

Trends in the Yanbian Region's Ethnic Relations  
Viewed through the Chinese Communist Party's  
Ethnic Policies: Up Until the Establishment of the  
Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture

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## Abstract

The proverb “Three feet of ice is not the result of one cold day” is the most appropriate expression to reflect the history of development of ethnic groups in the Yanbian region. Within the historical developmental orbit of ethnic solidarity, China’s ethnic solidarity has consistently maintained its development in an upward spiral. The Yanbian region’s ethnic solidarity has also gone through this kind of developmental process. The history of Yanbian’s ethnic solidarity can be divided into eight phases, the first of which occurred during the late Qing period when migrants from the Korean peninsula and Han Chinese inside China migrated to the northeastern region and formed relations with the native peoples who lived there. The various ethnic groups who lived in the Yanbian region at this time had adhered to their own cultures in their own ethnic enclaves, so there had not been an opportunity for different ethnic groups to form relations. After that period, however, following the rapid changes in the state of affairs inside and outside of the northeastern region of China, and the merges and collisions between ethnic and regional social communities, a transformation began to emerge in the relations between ethnic groups. The prominent social events of the era included the rallying of the Han Chinese during the period of the Republic of China (ROC), the decline of the Manchus, and the formation of an ethnic Korean society in Yanbian and the northeastern part of China. Moreover, as Japan spread its forces out over the northeastern region, the country used ethnic Koreans to expand its power. This created disharmony in the development of relations between the Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans, leading to the emergence of friction and misunderstanding between the two ethnic groups. After the September 18 Incident of 1931 (also known as the Mukden Incident), as class contradictions (division of nations/ethnicities) shifted to become ethnic contradictions (confrontation between the capitalist class and labor class in capitalist society), a national struggle against the Japanese began. Within this struggle, the various ethnic groups of the Yanbian region organized a united national

front against the Japanese under the correct leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and, for 14 years, conducted a desperate and trial-laden struggle that brought down Japanese imperialism. Following this, the CCP conducted a war of liberation that defeated the reactionary Kuomintang clique, established a people's democratic republic, and rose to become the master of the nation.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and its socialist system created a new opportunity for friendship and solidarity between various ethnic groups, put on display the massive centripetal force and cohesiveness of the Chinese nation, and embodied its infinite sense of confidence and self-esteem. The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region, which was established under the PRC's Regional Ethnic Autonomy System, brought leadership to the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region and transformed the region into a pleasant place to live while settling the conflict and misunderstandings that had been formed between different ethnic groups due to historical issues. It further created firm relations among the ethnic groups through socialism's new style of ethnic equality, solidarity, and prosperity. After the establishment of the PRC, the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region developed their economy and culture under the support and interest of the CCP and government to build Yanbian into a beautiful cradle for life. Over the past 70 or so years, the various ethnic groups of China have held up the great values of national unity under the correct leadership of the PRC and struggled in unity with one another to overcome difficulties, live together in harmony, and bring about harmonious development. In this process, the various ethnic groups in China have come together to push forward the sacred tasks of building socialism and reforms and opening, writing the grand historical narrative of the ceaseless self-improvement of the Chinese people and the promotion of solidarity and progress. The characteristic feature of this grand historical narrative is that various ethnic groups consistently came together, shoulder-to-shoulder as one, to fight. Today's ideology of "The Han Chinese people cannot be apart from ethnic minorities, and ethnic minorities cannot be apart from the Han Chinese people" has already

become a firm perception shared by the various ethnic groups in the country. In short, the theme of joint solidarity and struggle and joint prosperity and development have already become the common pursuit of the various ethnic groups in China and the Chinese nation is the source of the power that can move forward ceaseless efforts for self-improvement.

**Keywords:** ethnic Koreans in Yanbian, Han Chinese people, Mukden Incident

## A History of Ethnic Relations in the Yanbian Region and Ethnic Policies toward the Koreans before the Mukden Incident

With the lifting of the Qing government's policy of restricting entry into the northeastern region of China, refugees from Korea's northern region crossed the border and began to gather in China's northeastern area. How to deal with these migrants was an important issue that the Qing had to resolve. The Qing government implemented various policies toward these Korean migrants, and the basis of these policies remained fixed depending on the historical period. Broadly speaking, we can summarize these periods into the "period of tacit approval," the "period of pacification," the "period of appeasement and assimilation," and the "period of hardline policies." Carrots and sticks were a common method of control employed by feudal dynasties of the past, and was a technique used by the Qing government toward minority groups located on China's border regions. Similarly, the Qing took the ruling experiences of the feudal dynasties to heart in implementing policies of appeasement and assimilation toward Koreans who migrated to the northeastern region. These policies were aimed at achieving the Qing government's long-term goals, not to treat the Koreans with universal benevolence. Specifically, the Qing were interested in accepting the Koreans in order to develop an area of desolate, undeveloped wilderness on its border. An important goal of the Qing in developing the land in the area was to increase its financial income. The Qing government also pressured and exploited the Koreans and the Han Chinese who migrated to the region to collect payment for the bureaucrats and soldiers stationed in the area as part of efforts to protect the border and manage the Korean migrants and local Han Chinese developing the land. Moreover, the Qing government coerced ethnic Koreans to assimilate (by forcing them to have their hair cut like Manchus and wear their clothes), demanding that they become citizens of the Qing empire. This measure was implemented to fulfill the demands of the Qing government's rule and was put

into force based on a mix of prejudices and biases toward minorities in the border region. That being said, the Koreans who migrated and settled in the northeastern region became a major force in the development of the northeastern border region and played a major role in making the region a part of China's ethnic community. When examining the policies implemented by the Qing government in the Yanbian region, it is clear that there was almost no physical clashes between the region's natives under Qing rule and other ethnic groups not in power such as the ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese because the Qing dynasty did not use any coercive measures, such as subjugation or military force, to maintain control. Most of the time, the Qing government took relatively indirect and moderate measures in resolving contradictions and issues between different ethnic groups. Seen from a certain perspective, the policies implemented by the Qing at the time was a direct clash between the ruling class of the ruling ethnic group and the ethnic groups not in power.

