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Accepting reality: re-opening Manchuria to Chinese commoners (*minren*) in the Yongzheng era

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Abstract: For most of the period of Manchu domination of China prior to the nineteenth century, the rulers' attitude toward Han civilians settling in the motherland was negative. In the Kangxi period, immigration was tolerated but strictly controlled, and most of the resources were assigned to local Eight Banners members, because the court planned to base the region's development on the bannermen. In the fifth year of Qianlong's reign (1740), an imperial order officially prohibited Chinese civilians from migrating to Manchuria – this was the well-known *fengjin zhengce* 封禁政策. The only exceptions to this trend were two brief periods: the first between Shunzhi's reign and the early years of Kangxi's reign, and the second roughly corresponding to Yongzheng's reign (1723–1735). During the former period (1653–1668), immigration was encouraged, settlers were free to reclaim uncultivated lands, and a civil administration system was established. This phase has been widely discussed in the academic community for over a century, whereas research on the latter period – during which six new civil jurisdictions were established and the land policies, which had previously strongly favored bannermen, changed significantly in an effort to meet the needs of the growing civilian population – has been insufficient. Based on both institutional and private sources, this article will offer a detailed outline of the features of this peculiar stage and compare it with both the above-mentioned phase in which the province was opened to migration (1653–1668) and the restrictive policies of the Kangxi and Qianlong periods. In this way, the article will show how important Yongzheng's change of direction was, despite the fact that it did not last long.

Keywords: civil administration; civilian commoners; land economy; Qing Manchuria; Yongzheng emperor

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1 Premises

After the Manchu conquered the Ming capital of Beijing in 1644, the majority of the population of the Eight Banners “followed the dragon beyond the Pass”¹ to settle on the “Central Plain.”² Thus, with only a handful of manned garrisons left, the Manchu motherland had been depopulated. Due to economic, military, and not least to moral concerns, the Qing rulers had taken measures to repopulate the area ever since the very first years of their dominion over China. Relocating Eight Banners soldiers and households would have been a rather common practice in the period between the early Kangxi era (the second half of the seventeenth century) and the nineteenth century,³ but such maneuvers proved insufficient in terms of repopulation and land reclamation. Over time, migrants from China proper became an increasingly significant part of Manchuria’s population and also composed the main workforce for the region’s agricultural economy.

Although rulers generally maintained a negative attitude toward Chinese migrations to the ancestral lands for most of the first half of the Qing dynasty period, it was clear to them that the new settlers could also be a resource: the contradiction between the wish to repopulate Manchuria and to restore its economy on the one hand, and the desire to preserve it for the Manchu people on the other, was a major issue for the court for 150 years. Over this span of time, one can detect two peaks in which tolerance of the migratory phenomena increased: the first was from 1653 to 1668, when the emperors were very concerned with the motherland’s desolation and consequently instituted incentives for new settlers; the second roughly corresponded with Emperor Yongzheng’s relatively brief reign (1723–1735), when a series of pro-Han inhabitant policies were launched. Of the two, only the former has received the attention it deserves in academic circles,⁴ probably by virtue of its vigor and explicitness. The latter, which was

1 *Cong long ru guan* 從龍入關, the dragon symbolizing the new dynasty.

2 *Zhong yuan* 中原. This usually refers to the territories along the banks of the Yellow river, the cradle of Chinese civilization. From the Manchurian perspective, however, it generally denotes China proper or the North China Plain.

3 See, for instance, Chen 2017, which is dedicated to the history of Banner households relocating to Shuangchengpu 雙城堡, in Jilin province, in the nineteenth century, and to analyzing the complex, multi-layered social fabric resulting from this policy. Cong Peiyuan (vol. 4 of *Zhongguo dongbei shi* 2006: 1359–1365) provides a general account of transfers in the direction of Alcuka, Lalin, and Bedune, and also in Jilin province, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Isett (2006: 49) mentions the “rustication” of bannermen in both southern and northern Manchuria, including Heilongjiang. For relocations to southern Manchuria, see also Yang Yulian 1991: 162–163; and this article, paragraph 3.

4 This phase has been widely discussed for almost a century, especially by Chinese and other Asian scholars. See, for example, Inaba 1931; Wu Xiyong 1941; Xiao Yishan 1943; Guan Donggui 1972; Zhang Jie 1994, 1999; Diao Shuren 1998; Zhang Shizun 2003; Ren Yuxue 2003: 41–42; Diao Shuren and Gao Feng 2004; Zhao Shibing and Zhao Yuying 2013; Liu Xiaomeng 2015; and Tian Yu 2017. Some studies by

much more moderate (Yongzheng never went so far as to encourage immigration), has been neglected in scholarly research, with the exception of a few fragmentary studies.⁵ My main goal in this paper is to show how strong the shift in direction with regard to the relevant policies was in those years, and how different this sovereign's attitude was from those of his predecessors and his successors.

To serve this purpose, I will begin by offering a brief account of the first moment when Manchuria was opened. I will then make an effort to analyze in depth the causes and effects of the measures implemented during Yongzheng's reign. Finally, I will compare these actions to some of the related policies under Kangxi and Qianlong: this contrasting perspective will help us to understand the value of Yongzheng's decisions and enable us to appreciate their peculiarity.

I should point out one important fact here at the beginning. The migrants from the regions south of the Great Wall were not the only Chinese in Manchuria. Some were descendants of the Chinese Martial Banners (*Hanjun baqi* 漢軍八旗) established by Hong Taiji in the 1630s; others were enlisted into this section of the banners later, based on merit or thanks to conspicuous donations; many were recruited to work for the Imperial Household Department and were registered in the banners that belonged to this institution. These people were categorized as bannermen (*qiren* 旗人).⁶ Those who were attracted to Manchuria by the incentives at the beginning of the period of Qing rule, as well as those who spontaneously migrated to the area later to escape indigence and natural disasters in their places of origin, were registered as

Western scholars also touch on this topic: see Lee 1970: 78–79; Isett 2006: 33–34; Reardon-Anderson 2005: 20–21; and my own work in Sepe 2017, 2018, 2021.

5 See below.

6 See Ding, Guo, Lee, and Campbell: *Liaodong yimin zhong de qiren shehui* 遼東移民中的旗人社會 (Immigration and Eight Banner Society in Liaodong), 2004. These four scholars' contribution to the study of Qing Manchuria's social history is of the utmost importance for the field. They have provided the most in-depth and detailed institution-based classification (to date) of Liaoning bannermen under the Qing dynasty (for a comparison between the book's conception of the local social structure and the traditional one, see p. 197). The work shows that within the local Banner system, there were plenty of people who were ethnically Chinese, and it defines a category which had been neglected in previous research: the so called Banner followers (*suiqiren* 隨旗人) – these were primarily Chinese migrants who entered the local Chinese Martial Banners through several channels throughout the Qing dynasty period (see particularly pp. 196–242). Thus we can deduce that there were in fact paths by which Chinese migrants could enter Manchurian society, and that these were kept open throughout the centuries of Qing dominion. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the importance of the “interdiction policy” (*fengjin zhengce* 封禁政策) as a research topic. As migratory flows increased and eventually reached a massive scale, regardless of how complex the Manchurian Banner system was, the Qing court perceived it as a single vast constituency, the other being the Chinese commoners migrating to the region. In the eyes of Emperor Kangxi and especially Emperor Qianlong, immigrants were appropriating resources (mainly land) to which bannermen were entitled and were influencing Manchu culture – hence the official interdiction in 1740.

“civilian commoners”⁷ (*minren* 民人); compared to the latter group of Chinese, the former enjoyed certain privileges.⁸ As the number of migrations increased from the mid- to the late Kangxi period, the commoners became an increasingly important component of Manchurian society, thus heightening the above-mentioned contradiction. We will return to this point below; here it will suffice to say that, for these reasons, this study is based on constituencies rather than ethnicities.⁹

Among the Qing institutional sources I consulted, the *Veritable Records* (*Qing shilu* 清實錄) report the imperial orders issued as well as the considerations upon which those orders were based, thus enabling us to trace the court’s decision-making process. Where the *Records* and other similar sources are not exhaustive, I have resorted to archival materials. By comparing this information with the data contained in the local sources, the gazetteers (*Difang zhi* 地方志), we can obtain a more comprehensive view of the development of the local administrations – which, as I will show, is closely related to immigration policies. These documents also provide statistics on demography and economy, but these data are often scarce and not always reliable. The vivid depictions of society in the region which can be found in private writings – such as treatises, memoirs, and travel diaries – are helpful in this respect, since they can provide general indications of population density levels, economic development, and people’s living conditions. More importantly, they sometimes shed light on sensitive issues omitted from the official accounts. Further methodological indications as well as information on contemporary research on this topic can be found in the paragraphs below.

