

THIS BOOK DESCRIBES THE SETTLEMENT of Manchuria and the neighboring areas of Inner Mongolia and the incorporation of these territories into China during the Qing (1644–1911) and Republican (1912–) periods. The account that follows highlights two features of this story and connects it to recent scholarship on the history of modern China. First, is the extraordinary growth of the Middle Kingdom during the Qing Dynasty. Manchuria and Inner Mongolia were among several large territories attached during this period to the ancient core of the empire, doubling its size and creating the immense domain now known as China. Until recently, historians of China, both at home and abroad, have been preoccupied with events that occurred inside the Great Wall. During the past few years, there has been growing interest in China's borderlands and the process by which the empire expanded to reach its present size. This book adds a chapter to that story.

Second, is the question of whether and how China changed in the course of this expansion and during the transition from the traditional to early-modern periods. Again, the notion that China had been changing or developing on its own, before it was forced to respond to the impact of the West, represents a break in the historiography of this subject: away from the view of a stagnant China that dominated scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s, toward a dynamic model which is supported by evidence from the past and encouraged by realities of the present. To date, most accounts of China's pre-modern development have focused on China proper, while little attention has been paid to the stimulative effects, if any, of the borderlands. A second purpose of this book is to explore the question of whether the spread

The China that now colors so much of the map of Asia is of relatively recent vintage. The core of the empire, or China proper, bounded by the oceans on the east and south, the Tibetan Plateau on the west, and the Great Wall on the north, came together more than two millennia ago. Territories of equal size, including Manchuria, Inner and Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan, were attached to this core in the 15th and 18th centuries. Although each of these regions offers its own attractions, by most measures Manchuria, the region the Chinese call *Dongbei* or the Northeast, ranks first. A generous definition of Northeast China might include the fringes of the Mongolian steppe, technically part of Inner Mongolia, which is densely populated, well cultivated, and forms a natural extension of the central Manchurian plain. But even in narrower terms, counting only the three provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, this region now accounts for 8% of the area and population, 17% of the cultivated land, 14% of the grain output, and 11% of the gross domestic product of China as a whole.¹ Manchuria is larger than the six states of America's upper Midwest—Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa—has twice as many people, and produces nearly 40% as much grain, placing it second among the world's large grain and corn belts.² It is located at the intersection of China, Russia, Korea, and Japan, a neighborhood once called, and perhaps again to become, the "cockpit of Asia." The annexation of this region is the single most important addition of territory to China, since the unification of the empire in the 3rd century B.C.

The expansion of China is of both historical and contemporary significance. Historically, China is one of a handful of agrarian empires, the others are Russia, India, and the Ottomans—that took control of the Eurasian steppe during the 17th and 18th centuries, putting an end to the long reign of nomadic power and preparing the way for modern states.

¹ *Zhongguo tongji nianjian* (2000).

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 2001; and U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site. U.S. grain includes corn, wheat, and soybeans. China includes corn, wheat, soybeans, and rice.

Russian history, as a leading scholar in this field, V. O. Kliuchevsky observes, "is the history of a country undergoing colonization. . . . Migration, colonization constituted the basic feature of our history, which all other features were more or less directly related."³ Until recently, historians of China paid less attention to territorial expansion and its effects on the development of China. Now, that too is beginning to change.

B. Change?

The growth of China during the Qing and Republican periods is a . . . Whether and how this growth fostered change in Manchuria and China as a whole remain questions. Expansion and change have been so intertwined in the history of the West that historians who approach these questions from the Western perspective may be excused for assuming that the connection between the two is universal. Students of frontier history, which examines migration, settlement, and the incorporation of new territories into existing regimes, have been especially susceptible to this view. But does the equation of expansion and change also apply to China?

Since 1893, when Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his now-famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," historians have enjoyed a lively and illuminating debate over the nature of the frontier and its role in history. One aspect of this discussion, which is especially important for our study of Manchuria, is the role of the frontier as the locus of historical change. In Turner's account, the frontier, the expanding edge of conquest and settlement, generated the ideas, practices, and patterns that transformed society and drove his country forward. In the American case, the subject of his study, Turner rejected the "germ" theory, which explained American history as an outgrowth

³V.O. Kliuchevsky, *Kurs russkoi istorii* (Moscow, 1937), v, 20–21, cited in Donald T. Gold (1957), 14.

ive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a development for that area. American social development has been usually beginning over again on the frontier."⁴