By the time of the ROC period, as the ethnic group in power shifted from the Manchu to the Han Chinese, changes emerged in the relations between different ethnic groups in the Yanbian region. The arrival yet again of many poverty-stricken Korean migrants to the Yanbian region during the ROC period led to a significant increase in the population of the area. The divisions between social classes (farmers' organizations, local organizations, churches, etc.) also grew more severe by the day. Most of the Han Chinese and Manchu peoples in the Yanbian region at the time had worked in permanent positions at government departments, and many of them used their high status to accumulate wealth through commercial activities. As a result, while the proportion of Han Chinese and Manchu peoples in the region was not high (in fact, it would be correct to view them as a very small minority of traditional landowners), their economic and political status was high. In short, there was a higher number of Han Chinese and Manchu landowners compared to ethnic Korean landowners and, moreover, most of the famous major landowners in the Yanbian region were Han Chinese. There was a significant gap in the populations between the dominating class of the Han Chinese and the ethnic Koreans

being ruled over and the region's population density was very low, which means that the Yanbian area had an economic and political structure that stood in contrast with other regions. This was the cause for the multilayered characteristics that emerged in the relations between different ethnic peoples in the region.

As Japan began expanding its colonizing influence into in the Yanbian region in 1907, Japanese-style economic organizations, police stations, and businesspeople began to appear there. With that, the increase in management function departments of the ROC government and various other organizations led to increased exchanges and traffic between the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region, which resulted in a further increase in interaction between these peoples. Differences remained, however, in how these governments conducted their affairs. For example, there was disharmony between Japan and the ROC in regards to control over ethnic Koreans: Japan created colonial economic organizations like the Oriental Development Company under the pretexts of providing “support” and “aid,” and established Korean people's committees by recruiting pro-Japanese elements among the ethnic Korean community. In response to Japanese actions, the Yanbian authorities established an administrative agency to manage changes in household registers for ethnic Koreans. And even within the ethnic Korean community, so-called local organizations referred to as *kanminhoe* (association of Koreans) and *kanmin'gyoyukhoe* (educational association of Koreans) were established to protect the rights of ethnic Koreans, and these organizations helped Yanbian authorities with implementing administrative duties concerning the ethnic Korean population. As such, there were a diverse group of social organizations and organizational relationships working to protect the interests of their own nation and people in the Yanbian region, and it would not be an exaggeration to call this a microcosm of relations between various ethnic groups in the Yanbian area at the time. The increase in the region's population, deepening of social divisions, and the emergence of class divisions slowly led to an increase in the interaction between fixed classes of ethnic peoples, further widened the ways in



which ethnic peoples interacted and, as this phenomenon broadened, bilingualism began to take hold. This was a very important development in terms of exchanges and education. For example, the basic situation surrounding the relationship between ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese in Yanbian during the late Qing and early ROC period (the period around 1911) was as follows: the ethnic Korean population was in the absolute majority and were living in ethnic enclaves, meaning that ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese were living in different locales. Like the appearance of ethnic enclaves and non-ethnic enclaves in areas of reclaimed land in the northeastern region, there were clear lines that distinguished the different ethnicities. Ethnic Korean farmers farmed on land owned by Han Chinese, forming ties with the minority Han Chinese landowners in the region; however, they had very few interactions with ordinary Han Chinese. Ethnic Koreans began accepting Han Chinese culture when they started to learn Chinese. Following the emergence of modern industry in Yanbian and the development of urban areas, some ethnic Koreans engaged in labor-intensive activities such as mining or working in factories, or conducting commerce in cities, which began to force them to interact with Han Chinese laborers and businesspeople. Moreover, the first thing that ethnic Koreans came across while living and working as migrants in China was the Han Chinese language and form of writing, and they could not help but accept the language to survive in a foreign land. Ethnic Koreans were also aware that their children had to become proficient in Chinese if they intended to stay in the region into the future.

The first private school for ethnic Koreans featuring modern education, Sǒjǒnsǒsuk School, was established in Longjing, Jilin Province, in 1906, and offered Chinese language classes. Local authorities in the northeastern region began Chinese language education efforts at private schools for ethnic Koreans under their purview. For example, in accordance with Section 4 of the “The Unified Measurements for Cultivators’ Education” (*huayi kenmin jiaoyu banfa* 劃一墾民教育方法) issued by the local ROC government administration in June 1915, students at the schools were required to spend at least 12 hours per week on Chinese language studies. In

1925, the local government in Yanbian held a meeting with the four head education administrators in Yanbian and ordered the closure of ethnic Korean private schools and the matriculation of ethnic Korean students into state-run schools. At the time, the Educational Associations for Koreans (*kenmin jiaoyuhui* 墾民教育會), which were run by ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian region, ordered the reform of the educational system and teaching plans based on an ordinance by the Jilin Province educational authorities, leading to the hiring of Chinese language teachers and the adoption of textbooks to teach the Chinese language. On the one hand, this measure caused consternation among ethnic Korean teachers and students and impacted the normal development of relations between ethnic Koreans and the Han Chinese in the Yanbian region. However, on the other hand, the move to create a large number of public schools ultimately created educational institutions that combined ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese students, creating exchanges between different ethnic groups and propelling forward opportunities for the different groups to interact and communicate with each other or one another.

As Japan spread its colonizing influence throughout the Yanbian region, it distributed a large amount of loans under the pretext of “support” and “aid” for ethnic Korean farmers to buy land through financial organizations such as the Oriental Development Company, the Asia Development Company, and the *minhoe kŭmyungbu* (a financial organization setup by the Japanese military in 1920 to provide loans to Korean migrants). If farmers were unable to pay back their loans by the designated date, these companies took their land instead. The aim of this process was to use the ethnic Koreans to “create new opportunities for the development of the empire”; in short, expanding the Japanese power base in the northeastern region, including Yanbian. Some Han Chinese and members of other ethnic groups mistakenly believed that ethnic Koreans, who were no more than passive actors in Japan’s expansion in the northeastern region, were thus “agents” of the Japanese imperial military in its invasion of the area. As a result, the ROC government began to intensify restrictions and crackdowns on ethnic Koreans under the pretext of halting the Japanese empire’s invasion

of mainland China. As the Japanese empire's efforts to invade mainland China quickened, anti-Japanese feeling among the Chinese people deepened by the day.

