

Rebellion in Northern Manchuria During the Third Revolutionary War in China and Its Causes

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The frequent rebellions in Northern Manchuria during the Third Revolutionary War occurred in the special context of the struggle between the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) for Northeast China after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War. The rebellion reached its peak during the KMT's attack on Northeast China, followed by a second wave of rebellion after the defeat in the Defensive Battle of Siping. It tended to disappear after the downfall of the Jiang Pengfei Group. In addition to the blind recruitment of the CPC in traditional narratives, the instigation of the KMT, the traditional mutiny of the old army, the limitations of the early work of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, the early activities of the KMT, and the regional conflicts between the local and foreign forces are also important reasons for the concentration of rebellions.

Keywords: the Third Domestic Revolutionary War, North Manchuria, rebellion, suppressing bandits

Introduction

In the 1940s, North Manchuria was located in the northern part of Northeast China, including five provinces and one city: Songjiang, Nenjiang, Heilongjiang, Hejiang, Mudanjiang, and Harbin, equivalent to the entire territory of Heilongjiang Province today. This place has a vast territory and a large population, backed by the Soviet Union. After Japan's defeat in 1945, the Northeast region, including North Manchuria, was in a political vacuum. Various armed forces surged for a moment. With the return of the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army from the Soviet Union to the Northeast, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army marched into the Northeast from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass, and the Communist Party of China (CPC) took the lead in establishing an army and regime in the Northeast. Many bandit armed groups have been incorporated into the newly established democratic regime of the CPC. However, due to a lack of experience, the CPC did not timely clean up and train the new troops when they were incorporated. The Kuomintang (KMT) took the opportunity to infiltrate and carry out instigation work. In addition, many people in Northeast China also hold the idea that the KMT government is orthodox. At the end of 1945, the KMT regular army launched a large-scale attack on Northeast China, and the CPC's army retreated northward step by step. Under the instigation of the KMT, many newly recruited soldiers were pulled away and turned into bandits. This is a common understanding of the causes of banditry in Northeast China from the perspective of traditional anti-banditry. However, why does the KMT have room to instigate rebellion? Why is it easy for newly formed troops to be pulled away and not choose to stay in the Chinese Communist Army? These questions all need to be answered. For a long time, there have been

many studies on suppressing bandits and few on rebellion. Starting from the perspective of rebellion, sorting out the process of rebellion and analyzing the reasons for rebellion can better glimpse the growth process and success experience of the CPC's army in the Third Revolutionary War. Local chronicles provide us with rich details.

The Historical Process of the Rebellion in Northern Manchurian

The rebellion in North Manchuria can be divided into three stages.

First, From November 1945 to April 1946

After Japan's surrender in August 1945, former Japanese collaborators, officials, and landlords in North Manchuria quickly formed the Peace Preservation Association¹ to cooperate with the Soviet army. The Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, which had been suppressed by the Japanese and retreated to the Soviet Union, also returned in batches to follow the Soviet army back to China. They served as deputy commanders for the Soviet army in various places and formed the Democratic Alliance², which was actually a representative of the Soviet army. Fearing the power of the Soviet army, the Peace Preservation Association and the Democratic Alliance were able to coexist peacefully.

In October and November 1945, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, led by the CPC, entered North Manchuria from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass. The conflict between the CPC and the local maintenance committee intensified. Sun Jingyu and other CPC officials lacked experience and blindly incorporated the armed forces of the maintenance committee, laying the seeds of rebellion. Meanwhile, the advance personnel of the KMT were also active in North Manchuria, establishing secret armed forces. In November, the rebellion began, with many of the former Japanese-controlled police and bandit forces that had been recruited by the Democratic Alliance defecting to the KMT. For example, Gao Mingsan, a former Japanese police officer in Tonghe County, and Yu Pingshan, a bandit, who had been recruited by the Democratic Alliance after the war and formed a security force, soon defected and blocked the actions of the Communist Army to receive Tonghe in November.

