengjia: jingji. Shangye feisu fazhan” [Harbin's population increased: economics and commerce were in hypergrowth] *Binjiang Ribao*, April 18, 1942, 4.

³⁵ Zhu Tiezhen, *Zhongguo chengshi shouce* [China's cities] (Beijing: Jingji kexue chubanshe, 1987), 35.

³⁶ Haerbin shi difang zhi bianzuan weiyuanhui bian, *Haerbin shizhi: renkou*, 464.

³⁷ Xue Lianju, *Haerbin renkou bianqian* [Population change in Harbin] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1998), 102–9.

the 1940s: it was 153.7, meaning that the percentage of women in the population was lower than 40 percent.³⁸ However, compared to the 1930s (the sex ratio was 216 in 1934), there was a clear increase in the female population in the city.³⁹

The increasing urban population and a more balanced sex ratio suggests that more women and underage migrants had moved into Harbin, and the data of my study support this statement. Convenient transportation, terrible living conditions in Shandong's towns, an existing Shandong community in Harbin, and Manchukuo's national policy all played significant roles in these family migrants' decisions to voluntarily move to Harbin without government coercion and encouraged family migrants such as women and children to join their husbands and fathers in Harbin. Family migrants should not be a group that scholars overlook if we are attempting to offer a more comprehensive analysis of the urban development of cities in Manchuria.

Choosing Harbin: Railway, Shandong Communities, and Defending the North

As the last section addressed, many Shandong migrants chose Harbin as their destination between 1942 and 1944. Besides the familial connections that define family migrants, there are some specific reasons for this choice, including the convenience of and urbanization related to the railway, the nature of Harbin as a distant Shandong community, and Manchukuo's national policies that promoted migration to the North. Harbin was a new city but developed swiftly to become one of the largest metropolises in China within a few years. Gunther Barth argues that some cities are characterized by "the suddenness of their emergence and the speed with which they joined the ranks of cities that had taken centuries to evolve," usually because of the rise of urbanization and industrialization, along with technological advancement.⁴⁰ Barth referred to these cities as "instant cities." Harbin was a typical example. Unlike most modern cities in China during

³⁸ Xue Lianju, *Haerbin renkou bianqian*, 102–9.

³⁹ Xue Lianju, *Haerbin renkou bianqian*, 120.

⁴⁰ Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), xix–xxvii.

the later nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Harbin was not even a town but rather a wasteland before the arrival of Russians in the 1890s: there were barely any indigenous residents before the establishment of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in 1898.⁴¹

The Railway

The establishment of CER was the major reason for the rise of modern cities in North Manchuria, and Harbin was the unquestionable nucleus. Imperial Russians forced the Qing government to grant a concession in 1896, allowing them to establish a railway from Chita and Vladivostok in Russia to Port Arthur (today's Lüshun in China). Imperial Russia lost its control over the southern branch of the CER when the Japanese army defeated them in 1905 and took the South Manchuria railway as the fruits of victory. Nevertheless, Russia still controlled Harbin, the rail hub of the CER in North Manchuria. Just a decade after the establishment of the CER, Harbin was already “the largest commercial centre in North Manchuria.”⁴² During its heyday, Harbin was the city in which more than 40 percent of commercial trade of Manchuria took place, and all traded goods in North Manchuria would be transported, packed, and distributed in Harbin because of its railway network.⁴³

Harbin used to be a Russian-controlled city, but this fact changed soon after the Manchuria Incident when the Japanese raided and occupied Mukden on September 18, 1931. The Japanese army in Manchuria, the Kwantung Army (KTA) encountered little resistance to its occupation of most major cities in Manchuria.⁴⁴ The situation was a little different in Harbin, where some Chinese militarists chose to fight. However, resistance eventually proved futile. Harbin fell on February 6, 1932. Shortly after that, a puppet

⁴¹ Robert Nield, *China's Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840–1943* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2015), 118.

⁴² James Hugh Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916–1932* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 13.

⁴³ Qu Xiaofan, *Jindai Dongbei chengshi de lishi bianqian*, 148.

⁴⁴ Rana Mitter, *The Manchuria Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 17–18.

state called Manchukuo was established in May 1932.⁴⁵ In order to avoid being flanked by Germany and Japan and to recover its own economic system, the Soviet government adopted a neutral policy toward the Japanese occupation of Manchuria and agreed to sell the CER to Japan in 1932, closing the deal in 1935.⁴⁶ Thus, Japan became the new benefactor and started to use the railway system to bring in more cheap labourers from China.

The railway became one crucial factor in the increase of North Manchuria's population. There were five major routes by which migrants from North China poured into Manchuria: Dairen (Dalian), Andong, Yingkou, Shanhaiguan (Shanghai Pass), and Gubeikou.⁴⁷ The first three were sea routes, and the latter two were land routes based on railway development. In the 1920s, more than 70 percent of migrants entered Manchuria via sea routes, but the land routes became more important with the development of Manchukuo's railways. In 1941, more than half of all migrants arrived via land routes. Dairen remained busy from 1942 to 1944, but if migrants' chosen destinations were in North Manchuria, they usually needed to at least complete their journeys by train. Binjiang Province, in which Harbin was located, attracted one of the highest populations of migrant settlers in this time period.⁴⁸ The railway played a significant role in this phenomenon.

A Shandong Community

Harbin's development required intensive labour, and this need, satisfied by the import of cheap migrant labourers, especially from Shandong, made Harbin an immigrant city. According to historian Ge Jianxiong, most migrants in Heilongjiang were from

⁴⁵ Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 187.

⁴⁶ Chong-Sik Lee, *Revolutionary Struggle in Manchuria: Chinese Communism and Soviet Interest, 1922--1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 158.

⁴⁷ Li Qiang, *Weiman shiqi dongbei renkou yanjiu*, 152.

⁴⁸ Migrants heading to Binjiang comprised the third largest migration group in Manchukuo, next only next to Dairen and Mukden. Li Qiang, *Weiman shiqi dongbei renkou yanjiu*, 154.

Shandong.⁴⁹ A Shandong migrant who used to work as a farm worker in Harbin could earn about 130 yuan a year, which was three or four times higher than what he could earn in his native district.⁵⁰ In the 1920s and 1930s, the pace of regional economic development continuously increased, so the labour shortage still acted as a magnet for migrants looking for work building roads and railways, felling timber, and toiling in factories and mines.⁵¹

Single, healthy, and hardworking young men from North China, especially from Shandong, were the majority of migrants during Harbin's early development. According to Gottschang and Lary, the driving force was "the deep and unquestioned commitment of millions of North Chinese workers to aid their families by any possible means."⁵² Most Shandong migrants would not choose to stay in Manchuria permanently and returned with their money to their hometowns. When the trip to North Manchuria was no more an obstacle because of the development of the railway, more than 70 percent of agricultural and business migrants of Manchuria chose North rather than South Manchuria since the 1920s.⁵³ The settlement rate in North Manchuria increased over time, even if more migrants still chose to return home eventually.⁵⁴ Between the 1890s and the 1930s, an increasing number of migrants chose to settle in North Manchuria. Thus, there were many distant Shandong communities established in Manchuria, and Harbin was a typical example.

As many young men returned to Shandong to get married and became husbands and fathers, they typically worked in Harbin and their families would remain in their

⁴⁹ Ge Jianxiong, *Zhongguo yimin shi di liu juan* [The history of Chinese migration, vol. 6] (Fuzhou: Fuzhou renmin chubanshe, 1997), 501.

⁵⁰ Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, 44.

⁵¹ Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945–1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 16.

⁵² Gottschang and Lary, *Swallows and Settlers*, 9.

⁵³ Qu Xiaofan, *Jindai Dongbei chengshi de lishi bianqian*, 238.

⁵⁴ Ge Jianxiong, *Zhongguo yimin shi*, 501; Qu Xiaofan, *Jindai Dongbei chengshi de lishi bianqian*, 235; Yang Zihui, *Zhongguo lidai renkou tongji ziliao yanjiu* [China's historical population data and the relevant studies] (Beijing: gaige chubanshe, 1995): 1407–9; Xiong Yingwu, *Zhongguo renkou (Heilongjiang fence)* [China's population: Heilongjiang] (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingji chubanshe, 1989), 57.

hometown. However, once they achieved social and economic mobility in Harbin, they might bring their families when hometown life became insufferable to their wives and children from 1942 to 1944. Some sources suggest that more than half of the cultivators from Shandong became landlords and more than one-third of tenants became owner-cultivators as a result of their hard work in Manchuria for several years.⁵⁵ A similar situation occurred for workers as well who saved some money to start their own careers in Harbin. As the largest commercial centre in North Manchuria, Harbin was also a place to attract migrants looking for business opportunities. Almost 65 percent of owners of medium and small businesses in Harbin in the 1940s were Shandong and Hebei immigrants.⁵⁶

Wei Zhonglin's father abandoning his Shandong family was quite unusual. Based on most of my interviewees' memory, their fathers, husbands, and brothers cared about their families and wished to bring their families to Harbin once they perceived Harbin's life would be easier. For instance, Li Deshan, a Shandong migrant from Penglai County, moved from Shandong to Harbin in 1942. His father worked as a farm worker in Harbin when he was young, and after years of hard work, he saved enough money to start his own silk shop.⁵⁷ In 1942, Li's father wrote a letter to ask his wife and all his children to move to Harbin with him because Harbin had more food available. Zhu Simei, another Shandong migrant from Ye County, also had a father, who owned a leather shop, in Harbin. Zhu's father left his hometown when he was twelve and learned Russian during his early working experience in Vladivostok. In his early twenties, Zhu's father moved to Harbin to start his own business, which flourished thanks to his language skills. He went back to Shandong and married Zhu's mother, but kept the family in Shandong until 1942, when their hometown suffered from both natural disasters and Japanese raids.⁵⁸ They

⁵⁵ Mitter, *Manchurian Myth*, 120.

⁵⁶ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei manzhouguo shi* [History of bogus manchukuo] (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1980), 326–27.

⁵⁷ Interview with Li Deshan, May 3, 2019.

⁵⁸ Interview with Zhu Simei, May 15, 2019.

cared about their families, and when life in Shandong became miserable in the 1940s they usually perceived it as time to reunite their families in Harbin.

Shandong migrants also settled in Harbin and other North Manchuria cities because of the advantages that industrial development offered. Xiao Qingfang, the eldest interviewee I visited for this project, came to Harbin for her marriage to a young Shandong man who worked in Harbin's glass factory in 1940. Xiao's father died right after her birth, and she lost her mother when she was eight. Fortunately, a childless woman adopted her and arranged this marriage when she was sixteen. Xiao's adopted mother was a kind woman, and she chose this young man because skillful factory workers in Harbin provided a more stable and substantial income, and Harbin was a place without too much worry about warfare and natural disaster. The occupation of Xiao's husband would have another major advantage for their everyday life: a higher food quota, though this would not have been apparent or on their minds in 1940.⁵⁹ Mang Yishan was from Huang County, Shandong, and migrated to Mukden first when his father worked there. His father passed away soon after he arrived due to acute enteritis, and Mang chose to head to Harbin where his auntie and uncle lived in 1942. Mang's uncle arranged for an apprenticeship position in the toothbrush factory where he also worked. According to Mang, he did not enjoy this job because the workplace was damp and cold, but he admitted that this occupation made him less worried about being a forced labourer or having no food.⁶⁰

Not only merchants and skillful workers could have their families in Harbin from 1942 to 1944. Harbin's rapid development meant that all labourers were needed. In the 1930s, the north section of Harbin still required labourers for intensive agricultural production, hiring about 13 percent of all Harbin's employed Chinese men. Almost 43 percent of employed Chinese men worked in commerce and transportation, and 26

⁵⁹ Interview with Xiao Qingfang, June 16, 2019.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mang Yishan, July 22, 2019.

percent worked in manufacturing.⁶¹ As the most important metropolis in North Manchuria, Harbin's development as an industrial and transport centre did not change in the 1940s. The population of Harbin continued to increase in this period, as did the size of the Shandong community in Harbin.

Manchukuo's Policy: Construct the North

Construction in North Manchukuo was a Japanese priority. As early as 1934, the Industry Ministry of Manchukuo announced that Manchukuo's urban construction would focus on five major cities: Shinkyō (Changchun), Mukden (Shenyang), Harbin, Jiamusi, and Mudanjiang.⁶² The last three cities were located in North Manchuria and were crucial strategic cities for industrial development and military garrisons to counter possible Soviet encroachment. After the outbreak of the Pacific War, Manchukuo's Prime Minister Zhang Jinghui announced that Manchukuo had to be the garrison station and the protective screen for the northern part of Japan's empire.⁶³ After the declaration of total war against the Allies, Manchukuo further emphasized construction in the North. Therefore, the Manchukuo government attempted to direct immigration to North rather than South Manchuria, which by then was more densely populated. The Office of Administrative Affairs of Manchukuo issued the Directives of Urgent Evacuation of Urban Population on December 25, 1942, indicating that the government trying to direct North China migrants to North Manchuria rather than South Manchuria in order to promote the area's industrial and agricultural development.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Irene B. Taeuber, "Migrants and Cities in Japan, Taiwan, and Northeast China," in *The Chinese City between Two Worlds*, ed. Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 381.