2 Manchuria’s first opening and the foundation of the civil administration system

In 1653, Emperor Shunzhi’s court, which was very worried about the motherland’s depopulation, issued the so-called *Liaodong zhaomin kaiken ling* (遼東招民開墾令), the “regulation for repopulation and land reclamation in Liaodong.” Not only would migrants be granted basic material resources for settling there – seeds, tools and

7 Translation by S. Chen 2017.

8 See Ding et al. 2004: 214–220).

9 In Isett’s words: “In this construction, the Qing state was not drawing lines between Manchu and Han ethnic group per se, but rather between those peasants who were part of the banner system and those who were not” (2006: 57). In his *State, Peasant and Merchant in Qing Manchuria 1644–1862* (2006), which is a major contribution to this field of study, Isett also clarifies how, despite such a state of affairs, the language of imperial discourse became more “ethnized” beginning in the Qianlong era, associating the migrant commoners with the Han culture that was threatening the pure Manchu customs, thus leading them to think that all the Han in Manchuria were commoners; in the Kangxi period, this distinction was clearer (pp. 54–55).

oxen – but more importantly, alluring incentives were offered to whoever managed to take a certain amount of people with them to the territory east of the Liao river. In particular, whoever recruited at least one hundred settlers and led them to the new land would be granted the title of *zhixian* (知縣), a county magistrate. In other words, the immigrants' leaders (*zhaotou* 招頭, literally meaning “people summoners”) would receive a state stipend to govern the people they conducted to the northeast, without having to take the imperial examination.

In the same year, Manchuria's civil administration system was founded. A prefecture was set up in Liaoyang 遼陽 (Liaoyang fu 遼陽府), and two counties – Liaoyang (Liaoyang xian 遼陽縣) and Haicheng 海城 – were also established. Due to the low demographic pressure and the recovery of agricultural production on the North China Plain, the migratory inflow was very disappointing during the first years in which the regulation was implemented, despite the incentives.¹⁰ In 1661, the Liaoyang prefect 張尚賢 submitted to the throne a famous memorial in which he denounced the desolation of the ancestral land and asserted that “the Roots needed to be nurtured.”¹¹ In the first years of the Kangxi era, between 1662 and 1664, decisive action was taken in this direction. The prefecture was moved to Shenyang (the last Manchu capital prior to the conquest of Beijing), given the name of Fengtian 奉天, and upgraded to a “capital prefecture;”¹² Liaoyang became a sub-prefecture (*zhou* 州). Much more importantly, a new ordinary prefecture in Liaoxi,¹³ Jiinzhou fu 錦州府, and seven new centers were established: Chengde 承德, in Shenyang; Gaiping 蓋平, in the coastal area southeast of the Liao river, not far from Haicheng; Kaiyuan 開源 and Tieling 鐵嶺, north of Shenyang, near the willow palisade;¹⁴ and Jiinxian 錦縣, Ningyuan 寧遠, and Guangning 廣寧, west of the river (Figure 1).¹⁵

¹⁰ See Lee 1970: 78–79; Isett 2006: 33.

¹¹ From the very well known “Memorial on the Situation of the Roots” *Genben xingshi shu* 根本形勢疏, reported in *Qing shilu* 4: 64–65.

¹² *Jingfu* 京府. Shenyang was the only capital prefecture in the empire other than Shuntian fu 順天府 in Beijing. This was an honor reserved for Mukden, which – after the conquest of China – was regarded as the “secondary capital” (*peidu* 陪都). The one previously established in Liaoyang was an ordinary prefecture. The titles of the respective chief officials also differed – *fuyin* 府尹 in the capital, *zhifu* 知府 in the ordinary prefecture – and obviously the former had the higher rank. The functionaries involved in the situations analyzed here were all in charge of Fengtian and will be referred to generally as “prefects.”

¹³ 遼西, the territories between Shanhai Pass and the Liao river, belonging to Liaoning province, which are still referred to as such today.

¹⁴ See below.

¹⁵ Such information is found in fascicles (*juan*) on “foundation and development” (*jianzhi yange* 建制沿革) and on “territories and borders” (*jiangyu* 疆域) in all the local gazetteers from the Kangxi era, as well as in the various editions of the *Shengjing General Gazetteer* (*Shengjing tongzhi* 盛京通志). For a list of these sources, see the references section at the end of this article.

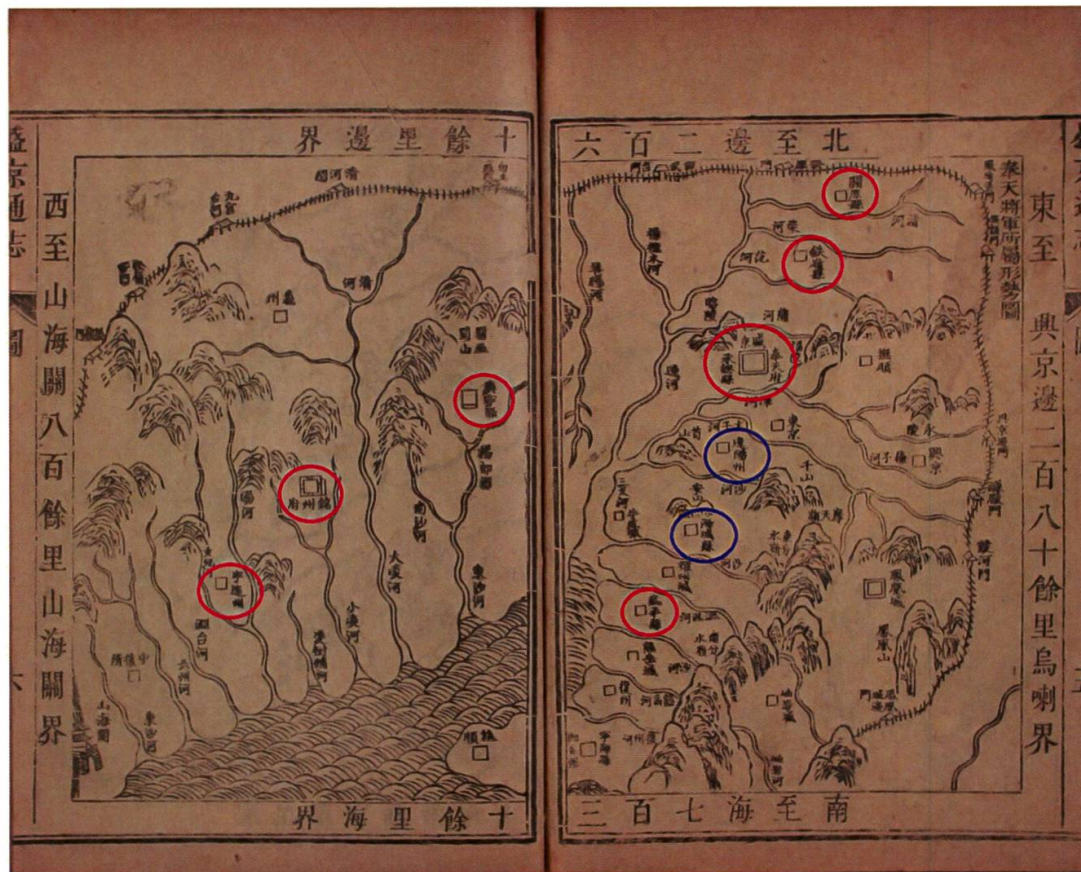


Figure 1: Development of the civil administrative structure of southern Manchuria 1653–1664, original picture from *Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 1st year edition, *tu*: 5–6. Jurisdictions founded in 1653. Jurisdictions added from 1662 to 1664.

From then on, in the area roughly corresponding to present-day Liaoning province, two local government structures – the Eight Banners, which had Manchu origins, and the traditional Chinese *zhouxianzhi* 州縣制 system – would coexist.¹⁶ These structures, which were in charge of bannermen and civilian commoners, respectively, were supposed to work separately, and the two constituencies were also supposed to live apart.

In the first years of Kangxi's rule, the civilian population in the area grew significantly.¹⁷ Just a few years later, however, when it seemed that the measure was finally starting to pay off, the court abolished the regulation. In a previous

¹⁶ For accounts of the evolution of the Manchurian binary administrative system, see Yang Yulian et al. 1991: 101–157; Zhang Shizun 2003: 237–300; Ren Yuxue 2003; Tong Dong et al. 2006: 1339–1367; Ding Haibin, Shi Yi 2007: 65–103; Liu Xiaomeng 2015; and Liang Chaoqian 2020.