On November 16, 1945, the 13th Army and the 52nd Army of the KMT broke through Shanhaiguan, opening the door to Northeast China. When the news reached North Manchuria, the rebels and bandits were emboldened, and the rebellion erupted in concentrated form. Under the instigation of the KMT, a large number of newly recruited troops defected from the CPC. In late November, the bandit leader Xie Wendong, who had just been recruited by the commander of Communist Army, Sun Jingyu, defected and formed the 15th Group Army Pioneer Corps of the KMT. On December 11, Sun Jingyu's uncle, the notorious bandit Sun Rongjiu, also defected in Boli County. On the way to suppress the rebellion, the 19th Battalion of the Mudanjiang Self-Defense Army was also subverted by the KMT. On December 19, Zhao Guang, the secretary of the Tongbei County government, was assassinated at Tongbei Railway Station. Meanwhile, the Tongbei County Detachment also defected. In a short period of time, this series of dizzying rebellion events was a snapshot of the precarious situation in North Manchuria at the time.

In late 1945 and the first half of 1946, the anti-bandit campaign was launched in full swing, and the interior of North Manchuria became relatively peaceful. However, border rebellions continued to occur. On February 22,

¹ The Peace Preservation Association was a local puppet organization during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945). After Japan's surrender, puppet Manchu officials and landlords continued to establish such organizations to cooperate with the Soviet army

² The Democratic Alliance is a united front organization established by the Anti Japanese United Army under the leadership of the CPC.

1946, Jia Shaotang in Raohe County launched a rebellion at Xifenggou, overthrowing the democratic regime in Raohe. On April 15, the detachment of Tongjiang County rebelled, and Tongjiang fell. Raohe and Tongjiang were both border cities, but the situation was still serious.

Second, From May 1946 to August 1946

On April 18, 1946, the newly-formed First Army and the 71st Army of the KMT launched an attack on Siping. The Communist forces concentrated their main forces to defend Siping for a month, and were forced to withdraw on May 18. The KMT forces then advanced northward, reaching the Songhua River. The situation took a dramatic turn. The rebels thought that the KMT advance into North Manchuria was imminent, and a new wave of rebellion was about to begin. Between May 1 and May 15, four uprisings occurred in Dongning, Suifenhe, Suyang, and Mudanjiang. In early June, eight uprisings were planned in Shuangcheng, Harbin. In August, Jiang Pengfei, a KMT military officer, planned the “8.28” uprising,³ However, it was successfully suppressed. Jiang Pengfei was arrested. The largest rebellion command center in North Manchuria was eliminated. Jiang Pengfei’s downfall was a turning point, as no large-scale, regime-subverting uprisings occurred in North Manchuria after that.

Third, From August 1946 to the Establishment of the New China in 1949

After June 1946, the KMT and the Communists were in a standoff across the Songhua River, and the situation basically entered a state of ceasefire. The rebels were expecting the KMT to move north to take over, but this did not happen. The discovery and suppression of Jiang Pengfei’s “August 28” uprising also destroyed the command center for the rebellion in North Manchuria. After that, the Communist army gradually shifted from defense to offense on the Northeast Front. The hope of KMT taking over was becoming increasingly remote, and fewer and fewer rebels were willing to take the risk of launching a rebellion. As the bandits from Dongxing County said at their meeting, they were disappointed by the KMT’s silence.

In this situation, not only did the number of rebellions decrease significantly, but the identity of the rebels also changed markedly. The number of defectors within the Communist army decreased significantly, while landlord armed forces became the main force of the rebellions. As the land reform movement progressed, the landlords who were subjected to retribution and harbored hatred for the CPC gradually became the mainstream of the rebellions. On July 15, 1947, the landlord party in Hailun County launched a rebellion with bandits, and was killed. On the eve of the Spring Festival in 1948, 29 landlords and rich farmers in Hailun County, including Xu Yongxi and Sun Shouchang, launched a rebellion, which was suppressed by local armed forces. On March 2, 1949, landlord Wang Shiyin launched a class revenge attack in Tangyuan County, killing six village officials and poor farmers. By this time, the so-called rebellions in North Manchuria had become more or less ordinary criminal cases.