⁶² Manshū rekishi kankō-kai, *Manzhou guoshi fenlun* [Manchukuo's history: Substantial Contents] trans. Heilongjiang sheng shehui kexue yuan lishi yanjiu suo (Heilongjiang: sheng sheke yuan, 1990), 570.

⁶³ Wu Qiang, Ren Xing, and Zhao Jiaji, *Dongbei luxian shisi nian jiaoyu shiliao* [Collection of northeastern education materials from the fourteen-year occupation era] (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989), 25–26.

⁶⁴ This document is from *Dongbei jingji lieduo*, an archival collection edited by Zhongyang dang'an guan (National Archives Administration of China), Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan (Secondary Historical Archives of China), and Jilin sheng shehui kexue yuan (Jilin Academy of Social Science). It will hereafter be abbreviated as DBJLD. DBJLD consists of various documents such as Manchukuo's laws and regulations, directives from senior to local officials, conference reports, announcements to the public, as well

One major policy was the control laws on food. Since the establishment of Manchukuo, the government already highlighted the necessity of control laws in Manchukuo, but its control over food was not a primary concern until the war against China began in 1937. The Control Law of Rice of November 7, 1938, was the start of total control over food.⁶⁵ The Manchukuo government further established a food rationing system that determined subjects' food quotas based on their age, occupation, and ethnicity. Chinese residents of Manchukuo often suffered under this system because they were often only qualified for food of the lowest quality and quantity. The Control Laws of Grains of September 30, 1940, ensured that all grains were under government control and that no private sales and purchases were legal.⁶⁶ The quota for Chinese residents in Manchukuo decreased from 1942 to 1944, and it is reasonable to assume that most Chinese residents were not satisfied with this change.

Although the control laws on food would seem to be an impediment to voluntary migrations to Manchukuo from 1942 to 1944, drought and famine conditions in Shandong made life there even more difficult. Even if the Chinese residents in Manchukuo were at the bottom of the food rationing system, they were qualified to have some food once they had proper occupations or the heads of their households had one. The 1940 Census of Manchukuo collected information about the population's sex, birthdays, positions in the household, occupations, times of arrival in Manchuria, and ethnicity, among other things.⁶⁷ Once the Japanese empire had suffered a series of bitter defeats after 1942 and the Manchukuo government consequently further strengthened its controls over food, all this census information became crucial for managing the food

as some testimony of Japanese and Chinese officials after the collapse of Manchukuo. All documents are translated into Chinese, serving as one main primary resource to most Manchukuo related studies in China. See Zhongyang dang'an guan, Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan, and Jilin sheng shehui kexue yuan, *Dongbei jingji lièduo* [Japanese economic looting in northeast China] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991). See Chengshi renkou shusan jinji yaogang [The directives of urgent evacuation of urban populations], December 25, 1942, DBJLD, 428.

⁶⁵ Manzhou sifa xiehui, *Manzhouguo diguo liufa* [Manchukuo's six laws] (Xinjing: Manzhou sifa xiehui, 1941), 9. Xinjing (Shinkyō) is today's city of Changchun, the capital of Manchukuo since its establishment on March 1, 1932.

⁶⁶ Sun Haiting, *Changchun shi zhi: liangshi zhi* [Changchun gazetteer: Grain] (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1996), 383–85.

⁶⁷ Edwin G. Beal Jr., "The 1940 Census of Manchuria," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 4 (1945): 244–45.

rationing system. For instance, industrial workers in Harbin not only had a higher quota, their families were also qualified for a better quota because these workers were invaluable assets for keeping up Harbin's production output as an industrial city. Compared with their hometowns, where they had no food, in Harbin, Manchukuo's food rationing system provided a minimal quota for Shandong migrants' survival needs.

As part of Manchukuo's food policy, Japanese residents of Harbin had exclusive access to rice. The "no rice to Chinese" policy has been highlighted by both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars to demonstrate the brutality of Japanese rule in Manchukuo. As Yamamuro stated, a defining characteristic of Manchukuo's ethnic discrimination was its food policy, as the Japanese could have nutritious food such as rice and flour, but the Chinese were only allowed to eat sorghum and other less nutritious grains that were used to feed dogs and horses in Japan.⁶⁸ Hotta and Driscoll also highlighted this fact to demonstrate that Manchukuo's food policies were a reflection of Japanese ethnic arrogance, which they never intended to hide, while Chinese nationalist scholars have underlined Manchukuo's food policies to portray Manchukuo as a human hell where the Chinese were not allowed to eat their favourite staple foods.⁶⁹ Thus, Manchuria under Japanese rule should be never have been an ideal choice for Chinese migrants.

All these facts are true, and yet they are also overemphasized. Until the 1940s, rice was never a staple food in Shandong because Shandong did not have an ideal environment for rice production. Rice production in Shandong was negligible most years because of insufficient rainfall and the dry conditions.⁷⁰ Natural disasters such as locusts and droughts from 1942 to 1944 further worsened the situation, depleting many villages entirely of food. With this in mind, eating sorghum was hardly an impediment to Shandong migrants pouring into Harbin. Instead, the availability of food, even rationed according to ethnicity, attracted foodless migrants. In her study on Stalinism in the 1920s

⁶⁸ Yamamuro, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, 200.

⁶⁹ Eri Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War, 1931--1945* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*.

⁷⁰ Zheng Huixin, *Zhanqian ji lunxian shiqi huabei jingji diaocha* [Economic investigation of North China during the prewar and occupied era] (Tianjin: Tianjin chubanshe, 2010), 250.

and 1930s, Shelia Fitzpatrick mentions that Russian farmers had to live under a high-pressure dominion when they moved to cities, but that the government indeed provided for basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter for their survival. Thus, Fitzpatrick describes the Soviet state as both a prison and a soup kitchen.⁷¹ Harbin was similar between 1942 and 1944, when Manchukuo's food policy was no doubt discriminatory to the Chinese, but it did not bother them too much, especially when the food problem was much more severe in Shandong.

Thus far, I have provided a brief introduction to the historical background of the Shandong migration from 1942 to 1944, the group of *family migrants* I will focus on, and the reasons I have chosen Harbin as the site at which to explore this topic. Since Manchukuo's food rationing system is the key subject of this project, in the next chapter I give more detailed information about and analysis of its establishment, looking particularly at how it impacted people's everyday life in Harbin, Chinese perceptions of this system, reactions to the "no rice to Chinese" policy, and the factors that led Chinese residents in Harbin to detest the food rationing system.

⁷¹ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 226–27.

Chapter 2.

Eating Less for the Empire: Manchukuo's Food Policies

One day in the autumn of 1942, Lin's family arrived in Harbin from Yuncheng County, Shandong. Lin was ten years old and accompanied by her parents and ten-month-old brother. Life in Harbin was not kind to this new family. Scarcity, especially of food, was a defining characteristic of their new life in Harbin, during a period when the food rationing system applied in Manchukuo. Leftovers from restaurants and markets became their main source of food, but they also needed to compete with other newcomers for whom food was also scarce. It was impossible to have high-quality meals. Fresh cabbage leaves were good enough for celebrating the Chinese New Year.¹

A heartbreaking tragedy occurred in this family soon after their arrival. Lin's brother became sick. Without any medical care and nutritious food, he became weaker and weaker. One day, two months after their arrival, the family knew that it would be this little boy's final day. "He cannot make it," Lin's father said. "Let us leave him in the ditch." Her father asked Lin to do it because he had to work outside as a coolie in the railway station. He would lose his only son, but he still needed to feed the others in the family. Lin had no choice; she could not refuse her father's order. When Lin arrived at the ditch holding her dying brother, she saw wild dogs waiting there. Lin put her brother on the ground abruptly and ran away as fast as she could. When she looked back, she saw a scene that would haunt her for the rest of her life: these wild dogs were eating her brother.

This painful memory led to an emotional meltdown immediately. I visited Lin several times and tried to avoid mentioning this story again during my following visits. Our last meeting took place a few days before my departure. Lin asked me to mention her brother's story in my project. Lin believes that her brother's tragedy showcases the brutal oppression by the Japanese in Manchuria, who visited abysmal miseries upon the

¹ Interview with Lin, May 13, 2019.

Chinese. Lin said that she used to hate her parents' decision and assumed that her brother might have survived if they had stayed in Shandong.

Lin's story conveys one important message: survival was not guaranteed in Harbin when it was under Japanese control. The tragedy of Lin's brother serves as an example. Which policy (or policies) led to this situation? What was the impact of these policies on ordinary people living in Harbin? If Harbin was such a terrible place, how did these newcomers perceive Manchukuo's food policies, and more importantly, why did they choose this city? These are the core questions I examine in this chapter.

The first section of this chapter highlights Japanese policies aimed at food control. Japanese ethnic arrogance was a defining characteristic of Manchukuo. Rice and other grains gradually became military requirements, and Manchukuo's food rationing system determined that Chinese residents in Manchukuo would both receive inferior food compared to Japanese residents and that they would be rationed less of it. Chinese residents, occupying the lowest rung in Manchukuo's ethnic system, suffered the most as a result of warfare. The establishment of the food rationing system was a gradual process by the government, which had been controlling major resources since the establishment of Manchukuo.

The following two sections focus on Chinese perceptions of Manchukuo's food rationing system. Annika A. Culver, an expert in Manchukuo's official propaganda system, notes that Chinese perceptions of Japanese oppression in Manchukuo have received less attention from scholars.² I highlight only one aspect of these understudied perceptions, namely Chinese perceptions of Manchukuo's food policies from 1942 to 1944. For newcomers from Shandong and other provinces in North China, it was reasonable to compare their diets in their hometowns versus Harbin. Most newcomers expressed disapproval of and dissatisfaction with Manchukuo's food policies, especially after Manchukuo became a garrison state during a time of total war and food quotas became insufficient to survive on. However, the situation in Manchukuo was still much

² Annika A. Culver, *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-Garde Propaganda in Manchukuo* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 200.

better than in any region in free China: whereas the food problem in Manchukuo was about having more or having less, in free China, it was a problem of having or not having. I focus on three grains specifically: rice, sorghum, and acorn flour. Although these were not the only food in Manchukuo, most interviewees had vivid memories about them. Based on these memories, we may have a clear understanding about the ethnic hierarchy of Manchukuo and show that even though family migrants chose to move to Harbin as a survival strategy, there were often dissatisfied with their lives.

Food Under Control: Manchukuo's Food Rationing System

On March 1, 1933, the first anniversary of Manchukuo, the government issued the Outline of Manchukuo's Economy in its official gazette *Zhengfu gongbao* (*Seiku Kōhō*), highlighting two themes of national policy: the priority of Japan's interests and the importance of control laws in Manchukuo. According to this outline, Manchukuo's economy should prioritize the development of key industries, such as heavy industries and resource development, to maximize Manchukuo's industrial potential to support and assist Japan's economy based on a mutual-assistance relationship.³ It also indicated that economic liberalism under the ideology of capitalism had proven to be flawed and detrimental. Thus, state intervention and supervision were necessary in Manchukuo, especially in key industries, to establish a healthy economic system to provide a decent life for all subjects.⁴ Control laws on food were not a primary concern for Manchukuo's government at first. Such laws governed direct control and supervision of key resources during wartime. According to the 1933 Outline of Manchukuo's Economy, the Manchukuo government only emphasized the importance of key industries and did not consider agricultural production and food rationing in control laws. According to Article Five, the government encouraged technological progress to improve crop output to

³ The Outline of Manchukuo's Economy in (*Manchukuo*) *Zhengfu gongbao* (*Seiku Kōhō*) [Gazette of the Manchukuo Government], March 1, 1932. This gazette will hereafter be abbreviated as ZFGB. Also see Manshū Kankō-kai, *Manzhou guoshi zonglun*, 390.

⁴ ZFGB, March 1, 1932.

establish a self-sufficient economy, but this outline did not highlight the necessity of state control of food.⁵

However, Manchukuo food policies changed in 1936 once the Kwantung Army (KTA) felt confident that their dominion had been stabilized.⁶ The Outline of Manchukuo's Economy Phase Two in 1936 represented one example, as Manchukuo had to adopt a stricter control policy regarding production related to military needs.⁷ Articles One and Seven demanded expanding the scope of control laws to control all production related to national defence. Unlike the previous outline, Article Three stated that the Manchukuo government should increase grain production to satisfy military needs.⁸ On the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Manchukuo government still failed to apply control laws on food, but the new outline represented a prelude to stricter control. An important feature of this outline was that it categorized grains as a military need, which was crucial for the later food rationing system during wartime.

Control laws on food finally became effective after 1937. Rice, for example, a main staple for the Japanese, became one of the most important military needs when Manchukuo was designated the empire's granary. On November 7, 1938, the State Council of Manchukuo along with the Economic Affairs Ministry and Primary Industries Ministry issued Edict Number 253, the Control Law of Rice (*migu guanli fa*). According to this law, all production, management, trading, and allocation of rice fell under direct control of the government, and the Manshū Grain Company (*Manzhou lianggu zhushi huishe* or *Manshū kokumotsu kabushiki gaisha*), a new semiofficial company, became the

⁵ ZFGB, March 1, 1932.

⁶ Teng Ligui, *Weiman jingji tongzhi* [Manchukuo's Economic Rule] (Changchun: Jilin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 52.