¹⁷ All of the above-listed studies on the 1653 regulation contain statistical data on the growth of the population and the increase in land under cultivation.

publication, I made an attempt to demonstrate that this decision was mainly due to the difficult coexistence between the two main constituencies. Sources that had not previously been taken into account show that as early as the mid-sixties, disputes – and sometimes violent conflicts – over land had arisen between the two groups. Kangxi decided in favor of the banners. It took some effort to prove this, since sources on that period are sketchy and implicit, when not outright misleading – some of the reasons adduced by the functionaries who pushed for the abrogation of the practice were merely pretexts.¹⁸ However, the sovereign's intentions would become transparent less than a decade later. Between 1679 and 1680, the emperor ordered that all the Liaoshen lands should be measured and allocated, and 84 percent of this area was recognized as belonging to bannermen. The emperor intended to base the region's agricultural economic development on the banners.¹⁹

As many scholars have argued,²⁰ the end of the 1653 regulation was not the beginning of the Manchurian interdiction on the migration of Chinese commoners. This statement is still correct, since while migration was no longer encouraged after 1668, it was still permitted. Yet as Guan Donggui noted as early as 1972, it was an important step in that direction.²¹ Over the subsequent decades, the court maintained a reluctant attitude toward the phenomena,²² and no major measures to address the increasing number of immigrants were taken.

Let us now look back at what was done in the years under the regulation. The alluring incentive of obtaining an administrative rank by virtue of the number of people one brought to the place did not actually work very well,²³ and the measure would never have been reimplemented. Apart from this, a complex administrative

¹⁸ Most of the works on the regulation see the rationale for its abolishment either in its ineffectiveness or in the problems of corruption and bad governance reported to the court shortly before the decision was made to rescind the regulation in 1668 (see, for instance, *Qing shilu* 4: 314). Guan Donggui 1972; Yang Yulian 1991: 162–163; Isett 2006: 33–34; and Sepe 2021: 123–128 have all pointed out that the reason had to do with clashes between constituencies and the court's choice to favor bannermen.

¹⁹ The orders of 1679–1680 and the subsequent related decrees of 1689 are reported in *Qing shilu* 4: 1105, 1150, and 5: 548–549. Apart from land distribution, the emperor also commanded that borders be established between lands belonging to different constituencies, which were thus officially segregated. See Yang Yulian 1991: 162–163; Zhang Shizun 2003: 312–318; Isett 2006: 34, 55–56; Zhang Jie 2009: 13–14; and Liu Xiaomeng 2015: 10.

²⁰ Most Chinese specialists, including eminent scholars such as Diao Shuren (1995, 1998) and Zhang Jie (1994, 1999), agree on this point.

²¹ Guan Donggui 1972: 244–245.

²² Chinese vagrants were requested to apply for permits from the Board of War (*qi piao* 起票), and guards were posted at all the passes leading into Manchuria. As a primary source on this subject, see *Treatise on the Willow Palisade*, by Yang Bin, 1707, *juan* 1: 7. For contemporary works, see Isett 2006: 34; Zhang Jie 1994: 115–116.

²³ Sepe 2017 and 2018.

apparatus was established, a great number of officials were appointed, new jurisdictions were founded, and settlers were free to reclaim wasteland.

If an authority allows new people to settle in a place, it needs bureaucratic structures to govern them; in an agricultural economy, it also needs to give them land to cultivate, from which fiscal revenue is also generated. Activities on this front are a criterion by which to judge the extent to which the authorities are willing to welcome immigrants to a region. Emperor Yongzheng did quite a lot in this respect, founding six new civil jurisdictions and allowing commoners to clear land – the same measures taken during the period of the 1653 regulation – whereas the policies under Kangxi and Qianlong inclined in the opposite direction.

This is the mainstream perspective of Chinese scholars who have mentioned Yongzheng's tactics. They consider the emperor's decisions to be a consequence of the increasing influx of people into Manchuria. In contrast, Western scholars have argued that any enlargement of the civil bureaucracy was actually intended to limit the mobility of commoners in the region²⁴ and to support the collection of taxes on land owned by commoners. In particular, Reardon-Anderson has stated that the number of civil offices – which were in charge of taxes – installed in an area indicates the extent to which the court expected local agriculture in that area to develop.²⁵ In my opinion, the two points of view do not necessarily contradict each other. If Yongzheng's court estimated the agricultural potential of the land in Manchuria, they surely also took into account both the natural growth of the local civilian population and the immigration factor. New civil offices were set up both to receive migrants and to keep them under control.

Nevertheless, the Chinese scholars' approach appears simplistic. Their work only accounts for the facts, while the processes that led to those decisions are not investigated in any depth. More importantly, it seems they are not overly concerned by the fact that prior to Yongzheng's decrees, the Kangxi administration had not taken any similar action for nearly sixty years; thus they fail to see the contrast between the emperors' different attitudes and therefore to acknowledge the peculiarity and importance of Yongzheng's positions.²⁶ In Western research, the new jurisdictions and their specific circumstances are barely mentioned, and in general, Yongzheng's policies in the region are not discussed in a satisfactory manner.²⁷

²⁴ Isett 2006: 33–34.

²⁵ Reardon-Anderson 2005: 39.

²⁶ Among the most influential works, see Yang Yulian et al. 1991: 137–138; Zhang Jie 1994: 115–116 and 1999: 79–80; Diao Shuren 1995: 30–36; Zhang Shizun 2003: 264–266; Ren Yuxue 2003: 44–46; Tong Dong et al. 2006: 1351–1352; and Liu Xiaomeng 2015: 2–4.

²⁷ Reardon-Anderson (2005: 39–41) accounts for the establishment of Yongji sub-prefecture and the counties of Taining and Changning (see below), as well as the dissolution of the latter two.

In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to analyze the above-mentioned aspects in depth, as these have been neglected in previous research. My main focus will be on the rulers' positions toward immigration and on Manchuria's civilian commoners in general. Based on the premises outlined above, I will look at local government structures and land allocation issues as elements that can help to interpret the rulers' intentions.

3 Re-opening in the Yongzheng era

While it was neither the only nor the primary reason for the annulment of the incentives to migrate in 1668, the low rate of migratory inflow and the consequent perception of the 1653 regulation as a failure are nevertheless facts. This situation would change dramatically a few decades later. In the late Kangxi period, economic growth could no longer balance out the demographic increase. People's living conditions south of the Great Wall worsened, and copious migratory flows began. In 1716 the emperor himself expressed his concerns about this situation, saying, "Those who say that new lands should be put to use do not seem to know that there is no more free space in the inner territories. This is why many of our subjects moved outside the Wall." He then went on to complain about the fact that the Han people could not conceive of any livelihood other than farming, while some of them could certainly have gone to live in the western regions if only they could have learned herding from the Mongols.²⁸ Kangxi's evaluation was far too pessimistic; the agricultural economy was still far from reaching saturation point. Certainly, however, after a "long period of harmony," things had changed significantly in comparison with the post-war era of reconstruction. Finding land to work was becoming harder, and the fertile expanses east of Shanhai Pass were surely an attractive destination.

In addition, the same years saw Manchuria's border regions and other nearby areas – particularly Shandong – struck by famines and natural disasters. Such catastrophes are reported in many local gazetteers (the *Wendeng Gazetteer* in Shandong contains a dedicated section on these events²⁹). For instance, the *Weihai Gazetteer* tells how hundreds of indigent families and single individuals left that arid place to start a new life east of the pass.³⁰ Shandong is only a day's sail from Liaodong. According to a later source written by a Mongol official who served in Fenghuang, by the mid-eighteenth century the area between Jinzhou, Gaiping, and Fuzhou had been entirely

28 *Qing shilu* 6: 629–630.

29 *Wendeng Gazetteer* juan 7.

30 *Gazetteer of Weihai in Shandong Province*: 368.

occupied by the “ferocious people of Qi.”³¹ However, people from more remote regions were reaching Manchuria as well. After Kangxi lifted the ban on maritime commerce, merchant ships from Fujian and Zhejiang smuggled refugees into southeastern Liaodong.³² Many others followed land routes into Liaoxi and even northern Manchuria.

By the end of Kangxi’s reign, Manchuria’s non-banner population had increased substantially, and it continued to do so in the early Yongzheng years. Unlike his father, the new emperor accepted the fact that it would not have been easy to limit the phenomenon of migration and to base the region’s development on the banners alone. Therefore he decided to designate more space and further resources to those newly arrived, and to commoners in general, so that vast portions of abandoned land could be cultivated and the refugees (*liumin* 流民 or *ximin* 徙民) – could become citizens (*minren* 民人).

3.1 New *zhous* and *xians* beyond the palisade³³

In the Shunzhi and Kangxi eras, no civil government structures based on the Chinese model were established in Jilin or Heilongjiang. When this kind of administration was first established in Liaoning in 1653, a banner general’s headquarters was set up in Ningguta.³⁴ Thirty years later, mainly for military reasons, a new commander was stationed in Aihūn,³⁵ with the title of Heilongjiang General. Beginning around 1650, a “Willow Palisade” (Chinese *liutiaobian* 柳條邊, Manchu *Biregen i jase*) was erected to mark the regional border that divided Liaoshen, northern Manchuria, and the Mongol territories.³⁶ Liaodong was where Nurhaci was born and the Qing dynasty

31 Scattered notes on Fengcheng: 3, in *Liaohai congshu*: 274.

32 *Memories of Liaozuo*: 119.

