

# Analysis of Russian and Japanese Background Factors in Railway Construction in Eastern Province of China

Hong Xiao

Senior Fellow, Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, Jewish Research Institute

**Abstract:** *The railway construction in Eastern province of China was an important event in the early 20th century, which had a profound impact on the relations between China and the major countries in Northeast Asia, especially on the formulation and implementation of domestic and foreign policies of Russia and Japan, and laid the foreshadowing for the expansion of the East and the West in Northeast Asia in the future. This paper makes a comparative study of the position, foreign policy, strategic adjustment and treaty signed by China, Russia and Japan on the railway construction in Eastern province of China in the early 20th century. Through detailed historical data analysis and background interpretation, the paper tries to analyze the complex and profound reasons behind the railway construction, and explains the far-reaching impact of the development of Sino-Russian and Sino-Japanese relations before and after the railway construction in Eastern province of China.*

**Keywords:** The railway in Eastern province of China; Capitalism; The Qing Government; Tzarist Russia; Japan.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the late 19th century early 20th century, Tzarist Russia had set up a vertical and horizontal "T" glyph of broad gauge railway in northeast China, known as the railway in Eastern province of China, its main west classics in Manchuria, Harbin, east to Suifenhe, with both sides after Russian Baikal railway and Wusuli river south railway head-tail, Russia through the renewal contract again later, has obtained the southern railway line built right in the Eastern province of China, Thus, the situation of connecting Europe and Asia is formed. The Railway in Eastern province of China, with a total length of 2489 km, took 6 years (1897.8-1903.7) to open to traffic. The Railway was nominally built and operated jointly by China and Russia, but all kinds of unequal treaties derived from it were all at the expense of China's interests. Tzarist Russia used the Railway to carry out the policy of aggression against China, to seize political and economic privileges by distorting or tampering with the treaty, and then realized the strategic purpose of invading northeast China and even dominating the Far East. It is the product of Tzarist Russia's total colonial expansion. Historically, China's northeast region was a battleground for modern capitalist and imperialist powers, especially Russia and Japan, who either gained interests or competed for hegemony. When the desire is consistent, they sing "equal interests, open doors", and when the east and West are insatiable, they "exert their national strength and use military force", so the modern northeast is also called "the Balkans of Asia". The formation of this situation is the inevitable result of the Qing Dynasty "from prosperity to decline", the inevitable result of the expansion of Russia and Japan, and the survival law of human society introduced the jungle law.

## 2. OPIUM WAR AND THE DECLINE OF QING DYNASTY

From the beginning of the British bourgeois revolution in 1640 to the First Opium War in 1840, the door of the ancient closed Qing Dynasty was forcibly knocked open by Western powers. In the past 200 years, the West has been transformed into the Industrial Revolution period, and the Qing Dynasty in the 19th century has shown a trend of decline. In particular, the late Qianlong Emperor had exposed his ignorance of the general trend of the world, and often referred to himself as "the supreme state of Heaven", and knew nothing about the trade protection system, the tariff system, the powerful ships and guns, and the industrial revolution. When the British gave the emperor Qianlong the largest and newest model warship, he was still dismissively talking about the gift of tea porcelain. From this, the British concluded that China was "in an extremely backward position in industry and science compared with the countries of Western Europe."The Jiaqing Emperor era began to fade obviously, showing the gradual failure of the official corruption and the hardship of the people have been accumulated.

The official officials used by Kangxi Emperor was to reward honesty and set a model to make officials clean and clear. The Yongzheng Emperor used resolute action, clearing up the deficiency, not to intercede, but not to help with the compensation, dismissing officials, confiscating homes, imprisoning, correcting the law, and using each other to restrain the evil spirit that permeated the officialdom; Qianlong Emperor at the beginning of the use is to learn from each other's strong points, eclectic, with his ancestor's reward for honesty, with his father's strict observation, but also established a better team of officials. Only in the middle and late period, he began to drift, and sleepy, the use of corrupt officials for 20 years, official officials then out of control. Emperor Jiaqing was faced with many difficulties, such as military affairs, river management, etc. Although he tried to rectify the official officials, he killed the corrupt officials and eliminated their henchmen, but he still failed to rebuild the prosperous world. The decline of the Qing Dynasty was far from being as simple as overhauling officials.