The Cause of the Rebellion

From the analysis of the rebellion process, the evolution of the situation in northeastern China and the strengths and weaknesses of the KMT and the Communists on the front line were undoubtedly the main factors affecting the rebellion in north Manchuria. The Communists were inexperienced when they first arrived in northeastern China and blindly incorporated the Japanese-controlled police and armed bandits. The KMT’s covert

³ On August 28, 1946, Jiang Pengfei gathered bandits and launched an uprising, attempting to occupy the largest city in North Manchuria, Harbin and cooperate with the KMT’s army to cross the Songhua River.

instigation of the rebellion was also an important reason for the rebellion in North Manchuria. This is the conclusion of previous studies. In addition, at least four other factors deserve attention.

First, the Tradition of Mutiny in the Old Army

In modern times, Northeast China not only has a tradition of bandit proliferation, but also a tradition of military mutiny. Since the modern era, Northeast China has experienced the rule of the Qing Dynasty, the Zhang Zuolin's warlord, and the puppet Manchukuo regime, and repeated invasions by Russia and Japan. The regime has changed frequently, and various forces are intertwined. Military personnel have used their force to navigate between different factions, either driven by interests or forced by circumstances, or motivated by national sentiment. Mutiny is a common occurrence. For example, during the Zhang Zuolin's warlord faction period, on June 10, 1924, Li Yushu, Jiao Yonghe, and others from the second detachment of the Mishan County Self-Defense Unit killed their captain, and armed themselves with weapons to mutiny. During the puppet Manchukuo regime period, Jiang Yongmao, the battalion commander of the anti-Japanese guerrillas, betrayed and surrendered to the Japanese in 1939 and was appointed as the captain of the mountain police. Unable to bear the Japanese oppression, he shot and killed the Japanese deputy captain on March 12, 1943 and fled to the anti-Japanese guerrillas. Therefore, when the CPC arrived in Northeast China first, the puppet Manchukuo police and armed bandits immediately pledged allegiance to the CPC; when they saw that the KMT was stronger, they launched a rebellion and pledged allegiance to the KMT. This is actually the continuation of the traditional military mutiny.

Second, the Limitations of the Anti-Japanese United Army's Early Work

After the Soviet Red Army advanced into Northeast China in 1945, the Anti-Japanese United Army that had previously retreated to the Soviet Union formed the CPC Northeast Committee and were dispatched in batches to return to Northeast China with the Soviet troops. By the beginning of September, a total of over 330 Anti-Japanese United Army's members had been sent back to Northeast China by the Northeast Committee and entered 57 counties and cities to establish democratic governments and people's armed forces. Their work marked the beginning of the CPC's control over Northeast China. Relying on the Soviet troops indeed brought convenience to the Anti-Japanese League's early work. However, the Soviet Union also signed the Sino-Soviet Friendship and Alliance Treaty with the KMT government. Under the coordination of the Soviet troops, the local maintenance organizations and KMT branches maintained normal operation in many places. This resulted in the coexistence of two governments and two armed forces, even a mixed situation, laying the hidden seeds of mutiny and rebellion.

Some actions of the Soviet troops also cast a shadow over the Anti-Japanese League's work. On August 9, 1945, the Soviet troops liberated Fuyuan, searching for Japanese spies; they gathered over 200 civilians from the inner streets of Fuyuan and shot them all in a mass execution at the south gate. The Soviet troops freed Northeast China from the Japanese, but some of them had poor discipline and committed acts of killing and looting, which aroused public anger. The Anti-Japanese League personnel were subordinate to the Soviet troops, and their image naturally suffered from negative impact. This also led to many people defecting from the CPC and joining the KMT from the side.

The Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army fought for a long time in the most difficult environment, and needed to unite various anti-Japanese forces, so it had a complex composition. After the Long March of the

Chinese Red Army in 1934, the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army lost contact with the Central Committee of the CPC of China and did not experience the ideological and disciplinary construction of the CPC of China during the Anti-Japanese War. After the Japanese imperialism was defeated, it was very easy to lose direction in peaceful life and be corrupted by reactionaries. Captain Jin Guoxiang and Public Security Bureau Director Li Guojun, who were also anti-Japanese soldiers, were the earliest CPC members to arrive in De'du County in August 1945. However, they quickly corrupted themselves and colluded with bandits, and betrayed the county on December 26th that year. Therefore, when the KMT secret agent Jiang Pengfei plotted the "August 28th" uprising in Harbin in August 1946 and wanted to develop spies in the CPC's army, specifically mentioning "anti-Japanese veterans", it was not without reason.

Third, the Early Activities of the KMT

From a military standpoint, the CPC of China was ahead of the game in Northeast China. By the end of November 1945, the total strength of the Northeast People's Autonomous Army was 270,000, while the KMT had only assembled two divisions of 70,000 troops by mid-November and had entered Shanhaiguan Pass. However, if one includes the early propaganda work in the picture, then the KMT's actions in Northeast China were even earlier than those of the CPC.

Of the 17 counties and cities in Hejiang Province, the CPC had only taken the lead or arrived at the same time as the KMT in six counties. In the other 11 counties and cities, the KMT had taken the lead in party and group work. In Tangyuan County, they propagated the KMT's Constitutional Principles and the Three Principles of the People; in Suibin, they issued a "Letter to Compatriots in Suibin" and held a mass meeting to propagate the KMT's platform. These early propaganda efforts strengthened the KMT's positive image among the people of North Manchuria. When the mutiny occurred, a considerable number of new troops and civilians were drawn away and joined the KMT.

Fourth, Regional Conflicts

Under the rule of Japan and the Puppet Manchukuo, the people of Northeast China were cut off from the rest of the country for 14 years. In the North Manchuria base area after the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, there existed various forces such as the Northeast Anti-Japanese and Soviet Volunteer Army that returned from the Soviet Union, the Eighth Route Army, and the New Fourth Army that came from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass, and various local armed forces. Regional conflicts were a real problem. On October 10, 1946, Yang Qinghai, the deputy commander of the city defense of Yilan defected. Yang Qinghai first killed three cadres from the interior of China. Then he went to the barracks to stir up the troops, saying that he had returned from the Soviet Union and that the cadres from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass had arrived later. After the arrival of the cadres, all the people he appointed were removed. Yang Qinghai's words and deeds clearly showed his resentment towards the cadres from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass. The report on the traitor Yang Qinghai submitted by the Hejiang Provincial Committee also did not hide the fact that Sun Jingyu's arrival in Yilan had played a bad role in Yang Qinghai's rebellion. After the arrival of Sun Jingyu's troops, which were based on the units from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass, the good houses and cars were all occupied. Yang Qinghai was forced to live outside the city. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, North Manchuria was a complex region, with various contradictions. The emerging democratic regime was not stable, and it was only a matter of time before it faced the test of rebellion.

Conclusion

In modern Northeast China, there has always been a tradition of military mutinies due to frequent changes in power. Although the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army that returned to Northeast China with the Soviet army after the war had the advantage of seizing some of the existing armed forces in advance, thus giving the CPC an advantage in entering northeast China, they were unable to completely transform the old army, thus laying the seeds for later mutinies. Meanwhile, the KMT had begun its instigation activities in the early stages of entering North Manchuria. In October and November 1945, the arrival of the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army from inside the Shanhaiguan Pass added the factor of the conflict between the locals and the newcomers. With the evolution of the northeast battlefield and the stimulation of the advance of KMT troops, the rebellion finally concentrated on an outbreak. There were the two high tides of the rebellion in North Manchuria, on the time of the KMT's attack on Northeast China in late 1945 and the failure of the Siping defensive battle in May 1946. After the second half of 1946, the northeast battlefield turned, and the CPC went on the offensive. After that, the rebellion within the army gradually subsided, and the landlord uprising became the mainstream of the mutiny and gradually faded away.

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