33 One would expect that such a captivating topic as the expansion of civil territory beyond the barrier which was supposed to keep commoners out of northern Manchuria (see below) would have attracted more attention in Chinese academic circles. Interestingly enough, however, this does not appear to be the case. As I have pointed out above, to date no Chinese scholars has analyzed the background and processes of this phenomenon in depth, and only a few have acknowledged its primary importance (Yang Yulian et al. 1991: 137; Zhang Jie 1999: 79; and Liu Xiaomeng 2015: 4). Even more curiously, when Liu Xiaomeng mentions the issue in his detailed and accurate 2015 study, which is based on a large amount of archival material and Qing sources, he only quotes a contemporary source – Yang Yulian.

34 Present-day Ning’an county, Heilongjiang. Ninggun is Manchu for “six,” and -ta is similar to the Chinese general classifier *ge* 个. Ningguta would thus translate as “the six” – see *Treatise on Ningguta*: 1. In popular culture, the six were identified with the sons of Fuman, Nurhaci’s great-grandfather, thus consecrating the place. This has never been proven definitively, however, and the name’s origins remain uncertain.

35 Generally transcribed into Chinese as Aihui 璦琿; present-day Heihe, in Heilongjiang province.

36 For extensive accounts of the palisade’s structure, geographical distribution, ramifications, and functions, see Yang Shusen 1978; and Edmonds 1979.

was later established (*long xing zhi di* 龍興之地), but it was also a Ming province that the Manchu had to conquer, whereas the area around Mount Changbai and the Sunggari river constituted the roots of the true ancestral land (*faxiang zhi di* 發祥之地). Therefore the sovereigns were even more concerned about Chinese commoners moving “beyond the Palisade” (*bianwai* 邊外) than they were about them settling “beyond the Pass” (*guanwai* 關外). In the Kangxi period, migrating to Liaoshen was permitted, albeit with restrictions, while crossing the willow barrier was a crime.³⁷

Nevertheless, since it was very difficult to keep such a vast territory under control, and as the palisade – which was mostly made of embankments no higher than 2 m, upon which willows were planted – was not hard to get over, a certain number of migrants, both peasants and merchants, made their way into Jilin.

Institutional sources up to the Yongzheng era are rarely explicit on the sensitive issue of civilians encroaching on the forbidden land; instead, they report all kinds of prohibitions. Private works, on the other hand, while they do not provide figures, give interesting glimpses of the phenomenon nevertheless.

The following are quotations of some relevant passages from such sources:

邊外或數里或數十里即為一臺, 以備守邊, 皆於奉天戌籍中轉發者。土地肥美, 任人開墾而不起科。多窩藏逋逃及創參之人, 因緣為奸, 以此家多殷實, 邊內貧民反羨為樂土。

Along the barrier, every few *li*, or every few dozen *li* in some segments, manned platforms are set up to guard the border. Sentinels were transferred from Fengtian, where they previously also served as guards. There lands are fertile, can be cultivated freely, and are not taxed. Many criminals on the run and ginseng collectors take refuge here and collude with each other in illicit activities. This is why many families are wealthy. In the eyes of the poor population inside the barrier, it certainly looks like paradise.³⁸

Wang Yiyuan 王一元 (1658–?), a brilliant man of letters from Jiangsu province, lived in Shenyang and Tieling from 1685 to 1703. He then obtained the *jinshi* 進士 qualification and was appointed magistrate of Lingtai 靈臺 county in Gansu province. Having moved back to his hometown in his old age, he wrote down what he had witnessed in Manchuria in his *Memories of Liaozuo*, which is one of the richest and most precious private texts on the region. It provides information on the various constituencies of the place, which can hardly be found in official sources, and sheds light on the living conditions of the Chinese commoners who had moved there from 1653 onward.

In the passage above, he may have exaggerated his depiction of the areas outside the palisade as a no-man’s land, simply there for the taking – in fact, there is no evidence that he ever went beyond the willow barrier himself. Yet it was

³⁷ *Memories of Liaozuo*: 154.

³⁸ *Memories of Liaozuo*: 155.

certainly harder for the local banner government – which had fewer resources at its disposal than Shengjing did – to keep those zones under control, so land taxes were indeed evaded, and state-monopolized goods were traded illegally. Nevertheless, this paragraph shows that many of the people who migrated to Manchuria pushed on farther than Liaodong and went to the northern part of the region.

船廠，即小吳喇，南臨混同江[...]。康熙十五年春移寧古塔將軍鎮之。中土流人千餘家、西關百貨湊集，旗亭、戲館無一不有。亦邊外一都會也。

“Dockyard,” also called Little Ula, faces the Huntong river to the south [...]. In the spring of the fifteenth year of Kangxi [1676], the general’s headquarters was moved here from Ningguta. After that, more than a thousand families from the midland, bringing all kinds of goods, gathered in that place. There are inns, theaters, and everything. One could call it a metropolis beyond the frontier.³⁹

內城中惟容將軍、護從及守門兵丁，餘悉居外城。[...]漢人各居東、西兩門之外。予家在東門外[...]。後因吳三桂造逆，調兵一空，令漢人俱徙入城中，予家因移住西門內。內有東西大街，人於此開店貿易。從此，人煙稠密，貨物客商絡繹不絕，居然有華夏風景。

Only the general, his attendants, and the gate guards lived in the inner city. Everyone else had to stay in the outer one. [...] The Chinese dwelt outside the east and west gates. Our family lived outside the east gate [...]. Later on, Wu Sangui rebelled, the soldiers were all sent to fight, and the Chinese were transferred inside, so we moved inside the west gate. A big road crossed the inner city from east to west, and many people opened stores along its route. From then on, the place was densely populated; merchants from other provinces came and went ceaselessly, and the hustle and bustle resembled Chinese towns.⁴⁰

當我父初到時，其地寒苦。[...]初至者必三襲裘，久居則重裘可禦寒矣。[...]近來漢官到後，日向和暖，大異曩時。滿洲人云：“此暖是蠻子帶來。”可見天意垂憫流人，⁴¹回此陽和也。

When my father arrived here, the weather was glacial. [...] When a person first got here, they had to wear three coats to withstand the cold. After some time, two were enough. Recently, since the Chinese officials came, it is getting warmer every day; it is indeed very different now. The

³⁹ *Treatise on the Willow Palisade*, juan 1: 7.

⁴⁰ *Treatise on Ningguta*: 3–4.

⁴¹ Not to be confused with *liumin* 流民, which are generally vagrants, *liuren* are people who were exiled to Manchuria. The Qing court exiled people to Manchuria for centuries, beginning from the time when they were trying to encourage migration to the northeast – one more contradiction in the dynasty’s management of the region. In 1668, in order to boost the disappointing population increase obtained as a result of the incentives, many of the exiles were pardoned and registered as commoners (see the above-mentioned studies on the regulation; this fact is also mentioned in *Memories of Liaozuo*: 123). On other occasions, they were sent to work in on imperial estate lands or enlisted in local military forces.

Manchus always say: “the southern barbarians brought this heat with them.” Apparently heaven pities us derelicts and is blessing us with some warmth.⁴²

Unlike Wang Yiyuan, Yang Bin 楊賓 (1650–1720, from Shaoxing, in Zhejiang province) went to Jilin several times to visit his father, who had been exiled there in 1662. His *Treatise on the Willow Palisade* is widely considered one of the most valuable primary sources on the barrier, and on northern Manchuria under Qing rule more generally. Wu Zhenchen’s 吳振臣 (1664–?) father was also exiled to Ningguta (in 1657). Born and raised there, the author of the *Treatise on Ningguta* left the place when his father was pardoned. The two moved back to the family’s hometown, Wujiang 吳江, in Jiangsu province.⁴³

Both of these works confirm that in the Kangxi period, the non-bannermen population in Jilin’s major population centers was growing. The Chinese immigrant communities were an increasingly important component of northern Manchuria’s social landscape.

The *Veritable Records* of the Yongzheng period attest that the emperor was aware of such circumstances even in his first year on the throne. In May 1723, addressing the Grand Secretariat, he stated that the population in “Dockyard” and the surrounding areas was increasing, and trade was flourishing: “such affairs should be under the authority of local personnel (*difang guan* 地方官). At the moment, only military officials are present, and this leads to irregularities.”⁴⁴ It was thus necessary to send qualified functionaries to manage these situations. After holding consultations, it was determined that two excellent officials – one Manchu and one Chinese – would be selected from among the censors and the supervisors to take on this task. Even at this early stage, we can infer that this was merely a provisional measure. In his own words, the ruler had implied that the area lacked a civil administration (in this type of document, *difang guan* refers to the civil branch of government, whereas the term for the banners stationed in the provinces is *zhufang* 駐防), thus laying the groundwork for the foundation of such an administration in the future. Furthermore, if such structures were present, then the “irregularities” the censors were sent to deal with would not have occurred in the first place.