One reason is a surge in population pressure. The 200 years of Qing Dynasty are divided into three sections: the first stage was from the beginning of Qing Dynasty to the eight years of Qianlong Emperor (1743), during which the population increased from 85 million to 170 million, with an average annual growth rate of 7.7%; The second stage was from 1743 to 1785, when the population increased from 170 million to 310 million, with an average annual growth rate of 13.3%. The third stage was from 1785 to 1840, when the population increased from 310 million to 410 million, with an average annual growth rate of 6.3%. The entire social economy is feeling the pressure of overpopulation, and the high growth of population is in sharp contrast to the high density, with Xinjiang, Tibet, Qinghai, inner and outer Mongolia, Heilongjiang and other provinces having less than one person per square kilometer. The shortage of land resources and the overpopulation produce the contradiction between people and land, and the population pressure and imbalance soon produce a bigger social problem - the refugee. Driven by foraging to make a living, Chinese farmers started the migration of modern society.

The second reason is displacement and social upheaval. Under the pressure of population explosion, the life of ordinary people is hard. Many displaced people have lost their place of abode, formed parties for personal gain, become bandits and even become subversives of the ruling class. The gangs formed by the refugees as the main body have great destructive effects on the society. Often after the bloodshed, some crafty people hide the society, therefore, some researchers said that "the refugees are mainly the product of rural blight, the decline of rural economy, resulting in the refugees everywhere... The phenomenon of homeless people has gradually changed, and has become the total source of a variety of social diseases. When Chinese society went into modern times, in the West, bourgeois parties had already stepped onto the political stage.

The third reason is the damage caused by the war on foreign goods and opium. When the Qing Dynasty turned from prosperity to decline, the western capitalist powers were on the rise. Britain, known as the "Empire on which the sun never sets" for its maritime hegemony, had already set its sights on China, followed by Western countries large and small. In the sixteenth year of Emperor Daoguang (1836), there were more than 50 foreign business houses in Guangzhou, mainly British and American opium merchants. The opium trade not only caused a huge outflow of silver from China, but the whole of China was also poisoned by opium. After the destruction of opium in Humen, the British government, losing opium profits, launched a two-year opium war, which ended with the signing of the Sino-British Treaty of Nanjing. The Opium War enabled Britain to win victory over China, followed by the signing of a series of treaties such as the Sino-US Treaty of Wangxia, the Sino-French Treaty of Huangpu, and the Treaty of Nanjing, which had a huge and profound impact on China's social development and was the dividing line of China's historical development process, from which China began to re-understand and contact the world.

The fourth reason is the emptiness of the Treasury and the decline of national power. Before and after the Opium War, the Qing Dynasty suffered from internal and external disasters one after another, and the battles of Jinchuan, Burma, Taiwan and other large and small campaigns cost a lot of money, coupled with foreign war reparations, annual river repair funds, etc., which made the Qing Dynasty's already strained finances even worse. Years of overspending has led to fraudulent expenditure, Jerry-cutting and other abuses. Especially the donation system prevailing in several dynasties, the Xianfeng Emperor has been unparalleled, thus the official officials become more corrupt. Since Emperor Jiaqing, the Qing Dynasty has been in decline, population, finance, military, official management and other problems were replaced, which made Jiaqing, Daoguang, Xianfeng and other generations of emperors in trouble. Moreover, the Taiping Rebellion and other anti-government uprisings, coupled with the British, the United States, France and Russia invaded and forced each other, so that the poor and weak China tended to collapse.