Turner has been and remains a controversial figure, whose work has attracted critics in each succeeding generation. The latest crop of critics, the so-called "new Western historians," have identified many of his shortcomings and offered remedies for each. Among the chief targets of their attack is Turner's basic model, in which a core empire or civilization expands outward along an advancing edge, the "frontier" to conquer and eventually consume a "periphery" of wilderness. The critics challenge this model on several grounds: that it is racist, because the core is dominated by whites and the periphery by coloreds; sexist, because the expansion is the work of men to the exclusion of women; anti-environmentalist, because it overlooks the destruction wrought by conquest; and most of all, because it rests on the assumption that the "manifest destiny" of the core civilization or empire is the proper course of history, whereas the periphery or wilderness has no history until it is conquered and consumed by the core. The current revisionist view, to identify the frontier as the locus of fundamental cultural change is to accept the entire model and the assumptions on which it rests. If the frontier is where history is being made, then its makers are civilized white men who are bringing order out of chaos and imposing their culture and institutions on the blank sheet of the wilderness. That, according to the new Western historians, denies all other ways of understanding the history of those landscapes and peoples. It is not inadvertently and inconsequentially, just happen to be in the way.

One antidote offered by the new Western historians is "the middle ground." In a book by this title, Richard White treats his subject as the Great Lakes region of the 17th and 18th centuries, not as a wilderness waiting to be cut down by an advancing frontier and incorporated into the expanding American nation, but as a place "in between cultures."

⁴Frederick Jackson Turner (1963), 28.

as a place—as many complicated environments occupied by nations who considered their homelands to be the center, not the edge.”⁶ Unlike pioneers on the frontier, whose role is to transform the wilderness and add the digested product to an expanding core, the people of “middle ground” work out their own history, shaping their land themselves without regard for the pretensions of their more civilized neighbors.

Given current trends in scholarship, it is hardly surprising that younger scholars should gravitate to the model proposed by White and the theories of the new Western historians. In the field of East Asian history, Brett Walker’s book on the Ainu lands (or Ezo), islands and peoples that lie off the mainland of Asia and now form part of Japan, Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kurils, does just that. Walker describes the transition of this region during the 17th and 18th centuries from “middle ground,” where the native Ainu interacted with Japanese and other peoples, to their present status as an administrative territory of Japan. Walker declines to label this region a “frontier,” because doing so would peripheralize it in relation to the process of state formation in Japan, and because the period of interaction between the Ainu and their neighbors—that is, their experience as a “middle ground”—is what accounts for the fate of both groups. “The point,” Walker explains, “is that the Ainu culture that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was in some respects a product of interaction on the middle ground, as was much of Japanese behavior in Ezo. . . .”⁷ Walker’s use of this model blows a fresh breeze through the study of Japanese history, reminding us that the framing of history around the nation can reduce peripheral territories and peoples to the status of losers, waiting to be gobbled up by the inevitable march toward someone else’s destiny. Given the success of this approach, one might ask, why not apply the same model to the study of other complex and unbounded areas

⁵Richard White (1991), x.

⁶Patricia Nelson Limerick (1987), 26.

⁷Brett L. Walker (2001), 12.

major aims is "to trace the process of sinicization of the manchu frontier."⁸ Without making reference to Turner, Lee nonetheless embraces the essence of his frontier thesis. A recent study by Pasternak and Janet W. Salaff (1993) of Chinese and Mongol settlements on the border between Manchuria and the Mongolian steppe, points in a different direction. By showing how ecology, society, and culture interact to produce communities that are distinct from their parent societies in both China and Mongolia and generate new identities all their own, Pasternak and Salaff favor an open-ended history of place that is akin to the "middle ground." To extend either of these accounts forward in time, one could turn to the Russian naturalists and ethnographers of the early-20th century, who describe the tribal minorities of Manchuria and their interactions with Chinese settlers along the Sungari, and Ussuri Rivers.⁹ Reports by Chinese exiles in the 17th century¹⁰ and Manchu officials in Jilin and Heilongjiang in the early 20th century,¹¹ surveys conducted during the 1950s and 1960s of surviving Manchu communities in Manchuria,¹² and other scholarship published in China¹³ offer additional information that can be used to reconstruct the interplay among Chinese, Manchus, and other tribal groups. In sum, the foundations for either a "frontier" or "middle ground" history of Manchuria have been established and could be elaborated here.

But this book follows neither of these lines. For discussion of the merits of the "frontier" versus the "middle ground," like other historical debates, tends to highlight the differences between these alternative views while ignoring their underlying similarities. And in the present

⁸Robert Lee (1970), 1–2.

⁹V. K. Arseniev (1941), S. M. Shirokogoroff (1924) and (1926).

¹⁰Three works by exiled officials Fang Gongqian (1894), Wu Zhenchen (1894), and Yang Bin (1894) are discussed in Xie Guozhen (1948), 16–33, 40–60, and in Robert Ross (1970), 9–14.

¹¹Works by Xiqing [Hsi Ch'ing] (1894) and Saying'e (1894) are discussed in Robert Ross (1970).