⁷ This was not an official document that could be found in ZFGB, but it was approved by the commander of the Kwantung Army (KTA), General Kenkichi Ueda, on August 10, 1936. The KTA was the actual ruler of Manchukuo even though its headquarters did not issue national policies directly. The Fourth Section of the KTA served supervised all vice ministers, who were Japanese, who were the de facto leaders of each ministry of Manchukuo. Along with the chief of the office of Administrative Affairs, the representative of the Fourth Section would host a meeting of all vice ministers on every Thursday to decide all important national policies. In other words, KTA's directives were authoritative. See Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei manzhouguo shi*, 177–78.

⁸ Toshihiko Shimada and Masao Inaba, *Gendaishi shiryō. 8, Nitchū sensō. 1* [(Japan's) Modern History Materials, vol. 8, Sino-Japanese War, vol. 1] (Tōkyō: Misuzu Shobō, 2004), 708–9.

sole legitimate agency to purchase and allocate rice in Manchukuo.⁹ This law outlawed for-profit rice production, making any personal sale illegal.¹⁰ The Economic Affairs Ministry and Primary Industries Ministry cooperated with the Security Ministry to issue the Directive of Eliminating Profiteering Activities (*guanyu baoli qudi zhi jian*) on April 12, 1938, which announced that the government would extend no mercy to “greedy” merchants engaging in illegal activities such as selling rice, wheat, and sorghum privately for profit. Violations would result in a 300-yuan penalty or a jail sentence of up to six months.¹¹

In February 1940, the Primary Industries Ministry issued another revision of the control law to implement the empire’s total war plan. Some major points included: first, Manchukuo must provide additional assistance to Japan, requiring all Manchukuo citizens to limit their consumption; second, all economic policies of Manchukuo served military needs, while a mighty Japanese army formed the foundation of Manchukuo as a “Paradise of Kingly Way”; and third, the government must immediately establish a wartime economic system as well as a hierarchical allocation system, as military needs were most important while commoners’ needs were least important.¹²

This hierarchical system had seven levels: military needs, quasi-military needs, government needs, special needs, quasi-special needs, important commoners’ needs, and commoners’ basic needs. The first five categories were exclusively for the military and government, so commoners had no chance to access or obtain certain materials, and food such as rice and flour were designated military needs. Rice became subject to state control in 1938, but this agenda in 1940 explicitly defined rice as a military need, and thus rice was not accessible for commoners.¹³

⁹ Manzhou sifa xiehui, *Manzhouguo diguo liufa*, 9.

¹⁰ Manzhou sifa xiehui, *Manzhouguo diguo liufa*, 9-10.

¹¹ Guanyu baoli qudi zhijian, April 12, 1938.

¹² DBJLD, 48–62.

¹³ Kong Jingwei, *Dongbei jingji shi* [Economic history of the northeast] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 484.

On June 20, 1940, the emperor of Manchukuo, Henry Puyi, issued Edict Number 165, the Control Law of Prices and Supplies (*wuzi ji wujia tongzhi fa*). This law granted the government absolute power to determine the price of all commodities and punished anyone who violated the fixed prices established by specific ministries.¹⁴ For instance, according to Article Sixteen, merchants and manufacturers had no right to change the prices set by the Economic Affairs Ministry, and if they did, they would be punished by either a three-year sentence or a fine of 5,000 yuan.¹⁵ These changes seemed irrelevant to Manchukuo's food policy but were one of the most important laws defining Manchukuo's food rationing system, because it determined that there was no room for private business in all grains, otherwise severe punishments would follow. No law explicitly stated that eating rice was a crime, but as a military need and state-controlled resource, rice was not an option for most Chinese residents.¹⁶ These laws laid the foundation for Manchukuo's food rationing system from 1940 until the end of Manchukuo.

Violation of the Control Law of Price and Supplies often related to illegal sales and purchases of grains. On August 7, 1942, Harbin's police force uncovered an economic crime in the Hongshun Rice Mill in Guxiang section, Harbin, finding that the mill had sold corn and sorghum at a price of 40 yuan per 100 kilograms when the government's fixed price was 17.65 yuan. The mill had profited more than 8,000 yuan. The mill owner, Du Qingxu, was so "greedy" and "lawless" that officials had enough to keep him in prison for a while.¹⁷ Nonetheless, this was not an extreme case in Harbin between 1942 and 1944, when engaging in black market sales was extremely profitable.

¹⁴ There was no single ministry that could decide all prices: The Economic Affairs Ministry mainly fixed prices on commodities in urban markets. The Agriculture Ministry determined the prices of agricultural products. The Office of Administrative Affairs (*zongwu ting*), the de facto head of the Manchukuo administration, had direct control of police affairs, establishing the economic police system and empowering it with the right to check all prices on the market.

¹⁵ "The Control Law of the Commodities Price and Materials, June 20, 1940, edict no. 165," in *Manzhou diguo zuijin xiuzheng tongzhi faling huibian* [The collection of Manchukuo's revised control laws] (Fengtian: Dongya shuju, 1941), 5.

¹⁶ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhouguo shi*, 380.

¹⁷ "Mishang da baoli, zuo bei jianju yancheng: Du Qingyu jiangchang tiechuang ziwei" [A greedy rice merchant who made huge profits was detected and punished yesterday: Du Qingyu will spend some time in prison], *Binjiang Ribao*, August 7, 1942, 4.

The average black-market price of sorghum in Harbin in 1942 was 33.45 yuan per 100 *jin*, and it increased to 93.75 yuan in 1943, and 105 yuan in 1944.¹⁸ If the government price index (in November 1941) was 100, Harbin's sorghum price in black markets was 652 in 1942, and it increased to 1816.7 in 1944.¹⁹ Other grains, such as rice, millet, and soybeans, all increased at least threefold on the black market from 1942 to 1944, compared to the fixed price.²⁰ The case of the Hongshun Rice Mill was only the tip of the iceberg of Harbin's black market.

The final step of the establishment of the food rationing system was the Control Law of Grains, issued on September 30, 1940, which represented the new version and replacement of the Control Law of Major Grains in 1939. The language in the title is important, because in 1939, only major grains such as rice, wheat, sorghum, and corn were under direct control of the Agriculture Ministry. The new law gave absolute power to the ministry to control all grains once the minister perceived them as important resources to the state.²¹ As one interviewee cursed, "The Chinese were not even allowed to eat shit unless the Japanese said so." The punishment became more severe, from a sentence of one to ten years or penalty of 10,000 to 100,000 yuan.²² If the Control Law of Rice was the prelude to Manchukuo's food rationing system, the Control Law of Grains marked its final establishment.

Severe punishment was not an empty threat. Ren Yelin was a migrant born in Xiajin County, Shandong in 1925.²³ His older brother was a comprador of a variety shop in Harbin. The shop manager promoted Ren's brother due to his intelligence and capability in commerce along with his boldness in seeking illegal commodities such as rice, cigarettes, and fresh fruits to maximize the shop's profits. Ren's brother returned to

¹⁸ Dongbei caijing weiyuan hui tongji chu, *Weiman shiqi Dongbei jingji tongji* [Manchukuo's economic statistics] (Shenyang: Dongbei caijing weiyuan hui, 1949), 550.

¹⁹ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Heilongjiang shengzhi: wujia* [Heilongjiang gazette: Prices] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1993), 17, 48.

²⁰ Dongbei caijing weiyuan hui tongji chu, *Weiman shiqi dongbei jingji tongji*, 551.

²¹ Sun Haiting, *Changchun shi zhi: liangshi zhi* [Changchun gazetteer: grain] (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1996), 383–85.

²² Sun Haiting, *Changchun shi zhi*, 387-88.

²³ Interview with Ren Yelin, May 24, 2019.

Shandong in the spring of 1942 when their hometown experienced an extreme drought. Ren's brother decided to take Ren to Harbin to save him from starvation. However, in the spring of 1943, Ren's brother was arrested because the police uncovered some sorghum and fruits in his cart. Ren's brother finally paid a heavy price for his boldness. Ren did not know the exact amount his brother carried, but one thing he knew was that his brother was sentenced to three years in prison. Ren's brother knew his sentence was unavoidable, so he confessed that this crime was his personal activity unrelated to the shop. The reason for Ren's brother's confession, according to Ren, was that Ren's brother hoped the shop manager would take care of his young brother. However, losing his brother was one major reason for Ren's later departure from Harbin in autumn 1943, a story I will address in the next chapter.²⁴

Passbooks: Are You Qualified to Have Food?

Starting in June 1940, the Manchukuo government distributed three types of passbooks (*tongzhang*). A passbook was the sole valid certificate for Manchukuo subjects to purchase food legally at appointed distribution stores. The passbook recorded the holder's information, such as birthdate, occupation, address, nationality, and the annual tax the household had paid in the previous year, determining the qualification and quota the family could have. The passbook system changed several times from 1940 to 1945. It had different names such as *peiji zhang* from 1940 to 1941, *tongzhang* from 1942 to 1943, and *guomin shouzhang* from 1943 to 1945. Regardless of the name of the passbook system, its function remained the same.²⁵

Not everyone would have the passbook. Only the head of each household would hold the passbook. The district government was responsible for collecting relatives' information, such as age, relations, and the time of arrival in Manchukuo, and for confirming that any newly added persons were direct dependents of the household head.

²⁴ In fact, Ren's brother was released from prison early because of the collapse of Manchukuo in 1945, and he joined Ren in A'cheng as a farmer. Interview with Ren Yelin, May 24, 2019.

²⁵ Teng Yingwu, Li Kaiping, and Jing Shi, *Haerbin shangye dashi ji* [Harbin's commerce chronology] (Haerbin: Haerbin shi shangye weiyuan hui, 1988), 57, 60-62.

Any distant relatives or friends were not qualified to apply for the food quota under the household registration.²⁶ Reporting new arrivals to the district government was the responsibility of the household head, or else there was no quota for their relatives. Once the family chose to move, they had to cancel their passbook by returning it to the district chief in person. Also, the passbook was exclusive to the given household, and all quotas would be cancelled if the household head loaned it to others.²⁷ Harbin announced another revision to the food rationing system in 1943, demanding that new residents must have direct relatives such as parents, husbands, and brothers to apply for the food quota in the city. Skilled workers were also allowed to apply, but the mayor was the only person able to decide whether the applicant was qualified.²⁸ Even if in practice the mayor never engaged in such trivial matters, it was clear that having skills or direct relatives was crucial to receiving the food quota in Harbin.

Ethnic discrimination was evident in the passbook system. First-grade passbooks were available to Japanese, who had access to rice, flour, sugar, salt, and cigarettes.²⁹ In the major cities of Manchukuo, Japanese children between the ages of four and twelve years could have nine kilograms of rice per month, adults could have fifteen kilograms, and seniors over the age of sixty-five could have twelve kilograms.³⁰ Chinese officials possessed second-grade passbooks and could access most food that the Japanese could but in lesser quantities. Most residents in Manchukuo were Chinese, and they only qualified for third-grade books, where rice and flour were not accessible, and thus sorghum, corn, and millet became the main staples for the Chinese in Manchukuo.³¹

²⁶ “Zonghe peiji tongzhang jiancha shi, shimin ying jia zhuyi shixiang” [Items that citizens should pay attention to when the government checks your passbook], *Binjiang Ribao*, May 21, 1943, 4.

²⁷ “Zonghe wuzi peiji tongzhang: shishi qian dangju zhi zhishi shixiang” [Passbook: Directives from the government before its implementation], *Binjiang Ribao*, December 17, 1941, 3.

²⁸ “Yibu shimin suo kewang zhi xintongzhang, quanshi geque yiqi banli: dan jixian yu zhixi qinshu huo you gexiang zhengming zhe” [All districts of the city start to manage the new passbook registration: Only available to direct relatives or people with valid certificates], *Binjiang Ribao*, July 3, 1943, 3.

²⁹ Teng Ligui, *Weiman jingji tongzhi*, 167.

³⁰ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhouguo shi*, 378.

³¹ Teng Ligui, *Weiman jingji tongzhi*, 167.

Chinese were not only rationed inferior food, but they also received insufficient quantities. For instance, Harbin's municipal government started to distribute grains for the period of July 10 to August 5, 1942, and during this period every Chinese resident could have three kilograms of millet, three kilograms of sorghum, and four kilograms of corn. According to the announcement, "all Harbin residents should not worry about food as this quota is highly sufficient."³² Few Chinese would have agreed with this statement. In Manchukuo, the food quota was based on occupation and taxes paid. Usually, officials, skilled workers, and those who paid more tax were qualified to have twelve kilograms of grains; if not, the food quota would be nine kilograms for adults.³³ According to economist Quan Zhe'nan, a person should consume fifteen kilograms each month to fulfill minimal nutritional needs during the Manchukuo era.³⁴ If the data from *Binjiang ribao* is accurate, Harbin's food quota was higher than the average in Manchukuo, but still five kilograms short of the minimal requirement. When food became insufficient and poor people, such as the Lin family, could not afford the prices on the black market, tragedy seemed inescapable.

Economic Police

To apply the food rationing system efficiently, Manchukuo created an economic police force in 1940, which became one of the most important forces during the final years of Manchukuo. Different from the military police, they focused on economic crimes, especially those that violated the Directives of Eliminating Profiteering Activities (1938), the Control Laws of Rice (1938), the Control Law of Commodity Prices and Supplies (1940), and the Control Law of Grains (1940). When warfare demand increased, more foods were directly under government control and sent to Japan for supporting the "parent state." From 1940 to 1945, Manchukuo requisitioned more than 33,800,000 tons

³² "Zuori kaishi zaifang liangshi: meiren gongling xiaomi deng nian manji" [Food rationing started yesterday: Everyone can have twenty jin of grains such as millet], *Binjiang Ribao*, July 12, 1942, 4.