Only three years later, the emperor ordered the establishment of the Yongji 永吉 sub-prefecture and the two counties of Changning 長寧 and Taining 泰寧, respectively, adjacent to Dockyard, Bedune, and Ningguta – the three main banner headquarters. The *Records* do not provide details on this decision, apart from mentioning that the measure was taken at the suggestion of Secretary Desin, who had been sent into the field to conduct evaluations (*feng chai* 奉差). Desin’s original memorial is not reported, however,

⁴² *Treatise on Ningguta*: 6–7.

⁴³ For further biographical information on the two, see *Biographies of Qing Era*, juan 70: 5738.

⁴⁴ *Qing shilu* 7: 129.

and also cannot be found in the archives, where other propositions he wrote when he served as secretary are preserved. Nevertheless, a “Memorial Responded to in Red Ink,”⁴⁵ submitted in late 1724 by the two delegates sent to Jilin that year – Hese and Wang Hong 王珙 – helps to fill in the gaps in the decision-making process.⁴⁶ Based on the document’s phrasing, it is clear that a large number of *minren* lived in the area, and that litigation with bannermen was frequent. The two functionaries praised their predecessors – Zhao Diansui 趙殿最 and Mai Zhu 邁柱⁴⁷ – for having done a good job keeping the two groups in line, but also stated that the military officers (banner commanders) were not very familiar with enforcing the law, balancing land tax accounts, or issuing official documents. Therefore, along with the general, they would be making every effort to ensure that “all the affairs of all the people, regardless of whether [they are] Manchu or Chinese, soldiers or civilians, would be administered justly [...] so that bannermen might focus on their tasks, and commoners abide by the law, and live and work joyfully.”⁴⁸ Thus Desin was faced with this type of situation when he arrived in the field. Most likely he concluded that it was time to install proper bureaucratic structures, which would have the capacity to administer the local commoners more efficiently than the annually appointed censors. Naturally the state would have benefited from such an action, since the lands in the area would then have been consistently registered and taxed. Moreover, as Hese and Wang Hong had subtly pointed out, illegal activities were also increasing,

45 During the Qing era, the emperors wrote responses to memorials to the throne in cinnabar ink. When officials asked the sovereign for specific commands (*qing zhi* 請旨), these were also written in vermilion ink. A copy would be sent back to the functionary, who was obviously supposed to proceed according to the imperial response or order.

46 Local sources are of no use on this front. Just like the *Records*, they only report the final result: the foundation of the jurisdictions; see *General Gazetteer of Jilin*: 222–224 and 970–979; *Treatise on Jilin* *juan* 3: 7–8. The compilers of the *Yongji County Gazetteer* seem more concerned about the exact time when the new centers were installed than on the reasons for this move: see *juan* 1: 16–17.

47 *Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 1st year edition, *juan* 20: 93.

48 *Collection of Yongzheng Era’s Memorials in Chinese Responded to in Red Ink*, vol. 4, document n. 131. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it very difficult to consult unpublished archives. In addition, the *Archive of Fengtian Prefecture* (*Fengtian fu dang’an* 奉天府檔案), which would have been a source of the utmost importance for the study of this topic, is lost. In none of the collections I currently have access to (which include the above-mentioned one, the *Collection of Yongzheng Era’s Translated Manchu Memorials Responded to in Red Ink*, and the *Red Ink Imperial Orders of Yongzheng*) is there any mention of Desin. I have searched for additional information in documents submitted by other officials who served in Manchuria at the time, including censors, prefects, and functionaries for the Shengjing Board of Revenue, but have found nothing relevant. For instance, the collections only contain memorials which the above-mentioned Mai Zhu and the prefects Cai Ting and Wang Chao’en presented to the court once they had already been promoted and transferred (see the *Red Ink Imperial Orders*, volumes 53–54, 21, and 36, respectively). Only four documents submitted by Desin are found in the digital index of the *First Historical Archives of China*, and none relate to the subject of this study.

and the new civil apparatus would have had a better chance of preventing such activities. Yet the logical consistency of the factors I have analyzed above should not mislead us into thinking that Yongzheng's decision was an easy one, since clashes could have arisen between the two different power structures, as was the order of the day in southern Manchuria.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the emperor chose to take this risk.

1726 was a very important year in both the social and the institutional history of Qing Manchuria. Sixty-two years had passed since civil administrative units had last been founded. For decades, immigration had increased constantly, but the government structures with authority over the new settlers had not developed significantly. In addition, the three population centers beyond the willow barrier were under the authority of Fengtian capital prefecture. The prefect's jurisdiction thus expanded north of the palisade and intersected not only with that of the Shengjing banner general, but also with that of the Jilin general. Therefore, as far as the civil jurisdictions were concerned, the willow palisade did not "divide the In and the Out."⁵⁰

3.2 New *zhous* and *xians* in Liaonan and Liaoxi

The areas to the west and the southeast of the Liao river were by far the most hospitable in Manchuria. Liaoxi's population centers, located just beyond the Shanhai Pass, were much nearer to China proper than those east of the river. As for the latter zone, we have seen that it was easily accessible by sea; furthermore, the coastal area's climate was much more forgiving than the climate anywhere else in the region. Even in early Kangxi times, when migratory flows were merely a trickle, the demographic density in these two places was relatively high. In the years during which the 1653 regulation was in effect, the court made efforts to push settlers northeastward by founding civil counties in Shenyang and to the north – in Tieling and Kaiyuan – as well as establishing Liaoxi prefecture in Guangning, east of Jiinzhou (where it would later move), this being the most populated, key population center in the sub-region. This maneuver was not very successful. Migrants concentrated particularly in Liaonan – according to Prefect Xu Jiwei 徐繼燁, in 1663 the area between Haicheng county and the Niuzhuang 牛莊 banner garrison was

49 With the intermingling of bannermen and commoners (*qi min za chu* 旗民雜處), disputes and even violent crimes were frequent. The uncertain and often changing laws regulating jurisdictional powers and investigation protocols caused the two branches of the administration to dodge responsibilities (see, for instance, *Qing shilu* 8: 608; Ren Yuxue 2003: 45, 47–48). Litigation over land also set them against each other.

50 In two poems dedicated to the willow palisade, Emperor Qianlong used the expressions *hua* (demarcate) *neiwai* 畫內外 (*Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 48th year edition, *juan* 13: 2–3) and *bie* (distinguish) *neiwai* 別內外 (*Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 48th year edition, *juan* 16: 5–6).

overpopulated,⁵¹ and officials in the northern cities had to work very hard to attract people to their jurisdictions.⁵²

When migration intensified in the subsequent decades, this trend did not change. Nevertheless, apart from allowing an unknown number of commoners from Jinzhou 金州 to join the banners in 1681,⁵³ Kangxi's court took no major measures to handle the situation. At the end of Kangxi's reign, the only seats of civil government in Liaonan were the counties of Haicheng and Gaiping, founded in 1653 and 1664, respectively. There, as in Liaoxi, only the Banner system had been enlarged. The above-mentioned Niuzhuang garrison was located east of Haicheng, while the garrisons of Fuzhou 復州 and Jinzhou 金州 stood south of Gaiping.

The civil administrations at that time were clearly insufficient to govern these densely inhabited zones. Both newly arrived immigrants and the commoners registered in these counties often trespassed into the neighboring banner-controlled territories in search of abandoned lands, at the risk of provoking conflict with the bannermen. In 1726, the same year in which the counties beyond the willow palisade were founded, provisional measures were taken in Liaonan. An inspector (*tongpan* 通判) was appointed in Fuzhou and tasked with administering the local commoners on behalf of Fengtian prefecture, to which the new official answered directly. Offices of this kind, stationed in the various jurisdictions, served as remote cells of the central prefectural authorities. Their tasks included mediating in litigation and criminal cases involving bannermen and commoners, and also collecting land taxes from civilians living in banner territories. Kangxi had already designated several itinerant superintendents (*xunjian* 巡檢) who performed similar functions to the inspectors, but at a lower level. In places where proper civil government structures had not yet been established, these posts served as government surrogates.⁵⁴ This was the case for the Fuzhou inspector as well as the superintendents in Jinzhou and Yizhou 義州 (which was northwest of Jinzhou).

Some years later, however, the emperor resolved to take more decisive action. Before we can analyze this, more contextualization – on both a national and a local scale – is necessary.

Just like his father, Yongzheng was concerned about the worsening average living conditions among his people, which were mainly due to the demographic increase. Yet in contradistinction to Kangxi, he intended to balance out this population growth by promoting agricultural development. In his very first year in power,

⁵¹ *Qing shilu* 4: 133.

⁵² Sepe 2017 and 2018.

⁵³ *Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 1st year edition, *juan* 19: 19.