From 1927, the rise in anti-Japanese sentiment led to efforts to expel ethnic Koreans from the northeastern region, and this was the result of the Japanese empire's policies of controlling and using ethnic Koreans in the area. However, the Gando Agreement had acknowledged the right for ethnic Korean migrants to take up residence in the Yanbian region, so the main thrust of ROC government efforts at the time was to further tighten the conditions for them to become Chinese citizens with a view to completely assimilating them into Chinese society. The government also made proactive efforts to bring Han Chinese migrants into the Yanbian region while giving ethnic Koreans a certain level of advantages to force their rapid naturalization into Chinese citizens to ensure that they would be removed from control by the Japanese empire. If they failed to do this, the government sternly warned, the ethnic Koreans would face being sent back to their own country. As a result of these government actions, ethnic Koreans became victims of frequent abductions, pillages, and murders starting in the latter part of 1927.

When examining the period of the 1920s, it becomes clear that the ROC and Japan used ethnic Koreans to further their own aims. There were a host of complicated ethnic and class-based contradictions that existed between the Japanese military commands and the ethnic Koreans, between the Japanese and the Chinese military commands in the northeastern region, and between the Chinese military commands and the ethnic Korean population, but gradually the ethnic contradictions overtook class contradictions to become the main set of contradictions in existence. The intensification of these ethnic-based contradictions greatly influenced the relations between the Han Chinese and ethnic Korean populations in China's northeastern region. Given that the Yanbian region was an enclave for ethnic Koreans, however, this ensured that the influence of the rising in ethnic contradictions did not reach levels seen in other regions. These changes continued until the Mukden Incident and the establishment of Manchukuo. An analysis of the process

reveals the following causes for the changes.

First, the ethnic relationship between the Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans, who were not rulers in the areas they lived, was equal and they did not ostracize each other. As a result, they were in the position of feeling sympathy for each other. They had all migrated to the Yanbian region due to persecution. In the process of efforts to reclaim land and push migrants to the border region, Han Chinese and ethnic Korean farmers had been forced to move in one direction to one area of China. The Han Chinese were pushed from the west to the east and from the north to the south, and their population gradually decreased. The Korean farmers, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction from the east to the west and from the south to the north, and their numbers gradually grew. There were clashes between them in the process of reclaiming wilderness, but the Koreans generally worked on paddy fields, while the Han Chinese farmers worked mainly dry fields (cultivating vegetables, for example), so from an economic perspective, they generally maintained a mutually beneficial relationship. This formed the basis for friendly interaction, exchanges, and blending (referred to as the so-called “three exchanges”) between the Han Chinese and Koreans of the time. As the Korean population increased, clashes did occur between Koreans and Han Chinese over undeveloped land; however, evidence has yet to be found that these clashes intensified to the extent that they caused major ethnic strife.

Second, the Manchu rulers provided some degree of help and practical benefits to the Koreans amid efforts in managing ethnic relations. A crucial expression of ethnic relations in Yanbian during the late Qing period was the relationship between the ruling class and the Koreans, which were not part of the ruling class. From 1881, when the Qing’s restrictions on movement into the region were lifted, to 1911, when the Xinhai Revolution occurred, the Yanbian area was home to less than 200,000 people. A survey taken in 1912 tells us that 76.88% of the population in the Yanbian region were ethnic Korean, while only 23.11% were Han Chinese. Yanbian society was self-sufficient to a certain degree, meaning that exchanges between different ethnic groups were very

common, and there was a certain level of connection with landowners and government offices. Of particular note was that the government offices and officials in the Yanbian region were much more moderate in how they dealt with ethnic relations than in other regions, and this led to many practical benefits for the Koreans. This is a major factor in explaining why ethnic relations in the Yanbian region in the late Qing period were so benign.

Third, there were members of the ruling Manchu class living in the Yanbian region at the time. However, they were poor farmers who existed in similar circumstances to the non-ruling classes of the Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans. As a result, they lived on equal terms and in harmony with other ethnic groups. The Manchus who had either migrated to the Yanbian region or who lived there showed a warm-hearted attitude toward the Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans who migrated to the area. While misunderstandings occasionally occurred due to differences in language and customs, everyone respected each other, maintaining distance from each other. Before the restrictions on movement to Yanbian were lifted during the late Qing period, exchanges between ethnic Koreans, Han Chinese, and the Manchus mainly involved exchanges of salt and other food. These necessary and frequent exchanges of daily necessities promoted understanding between the different ethnic groups and formed inseparable links between them. These exchanges and interactions formed the roots for achieving ethnic solidarity in the Yanbian region.

Fourth, as Japan spread its colonizing influence over the Yanbian region, a struggle emerged between China and Japan over the issue of authority over the ethnic Korean population, a development that started to bring about gradual changes in ethnic relations. After the Russo-Japanese war, Japan pushed out Russian forces from the Yanbian region and, under the pretext of “protecting” ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian region, intensified its military and economic infiltration into the region. The Japanese opposed efforts to have ethnic Koreans become Chinese citizens and used financial economic agencies to purchase a significant amount of land owned by ethnic Koreans, violating China’s national sovereignty.

Faced with this situation, the Qing government had no choice but to strengthen its management over ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian region. The intervention of the Japanese led to a gradual emergence of conflicts and clashes between the ethnic Koreans, the ruling Manchus, and the non-ruling Han Chinese; essentially, the ethnic Koreans became the “sacrificial lambs” of the Chinese and Japanese governments. This development deeply impacted the normal relations between different ethnic groups in the Yanbian region.