³³ The difference pertained mainly to adults; all children aged four to twelve years qualified for seven kilograms per month. See Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhonguo shi*, 380.

³⁴ Quan Zhe'nan, "Wei Manzhonguo shiqi nongchanpin jiage bianhua ji qi yingxiang" [The change of the price of agricultural products and its influence in the puppet regime of Manchukuo], *Dongjiang xuekan* 32, no. 2 (2015): 40.

of grains, and 11,300,000 tons were shipped to Japan, and 5,000,000 tons were for the KTA's needs.³⁵ For a stricter control over food, the number of economic police officers increased from 517 at the force's establishment in 1940 to 2,038 by 1943.³⁶

Since the establishment of the food rationing system in Manchukuo, economic crimes had become a major type of crime. Meizō Taniguchi, the chief of the Police Division of Manchukuo, noted in a report to his supervisor, the Minister of the Security, that economic crimes related to the violation of the Control Law of Grains had increased significantly from 395 cases in the first half of 1941 to 1,199 in the second half of that year.³⁷ The number increased again in 1942: the first six months alone saw 36,559 economic crime cases, with most relating to the illegal purchase of grains.³⁸ According to the statistics of economic crimes between 1941 and 1943, cases of economic crimes increased from 24,220 in 1941 to 131,762 in 1943, and 43.9 percent of these cases were violations of the Control Law of Grains.³⁹

When almost everyone was engaged in the illegal purchase of grain in Manchukuo, a few thousand economic police were insufficient for dealing with such a large volume of cases. After 1943, all police officers were empowered to pursue cases of illegal grain purchase. Police officers in each station were rearranged into groups for investigating illegal grain purchases, checking all possible places that illegal sales and purchases could take place, day and night.⁴⁰ However, it was impossible to eliminate illegal grain purchases in Harbin, and Chinese policemen played a significant role in the rise of economic crimes among all residents in Harbin. However, Chinese policemen's loyalty to their Japanese supervisors and their engagement in investigations were always

³⁵ Meng Guoxiang, "Zhongguo zaoshou Rijun qinhua zhanzheng shisi nian zong sunshi de zuixin pinggu" [The newest evaluation of China's losses during the fourteen-year Japanese war of aggression against China], *Nanjing shizhi* 1 (1995): 37.

³⁶ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhouguo shi*, 382.

³⁷ Meizō Taniguchi's report to the Minister of Security, August 7, 1942, DBJJLD, 168.

³⁸ DBJJLD, 170.

³⁹ Statistics of Economic Crimes, 1941 to 1943, DBJJLD, 177-78.

⁴⁰ "Jianju liang gu miyun fan, Daowai diqu ge jianwensuo, bushi yi minyunzhe louwang" [Investigating criminals for undercover grain transportation, Daowai police stations enhance investigations to ensure no criminals escape], *Binjiang Ribao*, November 11, 1943, 3.

a problem in determining the efficiency of Manchukuo's food rationing system. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.

Food for Humans or Animals? Rice, Sorghum, and Acorn Flours in Manchukuo

Many interviewees mentioned the terrible land conditions in their hometowns. For instance, Sun Dahai came from Qixia County in Shandong Province, which had experienced desertification since the eighteenth century and become an arid land incapable of producing many crops, including rice, which requires abundant rainfall. Sweet potatoes became the only option for his family because of its high degree of drought tolerance. Sun was the youngest child of his family and lived with his grandparents, parents, five brothers, and one sister. Sun's family had their own land (twenty *mu*, approximately 1.3 acres), which consisted of terraced fields with sandy soils and produced a meagre output of two hundred *jin* or 220 pounds per *mu*, which was the output if the family chose to plant sweet potatoes rather than other crops. Most families would leave some *mu* to plant wheat, providing the raw material for cooked wheaten food, which was precious and exclusively for able-bodied labourers during busy farming seasons and thus unavailable to the elderly, women, and young children. Sun's mother tried her best, but Sun and his young siblings could only have sweet potato yams as their best diet during childhood.⁴¹

In fact, most people in Shandong had never had rice as their staple food during the first half of the twentieth century.⁴² Rice was not an option for Shandong's people, and sweet potatoes became an unpopular but sensible option. According to geologist Elizabeth J. Leppman, rice can be grown in dry lands, but 80 inches or 2,000 millimetres of rainfall per year is essential.⁴³ Shandong lacked such conditions. Unfortunately, sweet

⁴¹ Interview with Sun Dahai, May 24, 2019.

⁴² In 1932, for example, only 1,650 acres were used for rice production in Shandong and the output was negligible: the entire province produced only 2,831,400 kilograms of rice, close to 0 percent of the total grain production of Shandong in 1932. See Zheng Huixin, *Zhanqian ji lunxian shiqi huabei jingji diaocha*, 250.

⁴³ Elizabeth J. Leppman, *Changing Rice Bowl: Economic Development and Diet in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 32.

potatoes were still insufficient to sustain a normal life for Sun's family. Historian Luo Ergang argued that one Chinese farmer needed four *mu* to meet their basic survival needs and avoid starvation.⁴⁴ He Qinglian, another famous economist, agreed with Luo by arguing that four *mu* represented the survival threshold (*jihan jiexian*) for Chinese farmers, especially those living in North China.⁴⁵ Sun's second brother worked in Harbin for years, but his oldest brother stayed in Shandong and married but had no children in 1942. This meant that Sun's family had eleven members living in Shandong, each with less than two *mu* on average, far below the survival threshold.

Sun rolled his eyes when I asked which subsidiary food such as fruits and vegetables Shandong people could have. "You still don't understand what kind of life I used to have in Shandong, do you?" Sun then explained that they could not ask for anything beyond sweet potatoes to remain alive. Later, I asked about the Manchukuo government restricting the Chinese from eating rice, wondering whether Sun knew this before his departure and about his perception of this policy after his arrival in Harbin. Sun replied, "Well, I never ate rice before, so how much impact did [this policy] have on me? Nothing."⁴⁶

Most interviewees did not complain much about sorghum being their main staple in Manchukuo. For instance, Ren Yelin felt that sorghum was a tasty food and admitted that this might have been based on his nightmarish experience back in Shandong. In Manchukuo, the food problem was about having more or having less, whereas in Shandong it was a problem of not having at all. When Shandong had no food for Ren's survival, sorghum was acceptable and even favourable. Because of his brother, Ren quickly registered under the food rationing system and qualified for rations soon after his arrival. He told me that he never forgot the smell of his first meal in Harbin. The sorghum

⁴⁴ Luo Ergang, *Taiping tianguo shicong bingji* [The history of Taiping's heavenly kingdom, vol. 3] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1995), 130.

⁴⁵ He Qinglian makes this conclusion mainly based on O. E. Baker's 1927 report "Agriculture and the Future of China." According to Baker's report, a farming family with five family members in North China required at least twenty *mu* to satisfy their basic survival needs, or in other words, four *mu* for each person. See He Qinglian, *Renkou: Zhongguo de xuanjian* [Population: China's hanging sword] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 14, 23.

⁴⁶ Interview with Sun Dahai, May 24, 2019.

was delicious to him, compared to the sweet potato which had constituted most of his meals back in Shandong and which he never wished to eat again.⁴⁷

Sorghum was not the only grain available to Chinese. Since the control law was in action, rice and flour was exclusive to military and government use only, and there were five grains available in food rationing system to Chinese in Harbin: sorghum, millet, yellow rice, corn, and green beans.⁴⁸ One month later, available items were down to three: sorghum, corn, and millet.⁴⁹ From 1941 to 1942, Harbin would distribute some special quota items such as sugar and buckwheat flour on Chinese holidays such as the Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival or to celebrate Japanese victories over the Allies. However, all special items disappeared in 1943, giving the residents a clue that the empire was in trouble. The main reason for sorghum being highlighted, as Yamamuro mentions, was because in Japan it was for horses and oxen.⁵⁰ Thus, Chinese eating sorghum in Manchukuo was evidence of the Japanese dehumanizing their Chinese subjects. However, eating sorghum was not a major problem for most Chinese, especially the poor from Shandong.

The Dark Side of Manchukuo's Food Rationing System

Acorn Flour

Although the no-rice policy was not a cause for Chinese disapproval of the rationing system, the inferior food as well as the inferior quality and insufficient quantities of acceptable food were. A typical example of an inferior food was acorn flour (*xiangzi mian*), a powder made from acorns gathered in the forests. While sorghum was acceptable, acorn flour was a nightmare for everyone. Unlike sorghum, sweet potatoes, and millet, which were also unfavourable foods, acorn flour was not a food for human

⁴⁷ Interview with Ren Yelin, May 24, 2019.

⁴⁸ “Zhushi peiji kanyi, shi dangju kaoju duice” [Main course rationing seems insufficient, the municipal government is working on solutions], *Binjiang Ribao*, November 23, 1941, 4.

⁴⁹ “Chongfen peiji lianggu, dati zi benyue xiaxun kaishi: yi gaoliang, baomi, su deng lianggu wei zhuyao” [Sufficient grain rationing will start on the last ten days of this month: Mainly sorghum, corn, and millet] *Binjiang Ribao*, December 20, 1941, 3.

⁵⁰ Yamamuro, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, 200.

beings or even animals. A folk song called “Strange Things in Manchukuo” (*Manzhouguo, guaishi duo*) went as follows:

People would wear sack-made clothes (*yanghui daizi zuo yishang*), and eat acorn-flour buns (*xiangzi mian lai zheng bobo*). Everyone felt swelling after eating it (*nan nü lao shao dou zhangdu*), and people cannot shit normally without using a stick (*la bu xia shi yong gun bo*).⁵¹

This folk song illustrates the most important problem with acorn flour: it was difficult to digest and caused constipation. Zhang Deli moved to Harbin in 1944 from his hometown in Ye County in Shandong and experienced this nightmarish period.⁵² Acorn flour was not a food but something with a sharp, bitter taste and without nutritional value. The sole function of acorn flour was to make people feel full. Drinking water after eating acorn flour was a suicidal action, because people could die of intense abdominal distension in extreme cases. When most food was under control for Japan’s warfare, acorn flour became a normal food included in the food quota. Lin also confirmed that since 1944, mouldy sorghum and acorn flour, both extremely unpalatable, became the main staples of Harbin’s residents.⁵³

Acorn flour was a typical staple food of forced labourers in Manchukuo and Liu Jinhua had a story to share about it.⁵⁴ Her father was a forced labourer in 1945 and only worked for five months because of the collapse of Manchukuo in August of that year. However, he had become unrecognizable to his family, as he was just forty years old but looked like he was eighty and passed away only two years later at the age of forty-two. According to Mrs. Lin, when an adult worked in a labour camp for at least fourteen hours per day but his food was acorn flour, it was impossible to remain healthy. Sun Dahai also witnessed this terrible food while living in Yuquan County in a small village near a forced labour camp in 1944. Sun was not a forced labourer but served as a garbage

⁵¹ “Manzhou guo, guaishi duo” [Strange things in Manchukuo], in *Zhongguo minjian wenxue jicheng quanguo bianji weiyuan hui, Zhongguo geyao jicheng Liaoning juan* [Collection of China’s Folk Songs: Volume of Liaoning] (Beijing: Zhongguo ISBN zhongxin, 2008), 38.

⁵² All information was based on the interview with Zhang’s wife, Granny Zhan. Interview with Granny Zhan, May 4, 2019.

⁵³ Interview with Lin, May 13, 2019.

⁵⁴ Interview with Liu Jinhua, May 20, 2019.

collector in the camp and observed that the forced labourers' main food was acorn flour that was not only insufficient but also mouldy. As Sun recalled, forced labourers were unlikely to survive under such conditions.⁵⁵ It is unlikely to find information about acorn flour in scholarly works about Chinese food since it is typically not consumed as food.

Insufficient Quota

Another reason for the Chinese disapproval of Manchukuo's food rationing system was the insufficient quantity of the rations. Granny Lan was not a Shandong migrant between 1942 and 1944 but was born in Harbin, as her parents settled in Harbin in the 1920s.⁵⁶ Lan was married when she was sixteen, and her husband came from Shandong, making a living as a Russian translator in the Daoli district of Harbin. In 1942, Lan was already a mother of two boys, and according to her memory, the food quota for adults was roughly 20 *jin* (approximately 10 kilograms), but it was much less for children.

On May 6, 1943, Harbin's municipal government issued the quota quantity from June to August. According to this announcement, the planned quota was eight kilograms for each person, including four kilograms of corn, two kilograms of sorghum, one kilogram of millet, and one kilogram of mixed beans. However, the announcement did not mention the exact date for next food rationing but noted that the next rationing time might be thirty or fifty days later.⁵⁷ It meant that Harbin's residents might have only eight kilograms of grains for fifty days, which was too little to meet their basic needs. Just two months later, the municipal government issued an announcement that starting in August quotas would be determined by age. According to this announcement, every adult would have nine kilograms for each month, and the elderly and children would receive seven

⁵⁵ Interview with Sun Dahai, May 24, 2019.