⁵⁴ Liu Xiaomeng (2015: 13–15) and especially Ren Yuxue (2003: 45–46) offer insights on the provisional nature of these offices and the transition to civil jurisdictions in southern Manchuria.

he was very clear on this point; when addressing the Ministry of Revenue, he stated: “Land reclamation is the thing that will benefit our people the most.” The sovereign then went on to express his worries about corruption in the local administrations and its consequences for reclamation activities. He accused officials at every level of perpetrating extortion and asserted that the authorities should instead be guiding people in the reclamation operation. He encouraged reclamation and ordered that functionaries who could successfully direct commoners to clear the largest plots of land would receive formal praise – which could lead to raises or promotions. In this way, he hoped that “no more wasteland would be seen and no families [would] suffer from hunger.”⁵⁵

These arrangements were to be enforced throughout the country, and based on the measures taken in northern Manchuria, it is clear that the motherland was no exception. Chinese civilian commoners, who were more expert and more industrious farmers than most of the bannermen, migrated to Manchuria – driven by hunger and natural disasters – and were eager to find land to cultivate. The emperor considered the multiple benefits of conceding more space to new settlers and to *minren* in general: given the abundance of unused land in the region, the agricultural economy of the banners would not have been threatened, at least over the short- to mid-term; refugees would have the means to provide for themselves; and consistently registered fields would have generated income for the state, while none would have been obtained from land cultivated illegally.

Thus we can easily infer that the *minren* population of southern Manchuria was growing at a higher rate than in the northern part of the region. Relatively well-developed civil administration structures were present there, but judging from the events that occurred during the last years of Yongzheng’s reign, we can deduce that these structures were insufficient, especially in the above-mentioned, rather densely populated areas.

Additionally, corruption had arisen in the local offices. Yang Chaozeng 楊超曾⁵⁶ brought this fact to light just a few months after he was appointed prefect of Fengtian, in the summer of 1731. This newly minted, highest civil authority denounced the extortion and embezzlement perpetrated by bureaucrats at every level of the local administrations, including his direct subordinates in Shenyang prefecture, the Jiinzhou prefect, and members of his office, as well as magistrates and their clerks in all the counties. According to Yang, when he submitted the denunciatory memorial,

⁵⁵ *Qing shilu* 8: 51.

⁵⁶ Apart from several, rather detailed mentions in the *Records*, two biographies of the man are available, which are very helpful in analyzing his activities as Fengtian prefect: *Biographies of the Qing Era* (see below): 1278–1281; and *General Gazetteer of Fengtian*, juan 141: 11–12. Several memorials he submitted to the court when he was the prefect of Fengtian are also available: see *Collection of Yongzheng Era’s Memorials in Chinese Responded to in Red Ink*, vol. 20–25.

he had already dealt with the situation by prohibiting such behavior. Based on the sources, it seems that no serious sanctions against the culprits were enforced. Yet the emperor enthusiastically praised the new prefect's deeds: "Corruption in local administrations has always harmed the people. Yang Chaozeng investigated and forbade such misconduct everywhere in the region. He has done excellently."⁵⁷ This praise is understandable, considering that the problems Yang addressed – corrupt government practices that affected the people and the agricultural economy – were precisely those about which the sovereign had been concerned since the very day he first sat on the throne.

Yongzheng also ordered that Yang's words be affixed to the doors of all the region's *yamens* as a reminder for both present and future officials.⁵⁸ By so doing, the emperor consolidated Yang's authority and laid the groundwork for his leadership to bring change to the place. Although Yang was promoted and transferred just two years later – he had probably made far too many enemies to stay any longer – another memorial he submitted immediately after his promotion did change Manchuria's social and institutional landscape, once again in favor of the civil administration. He argued that both the population and the amount of cultivated land had increased enormously in the coastal area and in Liaoxi; thus it was time to abandon provisional measures and to replace inspectors and superintendents with proper civil administrations.⁵⁹ Yang's proposals were approved.⁶⁰ The offices of Fuzhou's inspector, Jinzhou's superintendent, and Yizhou's superintendent became Fuzhou sub-prefecture 復州, Ninghai county 寧海縣, and Yizhou sub-prefecture 義州, respectively (see Figure 2).

These three new jurisdictions welcomed thousands of civilians – both new settlers from China proper and people who were transferred from neighboring counties – and the demographic pressure on the coastal region and on Jiinzhou decreased significantly. Large portions of land were assigned to *minrens*, cleared,

⁵⁷ *Qing shilu* 8: 507.

⁵⁸ *Qing shilu* 8: 508.

⁵⁹ *Biographies of Qing Era (Qingshi liezhuan 清史列傳)*: 1278–1279. It is not known who compiled the collection. According to Wang Zhonghan, who edited and punctuated the work for Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, the materials have been selected from other collections compiled by the Qing Historiographical Office (Qing Guoshi guan 清國史館), such as *Dachen liezhuan gaoben* 大臣列傳稿本 (Draft Biographies of Distinguished Officials) and *Man Han mingchen zhuan* 滿漢名臣傳 (Biographies of Manchu and Han Illustrious Officials). The biography of Yang Chaozeng found in this source, although of course not as detailed, effectively conveys the core content of the original memorial found in the archives. This document indicates that both vagrants from China and people within Manchuria were moving to the warm and fertile zone of Fuzhou, which sheds light on the fact that the authorities' attitudes toward immigration and internal migration were indeed more than tolerant. See *Collection of Yongzheng Era's Memorials in Chinese Responded to in Red Ink* vol. 23, document n. 354.

⁶⁰ *Qing shilu* 8: 721.

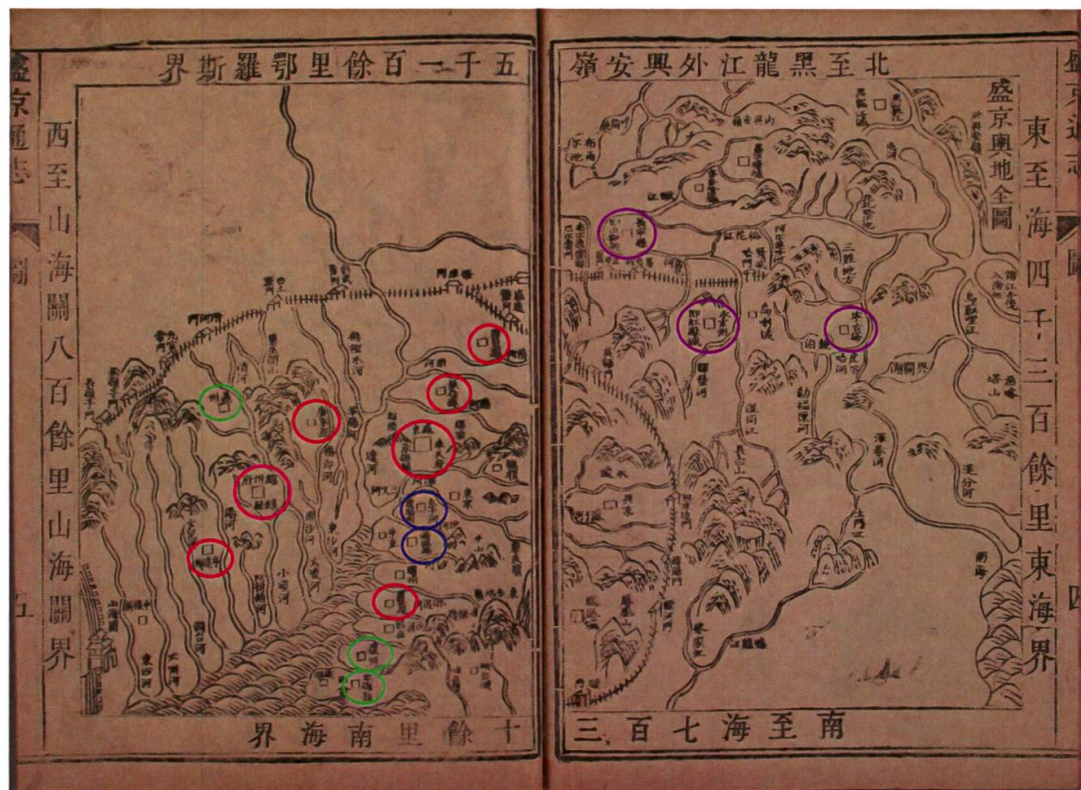


Figure 2: Development of the civil administrative structure of southern Manchuria 1664–1733, original picture from *Shengjing General Gazetteer*, Qianlong 1st year edition, *tu*: 4–5. Jurisdictions added from 1726 to 1727. Jurisdictions added in 1733.

registered, and taxed. A glance at the statistical data found in the gazetteers is useful in providing an idea of how effective this tactic was overall. The tables below show the increase in population and cultivated land in the new jurisdictions, as well as the significance of these increases in terms of the total population and the amount of land under cultivation across the entire region (Tables 1 and 2).⁶¹

The data clearly reflect disparities between the various territories where the new jurisdictions were established. We should note that Taining county was abolished only three years after its foundation, and Changning – which in 1735 accounted for only 200 taxable individuals – was to suffer the same fate in 1736, the first year of Qianlong's reign. It appears that there were not so many *minrens* in these two areas after all. It is also possible that more than a few moved to Dockyard-Yongji, where the registered population was higher than in Fuzhou. Nonetheless, the latter locality contributed the highest numbers. Combined with neighboring Ninghai county, this zone accounted for nearly 75 percent of the reported total of new population centers. The nearly 3,500 *dings* in Yizhou were not new settlers; they were originally from

⁶¹ These figures refer to the civilian population, *minren*, and to land belonging to civilians, *mindì* 民地.