¹²*Manzu shehui lishi diaocha* (1985), and Jin Qicong (1981).

¹³See, for example, a local history of Manchus in Xiuyan by Zhang Qizhuo (1985).

eties and cultures are formed or changed by a dynamic that occurs *side* the dominant empires, civilizations, or nations. Whether the source of change is a “frontier” process or a “middle ground” place, the action occurs on the edge or in the spaces in between. In both cases, history is made and the shape of things to come is set by events that proceed from the outside in.

This study of Chinese expansion into the territories north of the Great Wall supports a different model or explanation: namely, that Chinese migration to, settlement in, and eventual incorporation of this region into the empire occurred by the reproduction or transplantation of institutions and practices previously established in China proper rather than by the creation or invention of new forms in the wilderness or on the frontier. There was in Manchuria a Chinese frontier—a line of demarcation between areas that were more populated, cultivated, and integrated on one side than on the other—and a middle ground where Chinese and other ethnic groups interacted and worked out common solutions to common problems. But these edges and places played only a marginal role in defining the emerging Manchuria, compared to the wholesale importation of an essentially Chinese social economy, and culture. Modern Manchuria, according to the argument presented below, was made less from the outside in, than from the inside out.

C. Growth Without Change

The case for this thesis—growth without change—is made in three parts, which are both thematic and chronological. Part One, “Land,” covers the Qing Dynasty and focuses on the role of the state in trying and failing, to establish a new system of landownership and land tenure in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. The Qing experiment, by which land grants and enforced labor were given in trust to the dynasty’s Manchu and Mongol allies in exchange for military and other forms of service

Chinese moved forward and kept on doing more of the same on their own. Part Two, "People," focuses on the Chinese migrants who left their homes in China proper to move at first temporarily and then gradually to settle in areas above the Great Wall. The title of this book, "Reverent Pioneers," derives from Part Two and is frankly ironic. Pioneers are supposed to take risks, explore frontiers, open new vistas, and discover new worlds. They are not supposed to be timid, halting, or indecisive. But the men and women who established a social and political order in China's northern territories backed into this role, extending order by planting the way of life they had known in China proper, rather than by inventing new techniques and behaviors to fit the environment and circumstances beyond the Great Wall. These pioneers were reluctant to move in the first place, those who moved were reluctant to stay, and those who stayed were reluctant to change the world around them. They found their own ways of adapting to it. They expanded the realm of order not so much more by replication than by device.

Part Three, "Economy," describes the development of Manchuria and the lack thereof—during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Recent scholarship on Chinese economic history has produced both a general consensus and an ongoing debate. The consensus is that the economy of late-traditional China was growing in total output and becoming increasingly commercialized. The debate is between those who, following the "classical" model of Adam Smith, see these changes as leading to development in the form of higher productivity (output per unit of labor) and the transformation of socioeconomic structures, on one side, and those who see growth and commercialization without development, on the other. The former school, proponents of "early modern" development, such as Thomas Rawski (1989) and Loren Brandt (1989), argue that during the period 1870–1930 China achieved higher productivity in agriculture by increasing specialization in cash crops, selecting crops to suit different environments, and extending the application of the best available techniques—all measures that could be and were applied in Manchuria. The latter, who make the case for "growth without development,"

whether the growth in China's territory and production was accounted for by development? And second, if not, whether this was due to social, material or some other cause(s)? The answers offered in this book are that development did *not* occur, and that the most important reason for this outcome was the persistence of past practices, even under circumstances that favored the introduction of new patterns of behavior and new techniques.

D. Note on Geography

Details regarding the land and climate of Manchuria will be introduced in Chapter 4 and elsewhere in the text, as appropriate. Meanwhile, three overarching features, which are central to this story, deserve a few comments. These features are: the enormous natural wealth and potential of Manchuria; the imbalance between the densely populated land-short north China plain and the sparsely populated, land-rich Manchuria; and the seasonal or monsoon climate that gives Manchuria its warm, wet summers and cold, dry winters.

First, Manchuria enjoys extraordinary natural endowments, far beyond those of any other region adjacent to China proper. The topography of Manchuria is defined by a broad central plain surrounded by a horseshoe of mountains that contain abundant and valuable timber, furs, medicinal plants, minerals, and other natural resources. Two major river systems, the Liao in the south and the Sungari-Nenjiang (Map 1) in the center and north, provide access to the mountains, wash and recharge the plains with their sediment, and facilitate transportation throughout the region. The soils of the plain, aeolian in the west and alluvial in the south and east, are fertile and relatively free of stones. The Manchurian summer is sufficiently warm and long to support a single crop as far north as the Amur River on the Russian border, while ample precipitation during the growing season ensures maximum plant response. Recent history and current conditions confirm