⁵⁶ Lan forgot the exact date of her family migration. Her parents moved to Harbin when her older sister, who was four years older than Lan, was three years old. Lan was born on 1925 in Harbin. So, Lan's family migration date might be 1923 or 1924. Interview with Granny Lan, June 27, 2019.

⁵⁷ "Peiji shengbi pin" [Rationing life necessities], *Binjiang Ribao*, May 6, 1943, 3.

and four kilograms, respectively.⁵⁸ At the end of 1943, elderly people's food quotas decreased to four kilograms per month, the same as children.⁵⁹

It is hard to imagine how tough life was for most commoners in Harbin in this period. Back to Lan's story. In the first half of 1943, her husband's entire family—his parents, two sisters, a brother and his wife and two children – fled Shandong for Harbin. This increased the Lan household to twelve persons. According to Manchukuo's food policy, her husband's parents and all children only qualified for a minimal food quota, which was insufficient for them to survive. Thus, Lan needed to work as a washer, and her parents-in-law joined her in doing laundry work for their neighbours to earn some money, with which they could purchase grains illegally. When grain prices on Harbin's black market were extremely high, Lan's income barely improved the family's condition. Lan and her husband had to reduce other expenditures as much as possible and sometimes they had to collect elm leaves, an edible wild plant, to supplement their diets.⁶⁰

Inferior Grain

The third reason for Chinese hatred of the food rationing system was the inferior quality of the rations. Xiao Qingfang lived in Penglai, Shandong until 1940 when her adopted mother arranged a marriage for her to a young local man working in Harbin, a craftsman in a glass factory. Xiao's parents-in-law and adopted mother also lived with this new couple. In 1942, Xiao gave birth to her first daughter, which despite being positive news made the new couple realize that life would become tougher. Xiao's husband's income was insufficient to support the whole family. Xiao attempted to find a job, but most factories did not hire female workers. Xiao usually worked in a tannery as an unpaid helper receiving grains as compensation, or sometimes as a rag collector

⁵⁸ “Peiji shengbi pin: ba yuefen zhi lianggu peiji jue ding fabiao” [Rationing life necessities: August's grain quota], *Binjiang Ribao*, July 31, 1943, 4.

⁵⁹ “Peiji shengbi pin: benyue zhi migu peiji kaishi meiren jiu gongji” [Rationing life necessities: Nine kilograms of grain to everyone this month], *Binjiang Ribao*, November 8, 1943, 4.

⁶⁰ Interview with Granny Lan, June 27, 2019.

seeking used cotton.⁶¹ Like Granny Lan, Xiao did not have the earning power to help her family acquire more food, and what should be noted is that Xiao's family was comparatively well-off. Xiao's husband, being a factory worker, was entitled to a higher food quota, which is a topic of the next chapter.

Xiao did not remember the exact quota for each person but provided information about the quality. Sorghum for Chinese was not threshed and hulled, and according to Xiao, sorghum husk was difficult to remove; she had to soften the husk with boiled water three or four times and then find a brick to grind the husk off before the sorghum was ready to cook. In other words, even if everyone had twenty *jin* of sorghum each month, the edible portion was much less. But it was not the only problem, as the sorghum assigned to the Chinese was often mouldy and contained inedible sand and stones. KTA's military horses had privileged access to fresh sorghum, but Chinese did not. Xiao remembered having barely any fresh food during the Manchukuo era and was extremely happy when Manchukuo collapsed under Russian attack, but not because Harbin was no longer a Japanese colony and the Chinese were no longer colonial slaves. To uneducated commoners such as Xiao, national liberation or identity were not concerns. After the collapse of Manchukuo, the first thing Xiao did was go to the market and purchase two millet cakes made with fresh grain. As Xiao recalled, it was the most delicious food she ever had in her life.⁶²

Manchukuo's food policy dominated Chinese migrants' everyday lives and reflected the nature of Manchukuo. As Yamamuro has stated, even if Manchukuo's propaganda described it as a state of ethnic harmony, its true nature was one of "ethnic discrimination, coercive exploitation, and a garrison state."⁶³ There was no equality and harmony between the Japanese and other ethnic groups as rice and other nutritious food became privileges enjoyed by Japanese residents, drawing a distinction between the Japanese and their subjects. When eating rice became a crime, Chinese residents realized that Japanese people received different treatment. Migrants from other provinces in North

⁶¹ Interview with Xiao Qinfang, July 16, 2019.

⁶² Interview with Xiao Qinfang, July 16, 2019.

⁶³ Yamamuro, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, 211.

China did not perceive rice as their main food staple, but the sorghum-only policy was a reminder that they were inferior subjects in Manchukuo.

Inferior and insufficient food made life difficult for newcomers to Manchukuo, who had to take risks to survive. In the next chapter, I discuss some major coping strategies of these newcomers to Harbin and its neighbouring villages. Purchasing illegal grains on the black market was common, and leaving the city was also an option. Although Harbin was one of the most modern cities in Manchukuo or even in Asia, this was never a primary reason for migrants' decision to settle there. When urban life meant difficulty surviving, many newcomers, especially those with no other family members, chose rural areas without hesitation.

Chapter 3.

Passive Resistance: Illicit Grain Purchase and Leaving the City

Many migrants chose to migrate to Manchukuo because it offered a rationing quota to anyone who qualified. This did not, however, ensure that all of them would have sufficient food to meet their basic needs. Ironically, the municipal government of Harbin was fully aware of the problem of Manchukuo's food rationing system, and often gave hollow self-criticism in the newspapers. In April 1942, the city council of Harbin proposed that every resident of Harbin should qualify for twenty-five kilograms of grain each month, when the actual rationing quantity was less than half of this quantity.¹ Seven months later, the municipal government hosted another council meeting, proposing that the government should guarantee at least twenty kilograms of grain to every physical labourer working in heavy industry.² However, the reality was that after the outbreak of the Pacific War, the food quota had continuously decreased. In fact, the food quota was usually below ten kilograms. Also, the quality of the rations was awful. The mayor of Harbin from 1942 to 1944, Yuan Qinglian, frequently criticized the rationing shops that offered poor-quality grains to Harbin's residents. During one interview, Yuan expressed that it was reasonable for Harbin's residents to complain about the terrible quality of food they received when the rationing quantity was insufficient to maintain a normal life.³ Thus, it was clear that most residents were not satisfied with the quantity and quality of the food they could legally have.

¹ “Guanyu shengbi pin peiji wenti, jinci shilian dahui yantao zuiwei relie” [Regarding problems rationing life necessities, the municipal meeting had a heated discussion], *Binjiang Ribao*, April 30, 1942, 4.

² “Guanyu minshi wenti, jueneng chongfen buji” [Regarding people's livelihood problems, the government had the confidence to provide sufficient rationing], *Binjiang Ribao*, November 27, 1942, 4.

³ “Peiji shimin zhi lianggu taiwei culie: yuan shizhang xunshi ge peiji dian hou dui jizhe tan” [Rationing grains' quality was awful: Mayor Yuan criticized the rationing stores to reporters] *Binjiang Ribao*, January 22, 1943, 4.

Chinese residents' strategies for coping with Manchukuo's food policies are the focus of this chapter. Illicit grain purchases became one common strategy that almost everyone engaged in. Every migrant I interviewed confirmed that they and their families frequently needed to purchase illicit grain. Although the black market was frequently referred to in official documents and local newspapers, it was an abstract concept for most of my interviewees to understand. When I asked questions about the black market in Harbin from 1941 to 1944, most interviewees were confused about what I meant. However, most of them had stories about purchasing grains, a part of their "normal life" during this time. More importantly, no one perceived this activity as illegal even if the government applied laws and regulations to say so. If the law asked commoners to starve to death, nobody was willing to show their obedience.

There was no sole location for purchasing illegal grains; it could take place anywhere both within the city and its nearby rural zones. One reason economic crimes related to the illegal purchase of grain in Harbin increased during this period is that these crimes were not a priority for Chinese police. Most interviewees commented that in most cases, especially ones involving small amounts, Chinese police officers were not interested in arresting and punishing people engaging in the illegal purchase of grain as severely as the Manchukuo law system indicated. Thus, purchasing grains illegally was less difficult and dangerous than one might expect.

Leaving the city was also one option for many newcomers, especially when Manchukuo emphasized agricultural production for the empire's war needs. Some data indicate that the quantity of rationed food was even less in rural zones, which was also the place for the Japanese to loot all agricultural products at an extreme level. However, many interviewees provided a different picture: they might have a better chance to survive in rural zones compared to urban areas. It makes sense when illegal grain purchasing was omnipresent in the city, and most grains came from rural zones. It meant that rural zones near Harbin had more access to food and that the control laws on some food were also less restrictive there.

In keeping with the grassroots approach of this project, an analysis of Manchukuo's state policy, particularly after 1942, is necessary. As agricultural production became more important throughout the war, the government implemented a series of policies to evacuate the surplus urban population to rural zones to work the fields and increase grain production. The change of Manchukuo's state policy left many urban residents and new immigrants with little choice but to leave the city.

The Black Market in Harbin

In January 1942, the Economic Department of Manchukuo published a report about black markets based on an underground investigation. The report indicated that black-market prices in major cities such as Shinkyō, Mukden, and Harbin were three or four times higher than government fixed prices and that those cities had the largest black markets.⁴ Also, the report indicated that most illegal grains came from the countryside. Illegal sales and purchases usually occurred early in the morning, around three o'clock, and the sites for this trade disappeared completely by first light. Most grain traffickers were Chinese mobile peddlers and farmers, so it was very difficult for the government to locate and arrest them.⁵

The report showed that the black market was a phenomenon rather than a concrete location where Chinese people brought and sold illegal products. Illegal grain purchases could take place everywhere. According to *Heilongjiang Gazetteer: Prices*, the black market was the same as the Chinese free market.⁶ By this definition, black markets were everywhere in the city. Louise Young contends that the KTA's major concern was to create an autarkic economic system that "would provide self-efficiency in wartime and a resource base for the military," meaning that they had little interest in other issues, such as commoners' welfare.⁷ Nevertheless, the allotted resources were insufficient to

⁴ DBJLD, 188.

⁵ DBJLD, 189.

⁶ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Heilongjiang shengzhi: wujia* [Heilongjiang Gazette: Prices] (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1993), 17.

⁷ Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, 203.

maintain a normal life, and most Manchukuo residents, including the Japanese, had to rely on the black market to maintain their daily life.⁸ This situation determined the Manchukuo's government's ambiguous attitude toward the black market. On the one hand, the government issued a series of laws to restrict the rise and development of the black market, but on the other hand, it tacitly accepted the existence of the black market to sustain minimal social stability during such a chaotic time.

In fact, Harbin's black market retained a semi-open status, similar to Japan's. Francis C. Jones argued that Manchukuo's law system was a duplicate of Japan's wartime system, and the ultimate goal was to create Manchukuo as a part of the Japanese empire.⁹ As an unexpected side effect, both Japan and Manchukuo experienced the rampant emergence of black markets because of the application of control laws on food. With the development of war, Japan's urban residents in Japan could not rely on distribution systems run by the government, and they had to rely on black markets for life's necessities. In fact, the government could not eliminate the black market based on wartime laws because sometimes even the government needed to purchase some materials from the market, which led to the black market being "unleashed to the public."¹⁰

The situation in Harbin was similar. According to the report from the Investigation Department of Manchukuo's Central Bank in 1944, grain quotas from the food rationing system could only satisfy 75 percent of a person's dietary requirement in Harbin, so Harbin's residents had to purchase another 25 percent of the grains necessary for their survival needs from the black market.¹¹ This report indicated that the government knew the necessity of black markets among Manchukuo's major cities, and furthermore, the government turned a blind eye toward its existence when the

⁸ Mario Suzuki, "Zhanshi liutong tongzhi" [The control of supply circulation in wartime]. In *Weimanzhouguo de zhenxiang: Zhong-Ri xuezhe gongtong yanjiu* [The truth of bogus Manchukuo: a joint research of Chinese and Japanese scholars], ed. Zou Dongtao. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenhua chubanshe, 2010), 118.

⁹ Francis Clifford Jones, *Manchuria since 1931*, trans. Hu Jiyuan (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1959), 30.

¹⁰ Masato Shizume, "Black Market Prices during World War II in Japan: An Estimate Using the Hedonic Approach," *Institute for Monetary and Economic Studies, Bank of Japan* (2018): 13.

¹¹ Manzhou zhongyang yinhang diaocha bu, "Manzhou de shenghuo bixu wuzi peiji shiqing he heishi jia wenti" [The problem of Manchukuo's life necessities' price and black-market price], 1944, 42.

government lowered people's living standard to an insufferable level. Complete shutdown of these illegal activities, which they had referred as black markets, would have been impractical and even devastating to Manchukuo's governance.