## **The Chinese Communist Party’s Ethnic Policies and the Ethnic Relations in the Yanbian Region during the Period of War against Japan and Liberation War**

China’s northeastern region soon came under the ownership of the Japanese following the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931, turning the region into a colony of the Japanese. The Kuomintang government adhered to a non-resistance policy against the Japanese, and Ji Xing, who was a military commander stationed in Yanbian, sent an official to the Japanese General Consulate in Longjing to proclaim his unit’s surrender in accordance with an order by Xi Qia, the general in command of the Jilin Provincial Army of the ROC. As a result, the Japanese military was able to conquer the entirety of Yanbian without firing even a single shot. Then, for the next 14 long years, Japan implemented policies of ethnic assimilation and ethnic cleansing against the various ethnic minorities in Yanbian, creating severe damage and friction between the ethnic Koreans, Han Chinese, and Manchus living there. Japan’s aim in creating ethnic contradictions and conflict between the non-ruling ethnicities of the ethnic Koreans, Han Chinese, and Manchus was to prevent them from banding together to oppose colonial rule, destroying solidarity between the groups and isolating the different ethnicities from each other. To firmly secure its rearguard in its war of expansion into China, Japan used fraud and

coercion to forcibly move Koreans from the Korean peninsula to the northeastern region of China and took land owned by Han Chinese landowners and distributed it to the Koreans for them to farm on. This further fueled class contradictions between landowners and farmers made up of Koreans and Han Chinese along with worsening ethnic contradictions between the Koreans, Han Chinese, and Manchus.

On the surface, Japan designated the Koreans as an ethnicity second in rank to the Japanese people. The Japanese enticed the Koreans into their camp to expand Japan's power in the northeastern region while driving a wedge between the Koreans and Han Chinese, all with the ultimate goal of isolating the two groups with a view to ensuring stable colonial rule. In fact, the political and economic status of the Koreans did not change, and Japan conducted a ruthless ethnic extermination policy to exert political control over the Koreans, using constant military force to suppress them, and exploiting them economically while making efforts to culturally assimilate them. Moreover, by 1935, amid its savage rule over the people of Yanbian, Japan had created 144 "collective settlements" that accommodated 12,362 households, a development that was akin to something that could have been seen in the Middle Ages. In 1937, Japan created the "Imperial Subjects Oath," which it forced Koreans to repeat from memory, as part of the broader, so-called "Imperial Subjects" campaign. Japan abolished foreign extraterritorial rights in Manchukuo in 1937 and used the convenience of its double identity to firmly establish its central status in Manchukuo. However, the social status of the Koreans, who had enjoyed extraterritoriality rights, fell even lower. Koreans living in land owned by the South Manchuria Railways Co., Kwantung Leased Territory, and treaty ports who had been enjoying extraterritorial rights suffered particularly severe repercussions. With the spread of this phenomenon, stark changes emerged in how other ethnic groups viewed Koreans in Manchukuo. At the time, discourse among various ethnicities toward the Koreans went something like this: "The Koreans have been passing themselves off like the Japanese until now. They have done terrible things with the support of the Japanese. Now that their extraterritorial

rights have been abolished, the Koreans are now on an equal plane with us. That's why we won't hold back like we did in the past. If they do bad things to us again, we can now teach them a lesson." The expressions used here suggest that Koreans were becoming isolated from other ethnic groups due to Japan's efforts to drive a wedge between Koreans and other ethnicities in Manchukuo. In January 1939, Japan started a campaign to change the Koreans' Korean names into Japanese ones. The Japanese also demanded that they use the Japanese language, which seems to have further solidified perceptions among other ethnic groups that the Koreans were agents of the Japanese. Japan's policies of driving a wedge between different ethnic groups and its policies to assimilate ethnic groups worsened relations between the Koreans, Han Chinese, and Manchus in the Yanbian region, evidenced by violent incidents perpetrated by other ethnic groups against Koreans after Japan surrendered in 1945.

While it was not in power at the time, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provided leadership for the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region with a view to creating solidarity among them and bring about the important task of coming together to fight against the Japanese. On September 20, 1931, two days after the Mukden Incident, the CCP leadership announced a "declaration regarding the forced annexation of the three eastern provinces by the Japanese imperialists" that stated, "We oppose the forced annexation of the three northeastern provinces by the Japanese imperialists! The Japanese must immediately remove its ground, air and naval forces stationed in the three northeastern provinces! Japan must rescind all unfair treaties!" On September 22, the CCP leadership called for the entire party to form an anti-Japanese united front with the proletariat and presented the task of "organizing a mass anti-imperialist campaign and starting a mass struggle to oppose the invasion by the Japanese imperialists through a guerilla war that strikes at the heart of the Japanese imperialists." On September 30, the CCP leadership made a second announcement regarding the Japanese takeover of the northeastern region, calling out the Kuomintang's non-resistance as being disruptive and destructive toward the national war against the Japanese,



and called for China's laborers, soldiers, farmers, students, agrarian soldiers, and hardworking masses to stage walk-outs and closures of schools and businesses." The Central Committee of the CCP sent Yang Jōng-u, Cho Sang-ji, Chu Bo-jung, and Cho Il-man to the northeastern region to strengthen the leadership of all party and workplace organizations and began to build an army that would mount armed resistance toward the Japanese under direct leadership of the CCP. Apart from this, the CCP presented specific ethnic policies within the framework of joint resistance against the Japanese and with significant interest toward ethnic issues based on the special situation in the northeastern region, bringing together the people of China in solidarity to jointly resist the Japanese and protect the nation. In this process, the CCP adhered to a consistent policy of promoting equality among different ethnic groups. As a result, the CCP experienced an important period of forming and developing its theories and policies toward the nation's ethnic groups as the anti-Japanese campaign began to develop in earnest among the Chinese people following the Mukden Incident and up until liberation from the Japanese.

In the following subsections, this article explores the ethnic relations under the broad trend of resistance against the Japanese through specific examples that stretch from the formation of the anti-Japanese national unification front to the joint struggle against the Japanese that occurred in the Yanbian region, involving Koreans and other ethnic groups under the leadership of the CCP.