Table 1: Data on demography and land under cultivation in the civil jurisdictions founded in the Yongzheng era, from Shengjing tongzhi, Qianlong 1st year edition, juan 23: 12–14, juan 24: 15–18; and Shengjing tongzhi Qianlong 48th year edition, juan 35: 15, juan 37: 30.

Jurisdiction	Year founded	Population in 1735 (measured by <i>ding</i> 丁 ^a)	Total area of cultivated land (in <i>mu</i> 畝 ^b)
Yongji	1727	2,186	27,213
Changning	1727	201	142
Fuzhou	1733	2,074	219,017
Ninghai	1733	1,302	77,101
Yizhou	1733	3,441	72,092
Taining	1727 (abolished in 1730)	/	/
Totals		9,204	395,564

^aThis usually indicates men between 16 and 60 years of age and was used as a unit of measurement for the population, since the “poll tax” was based on the number of *dings* – hence the term *dingyin* 丁銀. The range of variation in the numbers of other family members under Qing rule makes it very hard to estimate actual demographic figures. ^bC. 600 square meters; see Wilkinson 2012: 557.

Table 2: Significance of the new jurisdictions in terms of total population and area of cultivated land, from Shengjing tongzhi, Qianlong 1st year edition, juan 23: 9–14, juan 24: 9–18; and Shengjing tongzhi Qianlong 48th year edition, juan 35: 15, juan 37: 30.

	Fengtian jurisdiction: total	New jurisdictions: total	New jurisdictions: increase expressed as % of the whole
Population (<i>ding</i>)	47,476	9,204	19%
Total area of cultivated land (in <i>mu</i>)	1,847,887	395,564	21%

Jiinzhou and Guangning, and were assigned to the new sub-prefecture in an attempt to ease demographic pressure on the most populated place in Manchuria – Jiinxian county 錦縣.

Despite these differences, and due to climatic and geographic factors, official data report that by the end of the Yongzheng era, the newly founded civil jurisdictions accounted for about one-fifth of both the population and the cultivated lands in this region. Considering the scale and importance of this court-ordered maneuver, one suspects that local administrations might have made efforts to make the numbers in official reports behave in such a way as to demonstrate how effective the policy was. Nevertheless, given that they refer to a seven-year span of time, and that three of the six new offices were in the glacial far north, these figures could be reduced by half and still represent some sort of achievement.

In 1991, Yang Yulian stated that those seven years were “the second peak”⁶² of the civil administration’s development after the 1653 regulation, which was in effect until 1668. In fact, the similarities between the policies implemented during these two periods are not hard to see. They lie in the nature of the measures taken, which basically consisted of carving out a part of the region and its resources for the civilian commoners while establishing and then reinforcing the power structures responsible for them. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge one substantial difference: When the regulation was in force, Shunzhi’s and Kangxi’s courts were trying to attract people to Manchuria at a time when very few were willing to move there, in an attempt to shape both the socio-economic and the administrative structure of Manchuria according to their wishes. In contrast, Yongzheng’s reforms were intended to welcome the many spontaneous migrants and to regularize the status and livelihood of the *minrens*. He made efforts to adapt the region’s institutional systems to this spontaneous socio-economic trend.

4 A comparative perspective: Kangxi’s and Qianlong’s policies in Manchuria

Under Kangxi’s rule, Manchuria’s civil administration system had remained unaltered for sixty years. Under Yongzheng, in just seven years, the number of sub-prefectures and counties expanded by around 50 percent, increasing from nine to fifteen. This data shows Kangxi’s hostile attitude toward immigration, and more generally toward *minrens*, from an institutional point of view. Of course the relationship between institutional and economic policies is a very close one. In the second half of the seventeenth century, land allocation in Manchuria strongly favored the banners – as the above-mentioned measurements and allocations of 1679–1680 demonstrate. The central government tended to assign lands to banner-men rather than to commoners, despite the fact that it was much harder to get the former to cultivate these lands efficiently. From 1675 until the end of the 1680s, eighteen new banner garrisons were installed, and bannermen were relocated from the capital. According to Wang Yiyuan, “before [their arrival], civil authorities were ordered to lead commoners to clear lands, which then became the hereditary properties of the new military officers.”⁶³ Apparently civilians were exploited to

⁶² Yang Yulian et al. 1991: 137.

⁶³ This practice, known as *daiken* 代墾, was quite common. The above-mentioned studies on the relocation of bannermen have shown how rural Banner members were often ordered to clear land for higher-ranked “metropolitan” bannermen (Chen 2017). The fact that bannermen were required to render such services makes it all the more plausible that commoners were also exploited for this purpose.

prepare the territory to welcome the new bannermen. Such corvées were not the only unfair treatment to which the *minrens* were subjected. One episode from 1689 is emblematic in this respect: the Fengtian prefect Jin Shijian 金世鑒 submitted a memorial in which he reported land disputes between commoners and bannermen, and he suggested reassigning the lands that the *qiren* had not yet put under cultivation to civilians, so that the state would benefit from increased fiscal revenue. The emperor firmly rejected the prefect's request – he judged it “highly improper” (*shu wei bu he* 殊為不合) – and instead ordered him to draw new, clearer borders between the plots belonging to the different constituencies. In the same year, the newly promoted prefect was admonished not to repeat his predecessor's mistakes. The emperor once again criticized Jin's proposal, this time with even harsher words. More importantly, he stated that “the still-uncultivated banner lands will be temporarily entrusted to the custody of the bailiffs (*zhuangtou* 莊頭).⁶⁴ One day, when the Manchus have proliferated, those lands will be assigned to them”⁶⁵ – thus making it very clear that the lands which bannermen could not use were not to be given to commoners.

Jin Shijian died that same year. Wang Yiyuan refers to him as arrogant and incompetent, and says that his manners exerted a negative influence on all the local administrations.⁶⁶ This *damnatio memoriae* was one more consequence the functionary faced for his atrocious misdeed – suggesting that unused land should be given to people who were willing to make good use of it.

A comparison with what the sources regard as another of Yang Chaozeng's achievements as Fengtian prefect sheds further light on the differences between the two rulers' positions. In 1733, the Imperial Household Department had decided to send a further 100 bailiffs to Jjinzhou. They would be allotted almost four hundred thousand *mus* 畝 of expropriated *mind*i 民地. In a memorial to the throne, Yang objected that if such vast plots of land were taken away from the commoners, then approximately 10,000 families would have no land to farm, and it would be hard to

64 Mainly recruited from among Manchu nobles' *baoyi* slaves, they oversaw imperial estate lands and answered to the Imperial Household Department. Ding et al. (2004) as well as Isett (2006) discuss this matter extensively.

65 *Qing shilu* 5: 549–550. Zhang Jie (2009: 11) has argued that the disproportion in the amount of land allocated to bannermen versus commoners in 1679 reflected demographic differences: bannermen were given more land because they were more numerous. This passage, in which Kangxi declares that the local Banner population would be granted time to increase their population to the extent that they would be able to cultivate larger areas of land, seems to disprove the Chinese scholar's conclusion. Liu Xiaomeng (2015: 10) holds the opposite view. According to him, at the time commoners already outnumbered bannermen, and the decision to confine the former to narrower territory would inevitably have caused conflict over land.

66 *Memories of Liaozuo*: 128.

provide for them. He added that the procedure was scheduled for the spring and would therefore compromise sowing season, thus jeopardizing the harvest and, as a consequence, tax revenue. Therefore he suggested postponing the work until the autumn. The emperor consented to his requests.⁶⁷ The *Biographies of the Qing Era* make no mention of what happened that autumn, but the version of Yang's biography in the *Fengtian General Gazetteer* reports that the project was abandoned.⁶⁸ Such a decision on the part of the court not only defended the commoners' interests against the administrators of the imperial estate, but also supported a Han civil official in a disagreement with an institution that was very close to the ruling house itself.

We should note that Yang's proposition was much more moderate than Jin Shijian's. The former was simply trying to prevent the state from expropriating civilian lands, whereas the latter had requested that bannermen's lands be reassigning to commoners when the bannermen themselves would not or could not cultivate it.

Nonetheless, a comparison of these two episodes is quite meaningful. Kangxi disdained the fiscal revenue which could have been earned by assigning the land to commoners and stated that he would rather wait for bannermen to become capable of cultivating it than give it to the civilians who were in urgent need. In contrast, Yongzheng clearly demonstrated concern for the civilian population's livelihood and decided to protect the *minrens'* interests. As for Yang Chaozeng, after leaving Shenyang, he continued his brilliant bureaucratic career, which culminated in the position of head of the Board of Personnel, and thus earned himself a place in Qing history. It is hard to say what the outcome would have been had he submitted these suggestions to Kangxi. One can guess, however, that such honors would have been off the table.