### **3. TZARIST RUSSIAN COLONIAL EXPANSION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY**

The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway is a great event in the world, and it is also a symbol of the strategic eastward shift of the Russian Empire and the curtain of the struggle for hegemony in the Far East and the Pacific region. In the middle of the 19th century, Britain, the United States, France and Germany were sensitive to the economic value and strategic significance of the Far East, and sent various people to actively penetrate here under various identities and various names, making it a competition field for the interests of world powers. The fact that the powers of each country are expanding their own interests on the pretext of building railways is undoubtedly futile in the face of the Russian Empire, which is eager to strategically move eastward and has exclusive economic interests and strategic position in Siberia. Russia has used various reasons to avoid and stonewall applicants with different purposes, and although it is powerless, it will not allow foreign powers to interfere with it. In 1858, China and Russia signed the Treaty of Aihui, in which Russia annexed 600,000 square kilometers of territory north of the Amur, and divided the Chinese territory east of the Ussuri River into joint administration between the two countries. In the face of the "new land", the Russian community showed great interest, which translated into a sense of urgency to build the Trans-Siberian Railway. The protracted financial crisis, which restricted the construction of the railway, was a constant squabble between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport, and was eventually resolved by the Tsar's appointment of Vitter as Chancellor of the Exchequer. In July 1890, Russia learned that the Qing government was preparing to build the railway from Beijing to Hunchun, and had sent the British engineer Jinda to conduct a field survey. Sensing the crisis, Alexander III ordered at a meeting of senior officials that "the construction of this railway must be accelerated as much as possible", and in February 1891, the Russian Emperor held a meeting of ministers, who agreed to immediately build the Trans-Siberian Railway and carried out research on related matters. The railway is expected to be 7,112 km long and is expected to be completed within 12 years, partly financed by the national Treasury and partly financed by the issuance of railway bonds. At the end of the same year, the Minister of the Army, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of finance, the Minister of Property, the Minister of transport,

the Minister of the Navy and the State Inspector General formed the "Siberian Railway Committee", in order to highlight the status of the "Siberian Railway Committee", Crown Prince Nicola Alexandrovich served as the chairman of the committee, which greatly promoted the construction of the railway.

In December 1892, the Committee of the Trans-Siberian Railway established the construction procedure of the railway, and the whole project was completed in three phases: the first phase of construction from Mias to Irkutsk via Chelyabinsk, the second phase of construction from the Count town to Boli section, and the third phase of construction of the Baikal section between Khabarovsk and Streltiansk railway. The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway was confronted with many difficulties, such as poor geological conditions, bad climate, numerous rivers, mountains and rivers, shortage of funds, lack of labor, and large projects, but they were all broken down one by one in the face of great human creativity.

Objectively speaking, the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway is a commendable event not only in Russia, but also in the history of railway construction in the world. The large amount of engineering, the harsh natural environment, the high technical requirements, and the rapid time of road construction are different from similar projects of the same era, and the far-reaching significance of economic development in eastern Russia will not be overestimated. Lenin once said: "The immensity of the Trans-Siberian Railway project, which refers not only to its length but also to its immense quantity, is rarely seen in a project which costs the state money and manpower." There is no doubt that the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway symbolized the entry of the machine Age into the region, revolutionizing migration and economic development in the East." The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway made it possible to develop the eastern part of Russia, and the former barren and isolated situation was completely changed. The Trans-Siberian Railway has a significant impact on the economic and military strategic significance of Eurasia, Russian Finance Minister Vitter said that "after the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway, the journey across Europe and Asia will be shortened from 35 days to 18 to 20 days, will replace the Suez Canal as the main trade route between Europe and China." Through this main railway, Russia will send large quantities of cotton, fur, wool and some industrial products to China, and then transfer these products from China to Korea and Japan. Likewise, tea and silk from China regularly flowed into Russia. Much of it is then resold from Russia to Western Europe, both at a high profit and to enhance its ability to compete with Britain..." Whether this is strategic design in advance or self-congratulation in hindsight, it is a structured idea for Russia. Let the Trans-Siberian Railway pass through the northeast of China, use the railway to conquer China's Manchuria, and realize the so-called "Yellow Russia plan", all that is missing is the proper time to organize the concrete implementation.