### *Wang De-tai, the Leader of the Second Army of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Allied Forces, and Korean Military Personnel*

The Second Army of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Allied Forces, which led the armed struggle against the Japanese in the Yanbian region, was a military unit that was largely made up of guerilla armies active in the Yanbian area. It was directly organized and led by the CCP. From the early stages of the formation of guerilla armies, most of the commanders and regular soldiers were Koreans. Wang De-tai was a prominent Han Chinese leader of the resistance against the

Japanese in the Yanbian region from the period in which guerilla armies emerged. As someone who had reached the highest echelons of the CCP's East Manchuria Special Committee, the Northeastern People's Revolutionary Army, and the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Allied Forces, Wang knew more clearly than anyone else that the ethnic issue and ethnic relations must be dealt with properly during the struggle against the Japanese in Yanbian. He also considered the fact that his enemies were implementing policies to drive wedges between different ethnicities to create ethnic contradictions, and thus focused great attention on improving ethnic relations. Wang was a Han Chinese but was one of the founders of the anti-Japanese guerilla forces in Yanbian, so he was very capable of dealing with relations between the Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans. After joining the Yanji guerilla force, Wang moved up the ranks to become a platoon leader, company commander, and then chief of staff, and he maintained special good relations with the Korean guerilla fighters who he had fought shoulder-to-shoulder with during the early days of the guerilla war and placed particular focus on promoting ethnic solidarity within the guerilla forces. Years later, Ch'oe Hyön, a high-ranking general who returned to the DPRK alongside Kim Il-sung, reminisced about his days in the Yanji guerilla forces, saying that he would have been wrongly killed in the Minsaengdan Incident (People's Livelihood Corps Incident) if it had not been for Wang. He further noted that Wang had ensured that Ch'oe had stayed in his military unit, which allowed the Korean to continue his revolutionary activities. What is even more interesting is that Wang De-tai married an ethnic Korean virgin named Im Chang-suk in Beidong, the home of the Wangyugou Anti-Japanese Guerilla Base. In this author's estimation, if Wang had lacked trust and understanding toward the Koreans, he would not have sought out a life-long partner in the form of a Korean woman. Im, for her part, is said to have yearned for Wang (who died in a battle in 1936) until her 1985 death at the age of 70 in the Chinese city of Tumen.

## *The Ethnic Solidarity and Friendship between Koreans and Han Chinese during the Struggle against the Japanese that Preceded Alliances and Brotherhood*

There are a large number of examples of people of different ethnicities coming together under revolutionary friendship to bring about heartwarming ethnic relations with a view to achieving the joint aim of resisting the Japanese. In the official history of the CCP, it is known widely that when the Red Army passed through the southwestern part of Sichuan during the Long March period, General Liu Bo-cheng, who later became one of the PRC's 10 marshals (the country's highest military rank), formed an alliance and brotherhood with Xiao Ye-dan (also known as Guoji Yueda), who was of another ethnicity. However, in the Yanbian region, there were few people who knew that there were examples of people coming together during the struggle against the Japanese to form alliances that resulted in the expression of warm ethnic relations.

In 1933, the Northeast Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army led by Wu Yi-cheng, the Suining Anti-Japanese Alliance Army led by Zhou Bao-zhong, and the Third Force of the Second Army of the Dokripsa of the Northeastern People's Revolutionary Force was active in Luozigouzhen, Sidaohezi, and Taipinggou in Wangqing County. These armies allied with each other following support from community leaders that came about through the substantial propaganda and efforts by the anti-Japanese allied forces. In 1933, Liu Gu-chen and Liu Guo-qi, who were running a beer factory in the Luozigouzhen area, along with the disbanded members of the Northeast Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army, who had been working at the factory, took the risky move of joining the anti-Japanese allied forces after hearing anti-Japanese propaganda from the CCP. Some of the enlightened social figures and leaders of local militias, such as *jiazhang* 甲長 (“tithing head”) and *paizhang* 牌長 (“decade head”), came together in kindred spirit to send some food, salt, matches, medicines, shoes, and clothing to the anti-Japanese allied forces active in the mountains. At first, Liu De-lin (Han Chinese), Yang Hui-min (Han Chinese), Kim Yong-un (ethnic Korean) and Wang Yu-ting

(Han Chinese) led these efforts, but gradually the number of people involved in providing aid expanded, leading to a stark need for workers and capital. As a result, leaders selected people who were deeply anti-Japanese and trustworthy to form an alliance. This alliance included both Han Chinese and ethnic Koreans, for a total of 24 people. This alliance even included Kim Il-sung, who would later become the leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Liu De-lin became the leader of the First Militia at Sandaohezi, while Dong He-ling became the militia leader in Xintuzi. Kim Yong-un became the clan leader in Sandaohezi, while Wang Ji-an and Cho (unknown last name), the owners of the beer factory and former Wongu National Army, Son An became the head of the fifth clan in Sandaohezi, while Liu Guo-shen was the head of the beer factory, Han (unknown last name) and Ŏm (unknown last name) along with Wang Shu-bin became cadres in the anti-Japanese army, while Kim Il-sung was the youngest of them all. Kim Yong-un became the guide for a DPRK delegation that was sent in 1962 into China to visit historical sites related to Kim Il-sung's fight against the Japanese. In July 1934, the 13th Brother, Ŏm (unknown last name), came down from the mountains and delivered the message that the anti-Japanese army had almost run out of food and medicine, emphasizing that cold medicine, traditional medicine, diarrhea medicine, and medicine for treating external wounds had all been depleted. After hearing this, the militia leaders in the alliance used their status to obtain around 180 kilograms from farmers in Kaktun, and purchased the needed medicine, sending these supplies to the army as quickly as was possible. Based on Wang Yu-yuan's directions, the Kim Yong-un, led seven trustworthy farmers to bring the supplies to the anti-Japanese allied force, which was stationed in near Saodaohezi, and sometime later, Kim Yong-un set up a small shop to provide even larger amounts of aid to the army, sending daily supplies directly to it. In 1935, as Japan's collective villages gradually became more permanent, Japanese control over food grew more severe, and the food distribution system implemented by the Japanese forced farmers to contribute food to the government, leaving them with almost nothing. That being said, it is said that even in

this situation, farmers took risks to their lives in saving food that they then sent to the army.

During the 14 years of resistance against the Japanese, the different ethnic groups in the Yanbian region came together in solidarity under the correct leadership of the CCP and fought bravely, achieving national liberation. However, the impact of the Japanese empire's policies to drive wedges between different ethnic groups and to rank these groups caused a considerable deal of friction and conflict between Koreans and Han Chinese.