Where is the Food? The Source of Grains

There were many loopholes through which the Chinese could get grains. One possible channel for grains was farmers with surplus grains. One example comes from Jia Yitian, who lived in Bayan County from 1942 to 1944. Jia's family owned sixty *mu* of land. He remembered that his father had a strong relationship with the local police, so they could always save some grain when the government collected it in the autumn. For instance, although they owned sixty *mu* of lands, they only turned over grain for forty *mu*. In other words, they could save twenty *mu* worth of grains for self-use or to sell for profit. Jia was sixteen years old in 1943 when he started to work with his father selling pork and vegetables in Harbin. However, they always concealed some grain, such as sorghum and corn, in their cart. It was an illegal but profitable business. Jia and his father would sell grain on the black market at first, and then sold other legal products in the morning. Because of the profits from these illegal activities, in Jia's words, "every girl from the neighbourhood wanted to be my bride when food was never a problem for my family."¹²

The countryside was undoubtedly a major source of illegal grains. Many Harbin residents also went to the countryside to purchase grains. In August 1942, the Economic Security Branch under the Manchukuo Ministry of Security advised Kaori Fuji, the chief of Harbin's Economic Security Department, that he and his subordinates should pay close attention to Harbin residents' illegal purchases of grains in the nearby rural areas and strengthen their inspections of farmers returning to the city to ensure that there was no illegal grain flowing into the city.¹³ The Police Commissioner of Manchukuo in 1943, Ikeda Kiyoshi, also mentioned that farmers lacking patriotism were responsible for most

¹² Interview with Jia Yitian, July 13, 2019.

¹³ See Zhongyang dang'an guan, Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan, and Jilin sheng shehui kexue yuan, *Weiman xianjing tongzhi* [Manchukuo's police dominion] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 627-28.

of the illegal grain business.¹⁴ Both documents demonstrated that grains were available for purchase in rural areas and that another major source of illegal grains were farmers and merchants who came from countryside.

Some interviewees also verified that they had access to food in rural areas. Granny Wen recalled that purchasing grains in rural areas was possible. Wen's father and older brother lived in Daowai for business. The rest of the family lived in Xiangfang, the southeast section of Harbin. This was a suburban area near rural areas such as Shuangcheng County and Xinlin village. Xiangfang, the first section of Harbin that the Russians built up, was marginalized and abandoned by the Russians and later the Japanese because of its remote location.¹⁵ Many Chinese migrants, such as Wen's family, still chose it as their new home when Japanese control was less restrictive. Wen and her sister-in-law often visited Xinlin, where they could purchase millet, the main staple for Hebei people. Another interviewee, Li Deshan, also recalled that his father, who owned a clothing shop, often purchased grain, including rice, from the Guxiang section, a suburban area of Harbin, where he sold textiles.¹⁶ Although all these activities were illegal according to Manchukuo's control law, Chinese families, even merchant families such as Wen's and Li's, who had less financial pressure compared to most, were willing to purchase food on the black market because the government quota was insufficient to satisfy their everyday needs.

Most commoners were unlikely to engage in major crimes involving the purchase of either large quantities of grain or the most forbidden grain, rice. The reason was straightforward: rice was too expensive to afford for most commoners. For instance, the price of rice in Harbin's black markets was 75.35 yuan per 100 *jin* in 1942. It increased to 185 yuan in 1943 and 294 yuan in 1944. Compared with rice, the price of sorghum was more affordable: it was 33.45 yuan per 100 *jin* in 1942 and increased to 93.75 yuan in

¹⁴ Manzhou chanye Diaocha hui, *Manzhouguo guozheng zhidao zonglan: Manwen ban* [Overview of Manchukuo's national policies: Manchu-language version] (Xinjing: Guoyu yinshua zhigong zhushi huishe, 1944), 114.

¹⁵ James Hugh Carter, *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, 17.

¹⁶ Interview with Li Deshan, May 3, 2019.

1943 and 105 in 1944.¹⁷ According to the statistics of economic crimes from 1941 to 1943, 43.9 percent of these cases (57, 931 in 1943) regarded violations of the Control Law of Grains, and only 3 percent of economic crimes (3,868 in 1943) were related to rice purchase.¹⁸ Because sorghum and other grains such as corn and millet were more affordable, most commoners would purchase them rather than rice.

Commoners' incomes were also too low to allow them be picky about food. The highest-paid occupation as workers in Harbin were skilled workers in metal machinery factories; these skilled workers could earn 6.73 to 7.50 yuan per month in 1943. In this sense, their salary could not purchase more than 8.3 *jin* of sorghum from the black market. This type of worker was rare since most commoners' income was much lower. For instance, Lin worked with her father in Harbin's Lobato Tobacco Factory (*lao baduo yanchang*) after the death of her brother. Lin's father no longer worked as a coolie in the railway station because the salary in the tobacco factory was higher.¹⁹ According to "Salary Statistics of Harbin 1943," a skilled worker in a tobacco factory could earn 4.20 to 4.53 yuan per month. Lin was too young to be a skilled and capable labourer, so she only worked as a general worker, earning just 50 cents to 1 yuan per month.²⁰ In other words, the income of Lin's family was less than 6 yuan each month. If they purchased sorghum from black markets, they could purchase, at most, 6.4 *jin*. Wei Zhonglin's mother worked as a general worker at the Chick-Duck Company. The Salary Statistics of Harbin 1943 did not provide data for this occupation, but for such an unskilled occupation, no factory would have offered a salary of more than 4 yuan per month, and in most cases the salary would be 1.2 to 2 yuan per month.²¹ The low incomes of most Harbin residents determined their purchasing capacity on the black markets.

¹⁷ Dongbei caijing weiyuan hui tongji chu, *Weiman shiqi dongbei jingji tongji*, 550.

¹⁸ The Statistics of Economic Crimes, 1941 to 1943, DBJLD, 177–78.

¹⁹ Interview with Lin, May 13, 2019.

²⁰ Interview with Lin, May 13, 2019.

²¹ All statistics in this paragraph are from Salary Statistics of Harbin 1943. See Dongbei caijing weiyuan hui tongji chu, *Weiman shiqi dongbei jingji tongji*, 575–76.

Evil Collaborators or Pitiful Agents? The Role of Chinese Police

The tone in official documents and newspapers about violating grain control laws was always menacing and intimidating. For instance, Ikeda Kiyoshi in his report in 1943, used a threatening tone to mention that Manchukuo's economic police would show no mercy to those making profits or violating control laws.²² After Ikeda's report, the inspection of illegal grain businesses seemed to reach another level. On November 11, 1943, *Binjiang Ribao* reported that the Daowai Police Department had extended its inspections to all important roads and streets to prevent any illegal grain from entering the city. Meanwhile, the article sent a warning to all who attempted to sell and purchase illegal grains to stop.²³ Similar articles were omnipresent in the newspaper from 1942 to 1944, delivering the message to the public that the government would have no mercy on anyone engaging in illegal grain sales and purchases. A complete crackdown on illegal grain purchase was in effect since October 1, 1944. All police officers would be part of this campaign by forming investigation squads everywhere. Once detected, all illegal purchase would be punished severely regardless of the size of the given case.²⁴

These examples indicated that Manchukuo launched more crackdowns and applied severe punishments over time. Another important message from these documents was that more police officers, rather than economic police alone, were engaged in crackdown activities. Based on interviews, almost everyone confirmed the fact that Manchukuo's food rationing system became extreme once Manchukuo's collapse was looming, which made illegal grain purchases even more important and necessary to most Harbin residents.²⁵

²² Manzhou chanye diaocha hui, *Manzhouguo guozheng zhidao zonglan*, 119.

²³ "Jianju liang gu miyun fan, Daowai diqu ge jianwensuo, bushi yi minyunzhe louwang" [Investigating criminals for undercover grain transportation, Daowai police stations enhance investigations to ensure no criminals escape], *Binjiang Ribao*, November 11, 1943, 3.

²⁴ "Zhanzheng riqi jilie, yili migu ji yili danwan" [War escalated, one grain was one bullet], *Binjiang Ribao*, October 8, 1944, 2.

²⁵ It was overstated that most Harbin residents realized the fact that Japan's failure was inevitable in 1944. In fact, many interviewees recalled that they had no idea that Manchukuo would collapse shortly, but only noticed that the life became tougher with the passage of time.

Still, one common belief among Chinese was that it was better to be killed by bullets than by starvation. Most Harbin residents could not afford to conform or be obedient when Manchukuo's food policy put them into jeopardy of dying from starvation. Thus, ferocious laws and propaganda did not prevent but instead promoted more violations of the food rationing laws. Also, purchasing illegal grain was less dangerous than most Harbin residents expected, especially when the Japanese authorities had to rely on Chinese police to enforce these laws on a daily basis.

Economic crimes were undoubtedly underreported. One major reason for this is that there was a lack of capable economic police. Indeed, the number of economic police members ballooned after the force's establishment, from 517 in 1940 to 2,038 by 1943, and most economic police officers were stationed in major cities.²⁶ The Manchukuo government hired 158 experienced personnel, of them 124 had been economic police in Japan.²⁷ However, well-trained and capable personnel were still rare in Harbin or in Binjiang Province in general. In 1940, there were only 15 or 16 economic police officers in this province, and this increased to 80 in 1941 and 200 in 1942.²⁸ Most of them were stationed in Harbin. Most Japanese police officers—of which there were only twenty-five or thirty, a small proportion of the total police force—were chiefs and sergeants, positions which were usually unavailable to Chinese police.²⁹ Thus, the Japanese authorities had to rely on Chinese policemen in economic crime investigations even though they never trusted them.

Although most interviewees said negative comments about the Chinese police officers, they consistently confirmed that the Chinese police did not take economic crimes as seriously as their Japanese supervisors. Wen provided an interesting story about a Chinese police officer in Harbin. Wen's family had a lifetime friendship with a

²⁶ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei manzhouguo shi*, 382.

²⁷ Manshū rekishi kankō-kai, *Manzhou guoshi fenlun*, 452.

²⁸ WMXJTZ, 617.

²⁹ There were about 100,000 police officers in Manchukuo, and approximately 8,000 were Japanese. There were approximately thirty official economic police officers belonging to the Binjiang Economic Police Department, and only five or six were Chinese. See WXXJTZ, 442, 617.

Manchukuo police officer's family whose last name was Zhang.³⁰ Wen called the officer Uncle Zhang. According to Wen, Uncle Zhang did not engage in anything evil when he was a Manchukuo police, and he took the position just to make a living in this difficult time. Uncle Zhang's wife was well educated and worked in an elementary school teaching Chinese. When this couple were both working, Wen's mother took care of and became the godmother to their first child. Because of this close relationship, Uncle Zhang often acted as a protector of Wen's family. On one occasion, Wen was purchasing three *jin* of millet from the countryside but encountered a Chinese police officer when she returned. When the police approached, Uncle Zhang showed up and explained that Wen was his niece. Wen escaped from this investigation because of Uncle Zhang, and she is still grateful to him even today.

Uncle Zhang's positive image was highly related to Wen's personal experience. Wen's family had a lifetime friendship with Zhang's family and remained their neighbours until Zhang's wife passed away in 2018. It did not mean that most Chinese policemen were friendly and protective of their native fellows. Most interviewees had terrifying memories of Chinese police. Wen also admitted that Uncle Zhang was quite a unique example when most Manchukuo policemen were evil. When the Japanese police were unwilling to interact with the "uncivilized" Chinese, the Chinese police became the major force in enforcing daily laws and orders. According to most interviewees, these police officers were rude, greedy, ferocious, and lacked a Chinese conscience. However, most interviewees admitted that the Chinese police had less interest in reporting economic crimes, especially minor cases.

One common brutality the Chinese police committed was unofficial confiscation when they found illegal grain purchases. Compared to their Japanese supervisors, Chinese police officers did not have specific quotas on food: in Binjiang Province, a Chinese police commissioner could earn 100 yuan per month but a Japanese sergeant's salary was 228 yuan per month; a Japanese constable could earn 90 yuan per month but

³⁰ According to Wen, Uncle Zhang's family and Wen's family helped each other, and still lived as neighbours after the collapse of Manchukuo. Zhang's wife passed away in 2018 when she was ninety-eight years old, when she still lived in the same building with Wen. Interview with Wen, July 30, 2019.

his Chinese colleague could only earn 8 to 12 yuan.³¹ It was clear that Chinese police officers made more money than commoners even if their income was much lower than Japanese police. But they did not have any special treatment when it came to food because their official status was too low to enjoy the quotas for senior officials. In Manchukuo, senior officials (both in office or retired), military officials (lieutenant commander or higher), directors or council members of organizations such as the Concordia Association, and citizens who paid more than 10,000 yuan of tax annually, along with their families and relatives, were qualified to have three to five kilograms of rice each month.³² Most Chinese police officers did not belong to these privileged groups, and they only had roughly the same quota as commoners. Wearing the uniform did not mean Chinese policemen had no worries about starvation.

Their underprivileged status in the food rationing system meant that most Chinese police tended to keep illegal food for themselves rather than filing a case. Most interviewees told me of an experience when the Chinese police stopped, checked, and confiscated their grains. Wei Zhonglin had a story to share about this. One day, Wei and his mother got two *jin* of rice from his auntie and encountered a Chinese police officer when they returned. The officer stopped them, grabbed the bag out of Wei's hands, and eventually found the rice. The police kicked Wei's butt and told them to get lost. Wei knew that the officer would keep the rice for himself. Regardless of this horrible memory, Wei recalled that most Chinese officers would not arrest someone engaging in such a minor crime and would let them go after confiscating the grains.³³

Hanjian or Huozhe?

The word and phrase used most commonly by interviewees to describe Manchukuo's Chinese policemen were "collaborator" (*hanjian*) or running dog legs (*zougou* or *goutui zi*). As Diana Lary argues, the meaning of "collaboration" in English varies significantly, but in the Sino-Japanese War context especially among Chinese

³¹ WMXJTZ, 445.

³² Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhouguo shi*, 380.

³³ Interview with Wei Zhonglin, May 18, 2019.

scholarly works, it tends to be negative but varied in degree. *Hanjian*, “traitor to the Chinese,” was the most negative translation of this word. There are other possible translations such as *toudi* (“consorting with the enemy”), *qinRi* (“being close to the Japanese”), or *huozhe* (“to live, to stay alive”).³⁴ Lary further argues that the Japanese barely trusted collaborators who betrayed their own country. In return, collaborators’ loyalty to Japan was limited at best.³⁵ Brook also argues that collaboration, rather than resistance, was a normal experience for most Chinese during the war with Japan when survival was the most important concern, even if sometimes they had to commit evil acts.³⁶ In the case of Manchukuo, as Rana Mitter mentions, Manchuria was a place where Japanese applied less violent means to dominate when local elites and population were more collaborative.³⁷

Although most interviewees preferred *Hanjian* rather than other possible terms to describe Manchukuo’s Chinese policemen, they also tend to ignore the fact that Manchukuo’s Chinese policemen were also a group of people trying to survive the occupied era. Granny Wen could be subjective because of her family companionship with Uncle Zhang of more than eighty years, but Wei’s story shows that, regardless of the evil behaviour of Chinese police, it was less dangerous to encounter them than Japanese police. Japanese authorities mistrusted Manchukuo’s Chinese police officers, who themselves were treated no better than other Chinese, and thus Chinese police were not terribly interested in wholeheartedly working to confiscate the grain of other Chinese for their Japanese supervisors.

Nevertheless, Chinese residents perceived Chinese policemen as *Hanjian* for solid reasons. Wei shared another story about his uncle and his friend named Brother Tian. Wei’s uncle later became a peddler, along with Brother Tian, selling multigrain cakes. One morning, two Chinese policemen stopped them when Wei was there to witness what

³⁴ Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68.

³⁵ Lary, *Chinese People at War*, 71.

³⁶ Brook, *Collaboration*, 2.

³⁷ Mitter, *Manchurian Myth*, 226.

had happened. These two officers attempted to confiscate all the cakes, but Wei's uncle and Brother Tian refused. "Well, you must have made these cakes with rice," one police said, "it was a serious crime!" Consequently, Wei's uncle and his friend were under arrest, and only returned home a few days later. Both of them were seriously injured. The police used the buttstocks of their guns to hit them, and confiscated all their goods and assessed them fines. Wei's mother did not comfort her brother but blamed him for his stupidity: "You idiot, you should have given what they wanted from the beginning."³⁸

Most interviewees had similar memories and perceived the behaviour of the Chinese police as a microcosm of Manchukuo's brutality, corruption, and disorder. According to many interviewees' stories, the Chinese police in Harbin abused commoners verbally and physically, asked for bribes in public, framed cases against merchants, and confiscated anything they labelled illegal.³⁹ There were three notorious Chinese police officers in Manchukuo's Harbin: Ye Yongnian (1901–1951), Cai Shengmeng (1902–1951), and Bai Shoutian (1913–1950). All three were executed by the CCP government after the liberation, and one of the major crimes they committed was looting commoners at will.⁴⁰ These names were not unfamiliar to some interviewees. For instance, Lin remembered Bai Shoutian, a police lieutenant who was so notorious that the most common cursing language among merchants and peddlers was "you will meet Stick Bai tomorrow."⁴¹ Bai arrested hundreds of merchants and commoners for economic crimes, and his major strategies were extortion and confiscation.⁴² Unlike their indifferent attitudes toward poor commoners, Manchukuo's Chinese policemen behaved more evilly toward merchants, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

³⁸ Interview with Wei Zhonglin, May 18, 2019.

³⁹ There were so many stories about Chinese police misbehavior—Wei's story is just one—but it was impossible to reproduce them all in this project.

⁴⁰ Xiao Binglong and Wang Xiwen, *Haerbin wenshi ziliao di shiliu ji Haerbin weiman jingcha zui'e* [Harbin's cultural and historical materials, vol. 16, The crimes of Manchukuo's police in Harbin] (Haerbin: Haerbin chubanshe, 1992), 108–13.

⁴¹ Stick was the nickname of Bai Shoutian. *Bangzi* was a local slang to describe someone who was extremely brutal, usually a word equivalent to police. Interview with Lin, May 13, 2019.

⁴² Xiao Binglong and Wang Xiwen, *Haerbin weiman jingcha zui'e*, 113.

Leaving the City

Manchukuo's food rationing system attracted new immigrants who suffered food shortage problems in places like Shandong, but this system was always shaped by the need of Japan's empire. When the Japanese Army swept its enemies in the Pacific from December 1941 to the first half of 1942, Manchukuo's food rationing system offered a better but still insufficient food quota to its subjects. For instance, from November 1941 to August 1942, the quota was around ten to twelve kilograms of grain to each resident of Harbin, and sometimes the government even offered special quotas on cooking oil and sugar to celebrate the Japanese Army's victory and show the empire's greatness and kindness.⁴³ However, the food rationing system changed significantly after the battle of Midway in June 1942, "the turning point of the Pacific," when the Japanese Navy experienced a devastating defeat.⁴⁴ The Allies' counterattack started right after this battle, putting the empire into a difficult situation. During Japan's attempt to respond to defeat by the Allied forces, Manchukuo's role as the empire's granary was emphasized.

In Harbin, the government decreased quotas for seniors and children, who were deemed "useless" for industrial and agricultural production. The government, however, tried to ensure a higher quota for labourers, or more specifically, working and skilled adult males in factories. For instance, in March 1944, Harbin's government announced that the food rationing system would be revised according to occupation. To industrial factory workers, the government would allow twenty kilograms of grain per month; to those working in processing industries and necessities-producing factories, the quota was nineteen kilograms. The direct relatives of these workers could also have ten kilograms per month, except children under twelve, who could have seven kilograms per month.⁴⁵

⁴³ "Zhanjie jinian peiji: shangtang erbaiwan jin, jiaopi xie baiwan shuang: renmin yu zhu yong shi dang si lai yuan" [Special quota for victory celebrations: Two million jin sugar, one million pair of rubber shoes: People should be grateful when they are used], *Binjiang Ribao*, February 21, 1942, 4.

⁴⁴ Paul S. Dull, *A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1941–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1978), 166.

⁴⁵ "Manxi zhuyao lianggu zhongdian peiji: Hashi dangju zuo fabiao shishi yaogang" [Regarding major grains distributed to the Chinese residents: Harbin's municipal government announced the directive of implementation], *Binjiang Ribao*, March 24, 1944, 4.

Evidently, workers were considered invaluable assets during wartime and the government wanted to keep them in the city for industrial production. Other residents were considered redundant and the government created conditions that forced them to leave. When food quotas were decreased to extreme lows, leaving the city was a desperate, not voluntary decision, stemming from government policy toward some certain groups. From 1942 to 1944, the Manchukuo government highlighted the importance of agricultural production for the Japanese total war. Consequently, young and jobless men, merchants, and new immigrants without skills working in factories became targets for evacuation. In the next section, I use several individual cases to demonstrate Harbin residents' reasons and motivations for their decisions and argue that their leaving was a type of passive resistance and a survival strategy during the final years of Manchukuo.

Leaving the City for Survival

“Useless” to the City

On January 20, 1942, under the name of the Ministry of Agriculture, the government announced the Agricultural Increase Production Plan, which emphasized the production of rice and other grains such as millet, maize, and sesame in order to stabilize people's livelihoods.⁴⁶ However, one of the most difficult problems was a shortage of rural labour, so increasing the labour force in rural areas became one focus of later policies. Consequently, the Manchukuo government proposed a plan for “saving the rural labourers, mobilizing urban floating labourers, and compressing business labourers” in February 1942.⁴⁷ It meant that urban-floating young adults and merchant families, who contributed little to the industrial development of the city, would become targets for the government to address the shortage of labourers.

⁴⁶ Kangde jiuinian du nongchanpin zengchan fangce [The plan for increasing production on agricultural products in 1942], DBJJLD, 413-416. Kangde became the reign title of Manchukuo when Puyi was crowned the emperor of Manchukuo on March 1, 1934, so the ninth year of Kangde was 1942. See Puyi, *Wo de qianbensheng* [First half of my life: From emperor to citizen] (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2011), 242–43, 247–250.

⁴⁷ Laodong ren jinji jiulao guize [Rules for labourers in urgent works], ZFGB, February 9, 1942.

When the government tried to guarantee the quota to industrial workers and their families, floating labourers and merchant families' food quotas were minimized and, in extreme cases, cancelled. On December 25, 1943, the Office of Administrative Affairs, the de facto highest authoritative agency of Manchukuo, issued the Directives of Urgent Evacuation of Urban Population, which highlighted the importance of the evacuation of certain urban populations. According to its guidance, the Office of Administrative Affairs empowered the police to arrest anyone who was jobless and send them to work camps as involuntary labourers.⁴⁸ The government categorized jobless people in the city as vagrants (*furōnin* in Japanese or *Fulang* in Chinese).⁴⁹ Furthermore, the government would cancel all the food quotas for unemployed young people, regardless of whether they were in urban or rural areas.⁵⁰

The Directives of Urgent Evacuation of Urban Population identified four types of urban people to evacuate: unemployed people, surplus middle- and small-sized business owners and employees, landlords living in cities, and others not working in industrial domains. The definitions of who were targets for evacuation were ambiguous, but it was clear that the government perceived urban areas of Manchukuo to be overcrowded, which was detrimental to the wartime economy. Many urban residents, including new immigrants, were perceived as potential agricultural labourers when they lacked sufficient skills to work in industrial workplaces. Also, this order again emphasized that the police had the power to sweep all unemployed or anyone they perceived as surplus population into the work camps. In other words, living in the city became a dangerous thing to many residents, and leaving was not only a rational alternative, but also a survival strategy.

Ren Yelin, the person who said that sorghum was tasty, had stories to share. His brother was under arrest in 1943, a few months after Ren's arrival in Harbin. As Ren's brother wished, the shop manager provided some protection for Ren. But the manager

⁴⁸ "Chengshi renkou shusan jinji yaogang" [The directives of urgent evacuation of urban populations], December 25, 1942, in DBJJLD, 427–429.

⁴⁹ Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, 275.

⁵⁰ DBJJLD, 440.

recommended that Ren leave the city eventually because of the food quota problem. On May 27, 1943, the Harbin municipal government issued an announcement about household inspections. According to this announcement, only dependent relatives of the household head had the right to food quota, meaning that no quota was available to a household head's friends, distant relatives, and servants.⁵¹ Ren was in an awkward situation. He was not related to the manager, and his brother was in jail, meaning he had no right to a quota in the city. Ren admitted that even though he was already eighteen years old in 1943, Ren was not good at communicating in business, and he also lacked the boldness of his brother, who dared to engage in illegal sales and purchases.⁵² Ren had only worked on farms before his arrival, only under his brother's supervision, had he worked as an unskilled helper at the shop. Ren was a typical target for the vagrant sweeping campaign from 1942 to 1944: young, healthy, and jobless. Also, Ren was not qualified to have any food legally when he did not have a legal occupation. Even if the shop manager promised Ren's brother that he would take care of him, it did not mean that the manager could provide sufficient food to an extra man for a long term.

In such a situation, leaving the city was not a terrible idea. According to the Ministry of Agriculture's guidance, agricultural labourers would receive priority allocation for all life necessities, but all allocation would be cancelled to those without jobs.⁵³ Ren realized that he might have a better chance to survive in the countryside rather than in the city. Finally, the shop manager introduced Ren to a landlord in A'cheng, a small village near the city in autumn 1943. Life in A'cheng was also tough, but as an experienced farmer, Ren felt less worried about being arrested by the police and lacking food. Ren worked for the landlord until the collapse of Manchukuo, and then he got some land because of the land reform campaign launched by the CCP government.

⁵¹ "Zonghe peiji tongzhang jiancha shi, shimin yingjia zhuyi shixiang: dui yiqie weifan zhe jue jia yi yanzhong chufa" [Items that citizens should pay attention to when your passbook is being checked: Severe punishment will be given to anyone violating the items], *Binjiang Ribao*, May 27, 1943, 4.

⁵² Interview with Ren Yelin, May 24, 2019.

⁵³ "Nongye laodongli gongqiu guanxi tiaozheng yaogang" [Guidance on agricultural labouring adjustments], December 25, 1943, DBJJLD, 440.