#### **4. THE "BLACK SHIP INCIDENT" AND THE RISE OF JAPAN**

Before the mid-19th century, Japan was a traditional agricultural country with a very backward economy. From 1603 to 1867, the Tokugawa shogunate put an end to the situation of frequent internal strife and division of the Warring States, and made it a unified and stable situation for more than 260 years. As in the Qing Dynasty, modern industry was minimal, and the Tokugawa shogunate imposed a policy of isolation. In the Opium War of 1840, the Qing Dynasty, which had always been regarded as "emulating" by the Japanese ruling class and intellectuals, was defeated in the war, which greatly shocked the Japanese court and opposition, and exclaimed that this was "a miracle never seen since the beginning of the world", and there were many people who believed that "the great chaos in the Qing Dynasty today, it is impossible to guarantee when it will affect Japan". Mizuno Nakaobu, a permanent highest official of the shogunate, keenly felt that the Opium War was "a foreign affair, but it was enough for our country", and subsequently triggered contemplation and re-understanding of history in the Japanese intellectual community.

After the Opium War, sober Japanese intellectuals saw it as a "godsend" and hoped to draw lessons from it. More Japanese politicians and intellectuals began to delve into the reasons for the defeat of the Qing Dynasty to avoid repeating the mistakes of the future country. Mito chief Tokugawa Saiaki was shocked to hear the news of the Qing's defeat, and he advocated that Japan should ban the luxury of war. The historian Saito Takedo, the politician Yokoi Konan and the "foreign scholar" Sakuma Yamayama all criticized the pedantry, ignorance and arrogance of the Qing government in their works. Driven by public opinion, the shogunate rulers also realized the seriousness of the national crisis and the urgency of reforming the old system, and the forerunners actively advocated abandoning the argument of "the West is a foreign nation", ending the policy of "closing the eyes to the country", and establishing "an eternal policy to compete for the supremacy of the world nation", thus strengthening the determination of reform based on the "Western Law". It must be mentioned here that the Japanese elite still attaches great importance to the publications after the Opium War in China, such as Wei Yuan's "Shengwu Record", "Sea Map", Shen Yun edited "Poetry of Zhapu" and so on have attracted considerable attention, showing that the Japanese society's attention to the situation has reached an unprecedented degree.

The sense of crisis of the Japanese elite from all walks of life was not groundless, and was quickly verified under the general trend of the expansion of the Western capitalist powers. In 1853, Commander Perry of the United States Navy led four ships into the vicinity of the shogunate. Because the American warships were painted black, coupled with the billowing black smoke from the steam turbine, and under the blue background of the sea and sky, the black ships were particularly terrible, causing chaos in the city, and then spreading more and more empty and false information, and spreading to the whole country. The "Black ship" brought the credentials of the President of the United States, and the purpose was simple: to open the port to trade, if you refused to resort to force. The Japanese Tokugawa shogunate, having learned from China's previous example, knew that