The various ethnic groups in Yanbian who weathered through difficulties under the hardships of war desired peace and the establishment of a people's government, just like the rest of the Chinese people. However, the Kuomintang provoked the start of a civil war, turning the northeastern region into a crucible of war yet again. Faced with this situation following liberation from the Japanese, ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian region—who made up most of the area's population—asked themselves, “Should we head back to the Korean Peninsula? Or should we stay in Yanbian and protect our way of life?” They also asked themselves, “Should we fight against the reactionary Kuomintang clique under the leadership of the CCP? Or should we just sit and watch? Should we cooperate with the Kuomintang just like some of the other ethnic Koreans living in areas controlled by the Kuomintang?”

At the time, Koreans in China's northeastern region had been maligned as traitors due to the effects of Japan's efforts to drive a wedge between different ethnic groups, which meant they were very much afraid of retribution and violence perpetrated by Chinese people after Japan's surrender. In fact, conflict and friction did not cease between the two ethnic groups. Koreans had no nationality to speak of because Korea was under control of the Soviet Red Army without its own sovereign government, which meant that they were considered foreigners without legal rights as citizens in China and failed to receive any protections as a result. Hyōn Kyu-hwan writes in Chapter 5 (“The Realities Faced by Migrant Koreans After Liberation”) of his book *Han'guk yuiminsa* (The History of Korean Migration), “Ethnic Koreans living in Manchuria (the northeastern region of

China) were, on the one hand, tearfully happy about their homeland's independence right after liberation given they were facing a new era filled with hope for the writing of a new history. But on the other hand, after the Japanese surrendered, the Manchus and Han Chinese who had suffered scorn and contempt from Japan lashed out with anger with anger they had suppressed. Some people even began rioting and committing acts of looting, which severely upturned the public order in Manchuria following liberation. As a result, a significant number of ethnic Koreans in Manchuria lost their lives and many people suffered damage to their property.” In fact, during the period right before liberation, police officers and government officials who worked for the puppet regime, and a small number of pro-Japanese elements and their puppets who had conducted evil deeds thanks to the support they gained from the Japanese through flattery while working at the South Manchuria Railway Company and the Manchurian Concordia Association realized that Japan was weakening and ran off to other areas. Moreover, landowners and some members of the middle class who had accumulated capital in the northeastern region were concerned that the CCP would redistribute their private assets and either returned to the Korean Peninsula or migrated to other regions. As a result, most of the people who remained in the Yanbian region were poor farmers just eking by or bankrupt farmers who had lost their workforce.

The CCP's entry into the northeastern region led to the solidification of the rearguard bases already under the CCP's control and the establishment of a people's democratic government, which allowed CCP policies to be directly legislated and handed down. At the time, the CCP, in consideration of the fact that ethnic Koreans had not been able to obtain Chinese nationality for historical reasons, believed it was a priority to expand the legal status of the Koreans. Of course, the CCP had long considered Koreans to be a minority ethnic group within Chinese territory and recognized that the Koreans had played an unforgettable contribution in the victory against the Japanese as members of the anti-Japanese national unification front. However, the CCP was aware by the times of the war of liberation—

and amid its efforts to push forward land reform, build its government, and conduct efforts to fight in the civil war—that if it did not clearly resolve the ethnic Koreans’ nationality issue, it could lead to the emergence of ethnic contradictions, and for ethnic Koreans to abandon expectations of the CCP promoting policies for minority ethnic groups. As such, the CCP permitted ethnic Koreans remaining in Chinese territory to maintain dual citizenship and granted them the same rights enjoyed by ordinary Chinese citizens. Moreover, the CCP granted permission for Koreans who had participated in China’s war of liberation as Chinese citizens to participate in a war to protect Korea as Korean citizens if their country were to suffer a foreign invasion.

In December 1948, Liu Jun-xiu, the secretary for the CCP in Yanbian, in accordance with the spirit expressed by his superiors, “permitted ethnic Koreans living in Yanbian (China) to become an ethnic minority inside China and one part of China’s democratic republic. The democratic government, on the basis of the principle of equality between ethnic groups, will provide ethnic Koreans with land rights, human rights, property rights, and protection of their lives and property.” He went on to clearly proclaim that, “Anyone who has lived in the Yanbian region and already applied for changes in family registry to the democratic government in this region in regards to the land reforms are Chinese citizens, and all those who have not officially registered themselves in household registries or have newly migrated from Korea are all recognized as Korean residents living abroad.” Most of the ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian region received Chinese citizenship through the period of the land reforms, establishment of the CCP government, and the war of liberation.

In August 1948, the CCP praised the ethnic Koreans in Yanbian as being the main force for development and construction in the region, a group with good-standing revolutionary traditions who fought bravely against the remaining Japanese imperialist forces, the reactionary Kuomintang clique, and spies and agents even after liberation with a high degree of revolutionary zeal, and that they participated in the steadfast struggle against feudal forces

during the land reform while simultaneously taking on the role of a main force to provide support to the battlefield and construction in the rearguard. The CCP went on to say that the party and government's recognition of ethnic Koreans as members of the ethnic minority in Chinese territory was a very correct policy and that there must be steadfast support for a policy to ensure the achievement of ethnic solidarity with the Koreans. Yong Wen-tao, the first secretary of the CCP's Yanbian Regional Committee, wrote the following in his memoirs about the relationship between the ethnic Koreans and Han Chinese: "The issue regarding the relations between the Koreans and Han Chinese was an issue that appeared unexpectedly in Yanbian. We placed a focus on this issue, so an armed revolt did not occur. The major issue that we faced was the belief that the Koreans were traitors, and that after the Japanese bastards had been driven away, communist party cadres came and elevated these traitors. As such, people said that we Chinese could not trust them (the Koreans). Moreover, Han Chinese people didn't trust our party even more because they were very adherent to 'traditional conceptions.' After coming across the wide range of propaganda from our party, especially literary propaganda, the Han Chinese people did away with the so-called 'traditional conceptions' toward Chang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang and began to accept ethnic solidarity. As a result, there were no severe political incidents that occurred between the ethnic groups in Yanbian."