Sun Dahai left Harbin for a similar reason. He came to Harbin looking for his brother, who had returned to Shandong when Sun arrived in Harbin. Sun was fifteen years old in 1942, but he was old enough to be defined as a vagrant by the police. Same as Ren, Sun was also inexperienced in urban living, and he did not have a direct relative living in Harbin to ensure he received a food quota. The only job he could find was an apprentice to a blacksmith. It was not a real job. Because of the Directives of Urgent Evacuation, Sun was also a possible target for either population evacuation or forced labour. The blacksmith shop was a small business that did not require extra labourers, which meant that Sun belonged to the category of surplus labourers. Sun felt horrified when he lived in Harbin, and finally, he decided to leave, going to Yuquan, a small village in today's A'Cheng district of Harbin in 1944. According to Sun, life in Yuquan was much better than in Harbin; in Yuquan, farmers had access to the grains they produced on their own farms, and the Japanese had no interest in interfering that much. In fact, Sun could have some rice to eat, which he could not imagine having in Harbin.⁵⁴

Few sources could be used to verify Ren and Sun's memories because rural zones of Manchukuo were usually described as a hell in which the Japanese would loot all possible grains. However, they were not the only people providing similar information. Several interviewees recalled that there was more food available in the countryside.⁵⁵ As economist Quan Zhe'nan argues, although without clear explanation, many farmers indeed had extra grains and often sold them illegally as a survival means.⁵⁶ Also, the amount of grain available on the black market was not insignificant, and according to Quan's estimate, the amount was perhaps 700,000 tons annually in Manchukuo.⁵⁷ I am not attempting to deny that the Japanese looted in the countryside, and indeed some interviewees discussed the difficulties of rural life in Manchukuo. Although they did not

⁵⁴ Interview with Sun Dahai, May 24, 2019.

⁵⁵ Interviewees shared some similar stories from their experiences living in rural zones from 1942 to 1944. They commonly remembered that the Japanese did not interfere in their normal lives as farmers and that they had food to survive even if their lives remained tough. Interview with Wang Ye, July 20, 2019 (who lived in A'cheng); interview with Zheng Zhilian, May 12, 2019 (who lived in Wuzhan County before 1946); interview with Yuan Maochen, May 23, 2019, (who lived in Wukui County since 1943); and interview with Jia Yitian, July 13, 2019 (who lived in Bayan during the Manchukuo era).

⁵⁶ Quan Zhe'nan, "Wei manzhouguo shiqi nongchanpin jiage bianhua ji qi yingxiang," 40.

⁵⁷ Quan Zhe'nan, "Wei manzhouguo shiqi nongchanpin jiage bianhua ji qi yingxiang," 40.

praise rural living, they did recall that rural life seemed more livable compared to urban life.

Merchant families were another major target for evacuation, and they were also the major victims of economic crimes in Harbin. When the control laws were in effect, almost everyone needed to purchase supplies from the black market. Chinese policemen might turn a blind eye to commoners' illegal activities, such as purchasing small amounts of grain on the black market, but they also found opportunities to extort merchants, or in the local slang, "eat rich families" (*chi dahu*). Consequently, Chinese police frequently "borrowed" money from merchants under threat of reporting "crimes" to their Japanese supervisors. In May 1943, for example, the economic police conducted a raid more than fifty Chinese restaurants in Daowai, alleging that all these businesses violated the law of price and supplies, resulting in a large number of fines and five-day closures.⁵⁸ In the same year, 146 of 337 Chinese restaurants and grain and variety shops closed their business because of this economic crime sweeping campaign.⁵⁹

One interviewee, Li Deshan, came from Penglai County, Shandong to Harbin in 1942. His father owned a silk shop for years in this city. Li and his older brother did not receive any education but worked for their father after arrival. Everything had changed in autumn 1943. After refusing to "lend" money to a Chinese police officer one day, Li's father was arrested, and the shop was seized. Li's father was imprisoned for six months and almost died before the family sold everything to bribe a Chinese police officer who could release him. The direct result was the economic deterioration of this family. Losing the family business also meant that Li's father and his older sons became jobless vagrants, as the government categorized them. Thus, leaving the city became the only choice for the family. Consequently, the whole family left the city and settled in Songpu, an agricultural section of Harbin, until the collapse of Manchukuo.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Heilongjiang sheng difang zhi bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Heilongjiang shengzhi: wujia*, 433.

⁵⁹ Jiang Niandong et al., *Wei Manzhouguo shi*, 329.

⁶⁰ Interview with Li Deshan, May 3, 2019.

Another interviewee shared a familiar but less dramatic story. Zhu Simei was the fourth child and the only daughter of her parents. Zhu's father had started his own leather factory in the 1920s and chose to move his whole family from Shandong to Harbin when their hometown, Zhujia tan (Zhu's Family Bank), a small village in Ye County of Shandong, became a possible target of a Japanese sweeping campaign in 1942 because of the frequent activities of the CCP's guerrillas.⁶¹ Zhu, along with her mother and two young brothers, moved to Harbin in 1942. A few months after their arrival in Harbin, Zhu heard something terrible had happened in their hometown: the morning following their departure, the Japanese Army raided their home village, killing seven people, including one of her uncles and a cousin. According to one witness back in her hometown, one Japanese soldier did not ask Zhu's uncle any questions but stabbed him seven times instead. Even today, Zhu still feels their departure from their village was a matter for rejoicing: she and her family could have become victims if they had stayed there.

Despite the relief of avoiding such a disaster and surviving, Zhu's family still faced difficulties, as their living conditions in Harbin deteriorated after their arrival. As a businessman, Zhu's father became a target of police extortion. When normal operation became difficult and the Chinese police treated Zhu's factory as a source from which to "borrow money," Zhu's father made the decision to end his business in 1944. The whole family moved to Songpu and made a living as farmers on some land they purchased. Zhu Simei recalled that during the final year of Manchukuo, the whole family planted some vegetables and potatoes, and sold them to the neighbourhood for a living. Rural life was not easy, but compared to the endless extortion from the police in the city, life was relatively livable.⁶²

⁶¹ Ye County is famous as a migration destination for villagers moving into Manchuria from the middle of the eighteenth century to the 1960s. This county was renamed as the city of Laizhou in 1988. Interview with Zhu Simei, May 15, 2019.

⁶² Interview with Zhu Simei, May 15, 2019.

Living in Rural Zones

Li's and Zhu's family stories further provided invaluable information about Harbin's nearby rural areas: the lack of a police force and less supervision in these sections. Another interviewee, Liu Deyi, provided similar information. Liu Deyi moved with his parents to Harbin in 1942 from their hometown, Dongying County in Shandong.⁶³ Liu's family chose to settle in Songpu, the section located on the north bank of the Songhua River. According to Liu's recollections, the population in this section was so sparse that almost no shop could afford to run their business in Songpu and people relied on peddlers for their everyday purchases. In 1943, the population density in Songpu was 127 people per square kilometre, compared to Daowai, where the density was 324 times greater.⁶⁴ The low population density meant weaker Japanese control in these areas. According to Liu, there was only one police station located in his neighbourhood, consisting of only five or six police officers. Furthermore, the Songpu population was composed of poor people, and the police had less interest in the poor, which was also true in the cities, where they had wealthy merchants to extort.

In other rural areas, control laws were only loosely enforced. Wang Wanyou was born in Harbin but moved to Bayan County in 1942 with his family.⁶⁵ His father moved to Harbin from Shandong in the 1930s but chose to leave the whole family in Bayan when urban food quotas were curtailed. The reason he chose Bayan was simple: Wang's father had heard from his countrymen that the food quota was higher and the cost of living lower in Bayan than Harbin. Bayan was a forest area with various mountainous products. Even though the Manchukuo government applied various control laws to most necessities, the same laws and regulations were not established for mountain products such as mushrooms and various nuts.⁶⁶ The government did not have any rule to limit and

⁶³ Interview with Liu Deyi, June 5, 2019.

⁶⁴ Xue Lianju, *Haerbin renkou bianqian*, 101.

⁶⁵ Interview with Wang Wanyou, May 20, 2019.

⁶⁶ Yi Baozhong, *Zhongguo dongbei nongye shi* [Agricultural history of China's northeast] (Changchun: Jilin wenshi chubanshe, 1993), 623.

restrict the collection and marketing of these products except acorn nuts, which later became the raw material for acorn flour.⁶⁷ Wang recalled that even if his family did not engage in business, they collected various mountainous plants such as edible wild herbs and nuts as an extra food source.

The use of control laws was also less severe at Bayan. For instance, on January 13, 1943, Xiao Tianxiang, the owner of a restaurant, who had illegally purchased 4,320 *jin* of flour and four pigs for his business, was arrested because he violated the Law of Grains. Consequently, he was sentenced to twenty-five days in prison and assessed a 200-yuan penalty.⁶⁸ I am not suggesting that the penalty was light, but it seems that law enforcement related to the violation of control laws on food was less severe in Bayan than in Harbin. Wang also confirmed that the police in Bayan were less brutal and paid less attention to grain purchases. Another interviewee, Jia Yitian, who also lived in Bayan, also has a similar perception about life in this county.⁶⁹ It did not mean that they appreciated life in Bayan, but according to their memory, rural lives seemed easier compared to life in Harbin.

Some interviewees' stories indicated that compared to their urban life, rural life seemed more livable when the Manchukuo government further revised and implemented their control laws in the city. Young, unemployed people were not only targets for evacuation but they were also in jeopardy of becoming forced labourers and losing their food quota. In this situation, leaving the city was not a terrible idea but it was also maybe the only choice they had. They were not the only people who needed to leave the city. Migrants and merchants losing their business also needed to leave for an easier life. Living in the city was never a priority to most migrants living in Harbin. If the city became a hard place to live, they would choose to launch their second migration without hesitation.

⁶⁷ Tao Yan, *Dongbei linye fazhan shi* [The history of northeast forest industry] (Changchun: Jinlin sheng shehui kexue yuan, 1987), 173.

⁶⁸ Bayan xian xianzhi banzhigong, *Bayan xianzhi* [Bayan County Gazetteer] (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chuban she, 1990), 30.

⁶⁹ Interview with Jia Yitian, July 13, 2019.

Epilogue

Zhu Simei was ten years old in 1944. The Harbin municipal government usually announced the monthly quota via newspapers such as *Binjiang Ribao* and public radio. Zhu was a little girl, but she knew that grains available to Chinese were sorghum, millet, and corn and that Japanese could have rice. One day, Zhu asked her father, “why can Japanese eat rice but we eat other grains?” Zhu’s father responded, “at least you have something to eat, stop thinking that these [grains] useless!”¹

Zhu was the only daughter of her parents and also a favourite of all her three older brothers. Zhu’s father rarely talked to her with such an impatient tone, which was the reason that Zhu remembered this conversation so vividly even after seventy-five years. Zhu understood her father’s reaction after she grew up. Zhu’s father worked hard, established his own business, and brought the whole family to Harbin when their hometown in Shandong became unlivable. Unfortunately, he lost his career as a businessman because of police extortion and Manchukuo’s national policy. The only choice he had was to live as a farmer and to behave as “legally” as possible to ensure everyone had a quota and not starve in such a difficult time. Zhu came to understand that her father lost his temper because Zhu’s question seemed an implicit criticism of him.

One common critique of oral history is its inaccuracy and unreliability. Indeed, collective memory can be inaccurate. For instance, every interviewee I visited recalled that Japanese were defeated and lost their control of Harbin on August 15, 1945. However, the reality was that the Soviet Red Army reached and occupied Harbin on August 20.² No interviewee could recall this date accurately. It did not mean that their memories were unreliable but that their collective memory had been “shaped in many ways, from books and museums to television programs and internet rumors.”³ Collective memories are likely shaped and changed by the authorities in charge, usually for some

¹ Interview with Zhu Simei, May 15, 2019.

² David M. Glantz, “August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria,” *Leavenworth Papers* No. 7, Combat Studies Institute (1983), 125.

³ Lynn Hunt, *History: Why It Matters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 28.

special reasons.⁴ August 15, 1945, is China's National Liberation Day. This "accurate" information for everyone to remember is found in textbooks, media, government documents, and popular culture. The attitudes of the government and the media also shape the narratives of oral histories. As Mariko Tamanoi argues, once the government and the media emphasized narratives of suffering during the war, less traumatic experiences are downplayed and even disappear.⁵ All my interviewees highlighted their experiences of suffering between 1942 and 1944 as well. They complained that they experienced a tough time as slaves when Harbin and its nearby zones were under Japanese occupation. "We lived in hell (in Manchukuo)" is a phrase I have heard a lot.

But collective memory is not the major concern of this study. I am more interested in the personal stories that were important to each individual I interviewed. As Lary mentions, memory can be very precise when it comes to information that was important to an individual.⁶ Indeed, most of my interviewees shared some unpleasant, even horrible, stories from when they lived under a state that applied a series of laws in the Japanese interest. As a group, family migrants from Shandong may have shared similar motivations for choosing to relocate to Harbin during the war: Manchukuo was prison state, but it was also a soup kitchen for foodless people who also had families and relatives they could lean on there, at least for a while. However, this does not mean that their life experiences were the same. The outcomes for migrants differed, even when they engaged in the same activities. For instance, for purchasing "illegal" grains, some were arrested, some had their grains confiscated, and some did not receive any punishment at all. And when conditions in Harbin became difficult due to changes in Manchukuo's national policies, some chose to stay in the city, though others had to or chose to leave. Most people just remember those matters that are important to them. The precise date of Harbin's liberation is not that important to most commoners. Instead, interviewees remembered things more personal and special to themselves, from unpleasant

⁴ Diana Lary, *Chinese People at War*, 202.

⁵ Mariko Tamanoi, "A Road to 'A Redeemed Mankind': The Politics of Memory among the Former Japanese Peasant Settlers in Manchuria," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99 (2000): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-99-1-163>.

⁶ Lary, *Chinese People at War*, 205.

conversations with their families to the tragic deaths of family members. Even after more than seventy years, all these memories remained vivid. The important thing is that they chose Harbin, dealt with life once they settled, and eventually, and more importantly, they survived.

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