resistance was useless, and replied with the condition of acceptance the following year, and Perry led the fleet to leave. The appearance of "black ships" is like sharks sniffing out blood in the Sea of Japan. The American ships had just left, and on 22 August the Russian fleet led by Vice Admiral Putiyatin entered the port of Nagasaki and demanded "demarcation of trade and establishment of diplomatic relations". Soon after his departure, Brigadier General Perry would not allow the Russians to take advantage, and would not wait until a year, but a few months later a fleet of seven ships reappeared in Edo Bay. With their powerful fleet and artillery, the Americans forced the shogunate to accept their terms and signed the Japan-US Friendship Treaty. Under the treaty, Japan opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate and promised to facilitate the passage of U.S. ships through the two ports, establish a U.S. consul in Japan, and enjoy most-favored-nation treatment for unilateral trade. Soon Britain, Russia, France, and the Netherlands followed suit, signing similar treaties with Japan. However, this did not end, in July 1858, Japan and the United States signed the "Japan-US Treaty of Rapprochement of Trade" and the "Trade Agreement", according to the treaty, Japan opened the Kanagawa (Yokohama), Nagasaki, Niigata and Hyogo ports, as well as the two cities of Edo and Osaka. When Japan opened its door, national contradictions were acute, political contradictions intensified, and revolutionary movements arose. In January 1868, the "overthrow of shogunate rule faction" succeeded, the Edo shogunate that had ruled Japan for more than 200 years was overthrown, the emperor system of autocratic regime was established, the bourgeois reform was carried out, the colonial crisis was got rid of, and the modern nation state was established. Because it happened during Emperor Mutsuhito's Meiji restoration, it is known as the Meiji Restoration.

The Meiji Restoration was an important turning point in Japanese history, which was caused by the unequal treaties signed with the great powers, and it was these treaties that triggered the struggle of the Japanese nation and opened the top-down modernization reform movement. A group of young and middle-aged politicians with new ideas have stepped on the stage of history. Iwakura Atsumi, 46, Nishiko Takashi, 38, Okubaomitsu, 38, Kito Takayoshi, 35, and ITO Hirobumi, 30, all supported the Emperor's "Five Oaths", which included "to promote the general Assembly and decide on the public opinion", "break the bad habits of the past", "seek knowledge of the world" and so on. Became a basic state policy. The changes achieved after the Meiji Restoration in Japan took only more than ten years, and it was precisely these ten years that became the turning point for Japan from weak to strong. After the Meiji Restoration, Japan implemented the policy of strong troops and quickly embarked on the road of foreign military expansion. Emperor Meiji's personal letter is famous for "opening up thousands of miles of sea frontiers, declaring national power in the four directions", the minister even put forward the proposition of "losing Europe, taking Asia", and has begun to covet East Asian neighbors China and North Korea. In the face of such a hostile neighbor, there are naturally not many people who dare to tell the truth in China.

To sum up, the role and influence of the railway construction in Eastern province of China building on the northeast of our country is complex, or it has the dual nature of barbaric invasion and "Western learning to the east", which is reflected in the vicissitude of many fields in modern society. In the past, when Chinese people talked about the railway in Eastern province of China, they used to link its political aggression, economic plunder, military occupation and cultural penetration together. Naturally, it is not wrong to elaborate the problem in this way, which reveals the essence of the capital expansion of Western powers. But only this is not comprehensive enough, from the law of social development, can not explain the Northeast regional society unchanged for hundreds of years and decades of change in the cause. Therefore, in addition to the capital expansion of the Western powers, we should also talk about the external cause of "Western learning to the east" and the interaction of people with insight to seek to enrich the internal cause.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Si Dang Dong. A Record of the British Envoy's Audience with Qianlong [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 1997.
- [2] Hu Huanyong, Zhang Shanyu. Population Geography of China (Volume 1) [M]. Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 1986.
- [3] Chi Zihua. The Refugees in Modern China [M]. Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1996.
- [4] Chen Xulu. Metabolism of Modern Chinese Society [M]. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2012.
- [5] Zhang Yingchang. Song of A Furong in Qing Dynasty (Volume 2) [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1960.
- [6] A.P. Vasiliyev. Cossacks of the Outer Baikal (Volume 3) [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1977.
- [7] George Alexander Renson. Russia's Eastward expansion [M]. Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1978.
- [8] Nie Shicheng. Journey to the East (Volume 1) [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007.
- [9] Daiting Shu. Japanese and Chinese Secret Language in the Edo Period [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1997.
- [10] Liang Qichao. Yinbingshi Collection (Volume 7) [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1989.