In his reminiscences about his work managing activities in Yanbian at the time, Ong wrote the following: "At the time, ethnic Koreans made up more than 80% of the population in Yanbian, and their revolutionary spirit was strong, so it was (the right thing) to rely on them to firm up the government and expand the number of armored units. The Korean armored units were relatively stable and became foundations for the new government, but when viewed through the prism of ethnic relations between the Koreans and Han Chinese, there was in the beginning tension due to some wrong-headed perceptions among the masses. Moreover, these perceptions were even shared by individual cadres, but because our party ceaselessly worked hard to improve ethnic relations, no



political issues ever arose.” Through this, the CCP altered the unequal political and legal statuses that existed between the Koreans, Han Chinese and other ethnic groups that had long existed in the Yanbian region. The CCP built ethnic relations with a foundation on equality and solidarity, ridding the Yanbian region of the ethnic pressure and exploitation that had previously existed. These efforts were a major force to promote the development of ethnic relations in the Yanbian region.

## **The Chinese Communist Party’s Regional Ethnic Autonomy System and Ethnic Koreans in the Yanbian Region after the Formation of the People’s Republic of China**

The establishment of the People’s Republic of China meant the firm establishment of the CCP’s status as the ruling party of the nation, and that the ethnic policies legislated by our party could be implemented throughout the nation. In short, it meant that efforts to improve relations between ethnic groups had reached an epoch-making era. During the initial stages of the formation of the PRC, the CCP went through a very difficult process of rapidly overturning ethnic relations, which had largely been based on ethnic pressure rooted in crude class pressure, to establish ethnic relations based on equality among ethnic groups, solidarity, and friendship across the spheres of politics, the economy, culture, and society. The party and government conducted a comprehensive adjustment in ethnic relations, and they systematically created policies and measures that improved ethnic relations that were based on an analysis of the historical causes of friction and disharmony. The party and government also took a very prudent and moderate approach to developing the implementation of these policies and measures. Most of the ethnic policies put in place in the early days of the PRC were emphasized and implemented in a continuous manner, bringing a rudimentary level of development to a new kind of

ethnic relations for our country.

On September 21, 1949, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) held its first meeting in Beijing. There were 198 representatives who attended the CPPCC meeting, and the 19 representatives from minority ethnic groups (from 10 minority ethnic groups) made up 9.6% of the total representatives present at the meeting. President Mao Zedong stated in his opening statement like: "The First Political Consultative Conference is a meeting (to promote) solidarity among the entire people," and "Our work will remain in the annals of humanity's history. This expresses the fact that the Chinese people, who make up one-fourth of the world's population, have risen up energetically." He went on to say, "The era in which people said that Chinese people are uncivilized has already passed, and we will, without fail, appear on the world stage as a nation (that boasts) outstanding traditional culture." During this conference, the party and government reviewed the experiences and lessons gained since the establishment of the CCP and, along with the national people's representatives, enacted a "joint platform of the Chinese People's Political Negotiations Committee" that espoused the significance of the constitution.

This "joint platform," which contained epoch-making significance, was an important document that contained important elements of a temporary constitution, and stipulated Chinese ethnic policies as follows: "The various ethnic groups in the territory of the People's Republic of China are completely equal. In order for the policy of solidarity and friendship to be achieved, they must oppose imperialism, oppose the enemies of the people within various ethnic groups, and the People's Republic of China will work to have the various ethnic groups come together as a big family to work together in friendship." The platform also stated, "The PRC opposes nationalism that narrowly confines itself to Greater Han nationalism and bans friction, pressure, and actions that destroy ethnic solidarity between different ethnic groups," and "There must be a significant number of representatives from various ethnic groups in each local government in areas where ethnic groups live or in ethnic autonomous areas." Moreover, it added, "The

various minority ethnic groups in PRC territory have the right to join the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the People's Security Service (the Chinese military police) in accordance with the unified national military system," and "The various minority ethnic groups can develop their own ethnic languages and writing systems, preserve and reform their own customs and practices, and even have the right to practice their own religious beliefs." It further stated, "The people's government must support the construction of the political, economic, cultural, and educational systems for the various minority ethnic groups." This joint platform was the comprehensive result and an heir to the national doctrine and policies that the CCP adopted during the Neo-Democratic Revolution period (1921–1949).

The most important aspect of the "joint platform" in regards to ethnic groups is the details concerning the implementation of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy System. The Regional Ethnic Autonomy System is an important national system legislated by our party on the basis of Marxist theories regarding ethnic equality and solidarity. As a result, Zhou En-lai, the first premier of the PRC, highly praised the system as the first great attempt of its kind in history.

The 125th State Council meeting held on February 22, 1952, passed the "Program for the Implementation of Ethnic Regional Autonomy of the People's Republic of China" and the "Decision of the Administrative Council Regarding Minority Ethnic Groups in All Areas of the Country to be able to Possess Equal Rights." In accordance with the spirit of these two orders, efforts aimed at implementing the Regional Ethnic Autonomy System spread rapidly through areas inhabited by ethnic minorities.

There were two issues that needed to be resolved first in order to establish the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. The most central of the two issues was correcting the false perceptions toward autonomous regions held by the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region. In order to correct these wrong-headed perceptions, the Yanbian provincial government created temporary training teams made up of propaganda workers in province and counties, and had them study documents regarding the implementation

of ethnic policies and autonomous regions. In the cities and counties, the government gathered cadres and propaganda officials from villages to study the documents. However, when news about the implementation of the autonomous region spread before full-fledged propaganda efforts began, members of the various ethnic groups in Yanbian began causing a stir because of their false perceptions and misunderstandings about autonomous regions. The ethnic Koreans perceived autonomous regions as “independence” and “a merger with Korea,” while others believed that the “Tumen River is not a national border anymore,” “Kim Il-sung sent people to Yanbian to lead it,” “Are we changing our national flag?” and “Will state-run enterprises also become property of the autonomous government?” Some ethnic Koreans claimed that “the autonomous people’s government is the only government of the ethnic Korean population, all Han Chinese cadres should be replaced, and the currency should be printed with Korean lettering.” On the other hand, some ethnic Koreans expressed concerns such as: “We must not leave the leadership of Mao Zedong” and “If the ethnic Korean population has to manage all the construction projects and take on costs for securing the border, it will increase the burden on us.” At the time, even Han Chinese had misunderstandings about the autonomous government. They voiced concerns such as: “Why is the communist party allowing Koreans to become independent? It doesn’t make sense,” and “The Koreans of the Manchukuo period were agents of Japan. If they are allowed to rule themselves, we will face (difficulties) again.”