In 1740, Emperor Qianlong closed Manchuria to immigrants. This marked the beginning of the official interdiction of Manchuria and, as a consequence, of the "illegal trespassing to the East" (*chuang guandong* 闖關東) – which is a very famous phenomenon, also outside academic circles, and one of the pillars of the historical awareness of northeastern Chinese people today. In the fourth lunar month of that year, the emperor summoned Šuhede, deputy minister of the Board of War, and other high officials to make known his intentions and to instruct them to discuss means of implementing his new policy on the motherland. The functionaries issued a

⁶⁷ *Biographies of Qing Era*: 1279.

⁶⁸ *General Gazetteer of Fengtian*, juan 141: 112. Unfortunately no relevant memorials by Yang can be found, and the gazetteers do not report increases or decreases in imperial estate and manor lands in detail, nor do they account for the number of bailiffs. Thus it remains difficult to determine what the final decision on the matter was.

detailed eight-point program, related to both border management procedures and the administration of the civilian commoners in Manchuria.⁶⁹ We can summarize the core content of this proposal as follows: anyone suspected of intending to settle in Manchuria would not be allowed through the Shanhai Pass; merchants would be allowed to enter only after obtaining a permit, and rigorous inspection protocols would ensure that they left the region as soon as they had completed their business. Those who overstayed their permits and transgressors who had no permits at all would be extradited and never again allowed to set foot beyond the pass. The fourth point of the program established that all the remaining uncultivated lands under Fengtian's jurisdiction would be assigned to bannermen. Therefore the *mindī* were never supposed to expand again. Of course, the lack of available land was meant to deter potential new settlers.

Understandably Qianlong and his staff blamed Manchuria's re-opening in recent years on the local administrations instead of on the previous emperor. For instance, they stated that when some localities in Zhili province were affected by lean harvests, frontier authorities could not help but accept migrants into Liaoshen. As a consequence, over the years an ever-increasing number of families came into the region, from other places as well; as for the reasons commoners had been clearing much more land than bannermen, Šuhede and other officials asserted that the application procedure for land reclamation was much simpler for the *minrens*⁷⁰ – although the emperor himself did mention that even if the bannermen would not farm the land, it would not be inappropriate to devote land to their other activities, thus showing his awareness of the fact that many bannermen were not very inclined to work their own plots. The pretense of such utterances is more than apparent. Local governments would never have consistently taken action over such a long period in a direction that conflicted with what the central power wanted. Based on the process I have outlined here so far, it is much more logical to infer that frontier officials were lenient with migrants because the emperor had ordered the foundation of new civil jurisdictions, and that the procedures via which commoners obtained new land were not overly complicated because the court generally supported this reclamation of the land on the part of the *minren*.

These new policies had a profound effect on the civil administration system. Changning county was abolished in the very first year of Qianlong's reign (1736). Yongji sub-prefecture, where civilians lived in large numbers, was replaced with a

⁶⁹ *Qing shilu* 10: 687–691.

⁷⁰ Actually the procedures were quite similar: bannermen and commoners were both supposed to submit their requests to local officials, who would report them to the respective regional head offices – Banner general's headquarter and the prefectural administration – for a final decision. See *Qing shilu* 4: 1150.

lishi tongzhi 理事同知 – the same type of office as that of inspectors and superintendents, but with a higher rank. This new office was in charge of all *minren* affairs, just like the sub-prefect, but the personnel appointed to these positions were Manchu, and perhaps more importantly, the office answered to the Jilin banner general, not the Fengtian prefect. The reason for such a measure, as reported in the *Records*, was that this population center was too far from Shenyang for the prefecture to efficiently administer it;⁷¹ however, the archives reveal that the emperor was concerned about the increasing number of commoners who were appropriating bannermen's lands.⁷² From then on, the only office beyond the willow palisade in charge of civilians was subject to the authority of banner headquarters. In southern Manchuria, despite the fact that the civilian population was growing at even faster rates than it had during the Yongzheng period, no new civil administrations were established, apart from three *lishi guan* 理事官 (a general term for inspectors and similar officials): an inspector in Xingjing 興京 (Hetu Ala) in 1764, and two superintendents, one in Xiuyan 岫岩 in 1773, and one in Fenghuangcheng 鳳凰城 in 1777.

Prior to this, thorough, sweeping measures were taken to enhance the powers of the banner structures and the Manchu officials, at the expense of the civil system. In 1750, the decision was made to appoint Manchu functionaries to all sub-prefect and magistrate positions in the territory. In 1762, the emperor decreed that the Fengtian prefect would be subject to the Shengjing banner general's "right of limitation" (*jiezhi* 節制).⁷³ For more than a century, the two spheres of Manchuria's dualistic local government structure were intended to operate independently. With this decision, however, one structure officially became subordinate to the other.

As the sovereign himself had declared back in 1740 (see footnote 71), this raft of measures had two main objectives. Firstly, Manchuria's bannermen needed more land and more resources, so anything the motherland still had to offer was to be reserved for them. Secondly, due to their intermingling with the increasingly numerous Chinese commoners, the "old Manchu customs" had been changed, and therefore their purity needed to be restored and preserved. Neither of these goals were achieved. Chinese migrants flooded the region. Forbidden to clear land, they rented or "conditionally purchased"⁷⁴ plots from bannermen. In either case, they were able to secure their rights to the land, becoming *de facto* proprietors, so that by the end of the Qianlong era "the

⁷¹ *Qing shilu* 12: 699.

⁷² See Liu Xiaomeng 2015: 10.

⁷³ *Qing shilu* 17: 564.

⁷⁴ The customary rental (*diàn* 佃) and conditional sale (*diǎn* 典) practices with regard to Banner lands became increasingly common beginning in the late Yongzheng period. The *Shengjing General Gazetteer* (Qianlong 48th year edition, *juan* 37) reports data on the amount of Banner lands rented or bought by commoners. For contemporary work on this subject, see Isett 2006: 89–105; Chen 2017: 21 and 152–156.

bannermen no longer owned their properties.”⁷⁵ At the same time, far from being prevented, cultural “contamination” spread, even reaching northern Manchuria. In 1777, the emperor expressed his concerns that Manchu traditions – already decaying by the day in Jilin, just as they had in Shengjing – might soon be threatened even in Heilongjiang.⁷⁶

Emperor Qianlong’s wish to keep his ancestors’ lands for his own people is easy to understand. Nevertheless, refusing to accept reality and opposing the region’s natural development trends did not work out well.

5 Conclusions

Immigration policies, the evolution of local government structures, and land distribution all clearly show that Kangxi and Qianlong wanted to keep Manchuria for the Manchu. Beginning in the late Kangxi period, however, this plan clashed with the natural development trends in the region and in neighboring areas, which eventually resulted in one glaring failure. No matter how they struggled, neither of the two rulers could keep the Chinese out of the Manchu motherland or prevent them from taking possession of its resources. Unlike the previous rulers, Yongzheng accepted reality. He decided to allow migrants in, granted land to them and to the old settlers as well, and established new offices to administer this part of Manchuria’s population, thus ensuring that the state obtained a certain amount of fiscal revenue from the region. We should also note that all of Yongzheng’s policies were moderate. He never explicitly endorsed immigration, nor did he install a civil prefecture beyond the willow palisade, which would have been far too strong a signal that civilians were welcome in northern Manchuria as well – Jilin prefecture was only founded in 1882, by Emperor Guangxu. Moreover, during Yongzheng’s reign, bannermen still controlled approximately eight times more land than the commoners, despite the latter’s rapid expansion. All the emperor did was to grant civilians a small part of the region’s resources and to invest in institutions that could administer their affairs and collect taxes to balance the state’s finances. His efforts were intended to manage the increase in the civilian population rather than to stop it.

Due to the brevity of Yongzheng’s reign and to Qianlong’s decisive and relatively quick change of direction, there is no telling what kind of results Yongzheng’s policies may have had in the long term. Nonetheless, we can infer that he might have guided the region toward a more balanced development.

⁷⁵ *Copies of Memorials and Imperial Responses from the Grand Council Archive, Junji lufu* 軍機錄副, Jiaqing XI (1806)-VII-XVIII, quoted in Zhang Shizun 2003: 322.

⁷⁶ *Qing shilu* 21: 868.

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⁷⁷ For this kind of source – which includes records, gazetteers, archives, etc. – I follow the standard format for the field in research on Ming and Qing dynasties. In this format, the works' titles precede the compilers' names (see Wilkinson 2012: 788–860); however, the compilers are unknown in many cases. Next I have indicated the years (where known) or era of completion or original publication; to avoid confusion, I have placed the year of publication in the contemporary era last, after the publisher or the library where the source is held.

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