Some Han Chinese said that they “were putting plans together to migrate northwards to Haerbaling because they would not be able to participate in government in the autonomous region and that they would be treated like overseas Chinese.” Some members of the Han Chinese community even said that “Mao Zedong is compensating the Koreans for their major contribution to the fight against Japan by presenting them with the five provinces in Yanbian.”

There were also concerns among other ethnic groups in the Yanbian region. In particular, the Hui people, who made up a very small minority of the population in the Yanbian

area, claimed that they would face persecution going forward because the ethnic Koreans did not understand their customs and practices. These baseless rumors created more barriers in developing normal exchanges and interactions between the ethnic groups of Yanbian, and it would have been impossible for the Regional Ethnic Autonomy System to have been implemented in the region if these kinds of perceptions were not corrected. As a result, the Yanbian authorities immediately expanded its propaganda activities to ensure that our party's statements regarding the regional ethnic autonomy system were understood in a correct manner by the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region. These propaganda efforts further deepened the members of these various ethnic group's understanding about the party's ethnic policies.

On February 3, 1952, following the approval of the Central People's Government, the CPC Central Committee of Jilin Province, the Jilin Provincial Government, the Northeast Central Bureau of the CCP, and the Northeast People's Government, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region (after being approved by the State Council in accordance with the 'Constitution of the People's Republic of China' on April 7, 1955, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region was renamed Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture) was established.

Established in September 1952, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region was the third autonomous region established among the ethnic minority autonomous regions created nationwide. The establishment of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region is a vivid example of practical steps implemented by the CCP's Regional Ethnic Autonomy System, and for ethnic Korean people in the Yanbian area, it is an important way for them to practice ethnic regional autonomy. Not only that, but the formation of the autonomous region has also allowed Yanbian to achieve ethnic unity and progress. The ordinances enacted, promulgated, and implemented suited to the conditions in Yanbian on the basis of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy System has aroused sufficient unity and initiative among the people of various ethnic groups in Yanbian, becoming the historical beginning for promoting social development in the region. The ethnic Korean people in Yanbian and other ethnic groups feel through their

experiences that the Regional Ethnic Autonomy System is an accurate policy that fully meets their pressing aspirations and interests.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China government showed infinite interest and support for areas of the country with ethnic minorities. The party and government showed an interest in politics, supported in economy, and took an interest in people's lives. As a result, ethnic minority areas were able to develop rapidly within the large family of the Chinese motherland. After the establishment of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, provincial leaders such as Wang Yi-fu, Li Mong-ling, and Yu You-wen of the Jilin Provincial People's Government, as well as high-level leaders such as Zhou En-lai, Deng Ying-chao, Zhu De, Dong Bi-wu, Ye Jian-ying, Liu Bo-cheng, He Long, Liu Rui-qing, and Sa Kong-liao visited Yanbian. In the hope of building a strong Yanbian, strengthening ethnic unity, and strengthening socialist equality, solidarity, prosperity and cooperation among the ethnic groups, the party and state handed down important instructions on promoting the improvement of ethnic relations. The party and state also promoted the characteristics of ethnic minorities and demanded the thorough implementation of a policy of ethnic equality. On the other hand, the visits of party and state leaders have strengthened the sense of belonging and identity with the people of the PRC in the people of many ethnic groups in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, which has led to the reunification of the motherland and the stability of its borders. The visits have also had a very favorable impact on ethnic relations and the stable and smooth development of the region.

## Conclusion

Before the lifting of the Qing government's restrictions on entry into the Yanbian region, the peoples living in the region, including the Han Chinese, the Korean migrants who entered

the region despite the ban on entry, and the Manchus who remained in the Yanbian region to protect the proclaimed homeland of the Manchu people (*longxing zhidi*; “where the dragon arose”) lived in their own ethnic enclaves while adhering to their own culture. At that time, there were no ties between the different ethnic groups and no exchanges, either. However, in modern times, with the crisis on the border and the full-fledged start of the Qing government’s policy of pushing migrants to the border region, the restrictions on entry to the region began to be lifted. This made movement between the different ethnic groups in the northeastern region, including Yanbian, more frequent, and began the formation of exchanges and interaction between different ethnic groups. After that, the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region came together in solidarity in opposition to the Qing dynasty’s feudal rule, the feudal military rule of the ROC period, and Japan’s colonial rule during the Manchukuo period, fighting bravely under the flag of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism.

Following the Mukden Incident of September 19, 1931, the various ethnic groups in the Yanbian region formed an anti-Japanese national unification front under the correct leadership of the CCP and, for 15 years, conducted a difficult struggle that resulted in the overthrow of Japanese imperialism. In the event, the war of liberation led to the overthrow of the reactionary Kuomintang clique, the establishment of a people’s democratic government, and the rise of the CCP to become the guiding force of the nation. In particular, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, which was established under the PRC’s Regional Ethnic Autonomy System, led the various ethnic groups of the region to build the area into a pleasant place to live, calming the conflict and misunderstandings between the ethnic groups due to historical issues, and forming strong ethnic relations under socialism’s new kind of ethnic equality and solidarity and friendship. After the formation of the PRC, the various ethnic groups of the Yanbian region developed their economy and culture under the support and interest of the party and state, turning Yanbian into a beautiful cradle for life. In this process, the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture was

given the honor of being a “National Inter-ethnic Solidarity Progress Model Community” five times by the State Council, and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission has designated it a pilot unit for “Establishing Activities Related to National Inter-ethnic Unity and Common Progress” several times.



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