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MANCHURIAN BANDITRY UNDER JAPANESE OCCUPATION: 1931—1935

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## **Abstract**

In the immediate aftermath of the Manchuria Incident in 1931, “banditry,” which had long been common throughout Manchuria, increased to numbers that had never been seen before. This paper deals with the identities of these so-called bandits in an attempt to clarify whether they were in fact brigands who set out to exploit the turmoil in Manchuria caused by the Japanese occupation for personal gain, or if they were in fact genuine insurgents fighting to regain Manchuria’s independence. To bring clarity to this issue, this paper will present a set of characteristics common to insurgencies around the globe by drawing on the works of both insurgents and counterinsurgents. It will then apply these characteristics to “bandits” in Manchuria by using diaries and memoirs of individuals captured for ransom by these groups, US State Department communiqués, and documents from the South Manchuria Railway. This paper concludes that these groups were mostly bandits in fact as well as in name and that they had little interest in actively resisting the Japanese presence in Manchuria; however, through their actions, these bandits had the same deleterious effect on Japan’s rule in Manchuria as a genuine insurgency would have had.

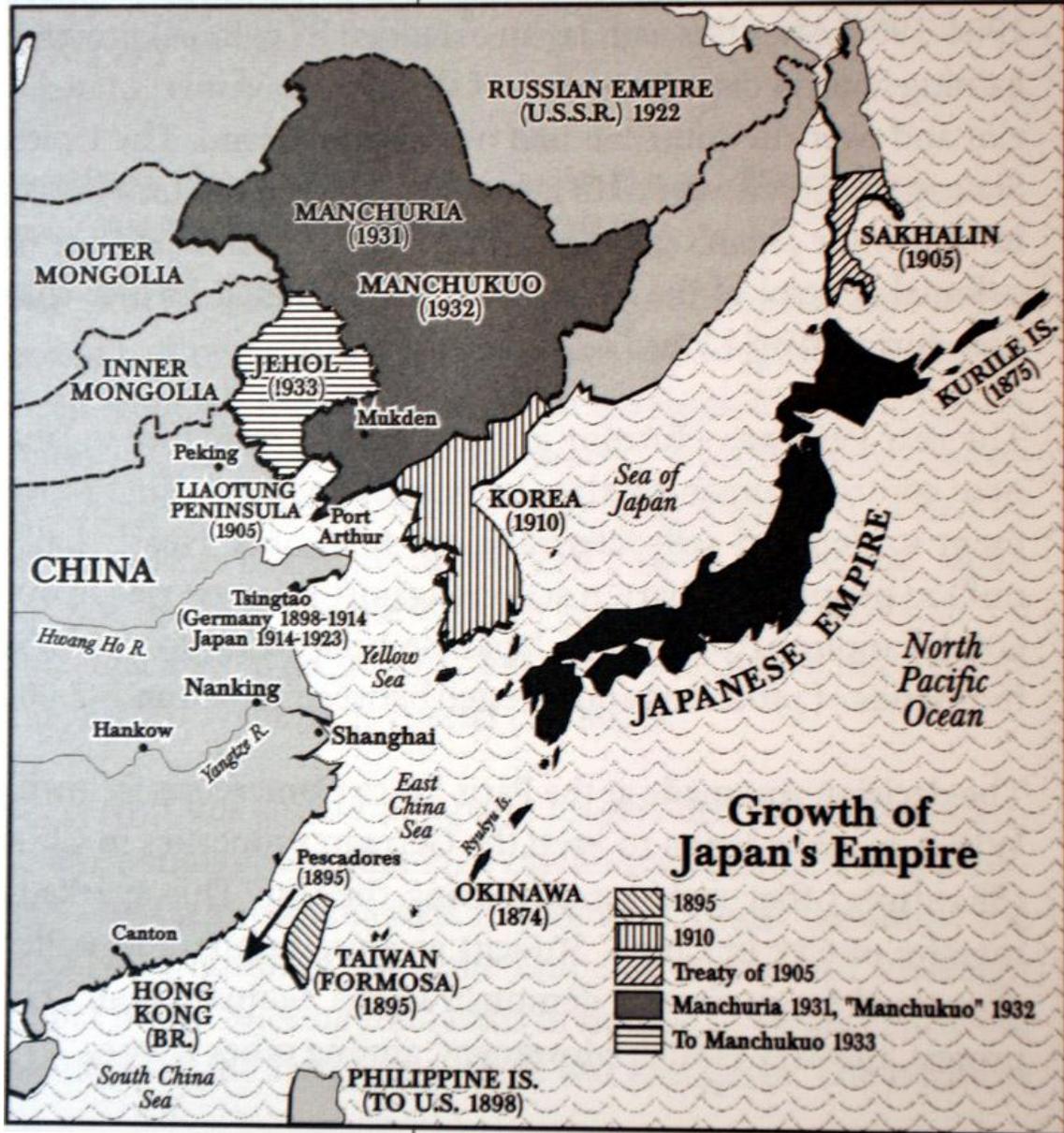


Figure 1. The Japanese Empire, 1895-1932. Source: <http://www.japanfocus.org/products/details/2418>

## Introduction

On 18 September 1931, Kwantung Army officers instigated Japan's takeover of Manchuria by framing Chinese soldiers for an explosion along a desolate portion of Japanese administered railway; this event would later come to be known as the Manchurian Incident.<sup>1</sup> Within months, Japan had taken control of much of Manchuria and had begun the process of setting up a puppet government. On the 18 February 1932 this process was complete, and the declaration of the founding of the ostensibly independent state of Manchukuo was greeted with disdain by the international community, which understood that the Japanese were in full control of Manchuria's new government.<sup>2</sup>

Against this geopolitical backdrop, Manchuria itself was in a state of bedlam. While the Japanese had gained control of enough major population centers to create its puppet government, it still lacked control over rural areas. This allowed longstanding bandit groups, who had existed for decades in Manchuria and thrived on robbery, extortion, opium growing, and other illicit activities, to have free run of the countryside, where they wreaked havoc in many areas. Joining the bandits in the countryside were the remnants of what had been the previous warlord's army, which continued to resist the Japanese.

For their part, however, the Japanese lumped both the traditional bandits and disbanded military together because, in the words of a Japanese colonel "they (the

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the Manchurian Incident, see Sadako Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria: The Making of Japanese Foreign Policy, 1931-1932* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> For more on the creation of Manchukuo, see Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

Manchurian soldiers) are little better than bandits, and bandits we call them.”<sup>3</sup> Mao Zedong (1893-1976) also drew a distinction between true and faux insurgents when speaking of the situation in Manchuria as of 1937, stating that “there are corrupt guerillas...there are people who under the guise of guerillas indulge in unlawful activities.”<sup>4</sup> Yet both the Japanese and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had reason to portray what were in reality insurgents as mere bandits; for the Japanese, it would be much easier to sway public opinion by portraying insurgents opposed to the faux government of Manchukuo as criminals unworthy of anything more than harsh treatment. At the same time, the CCP would not want its reputation as the leading anti-colonial group in China threatened by insurgents who did not share in its ideology.

This paper will attempt to step into a grey area that currently exists in the English language literature concerning the resistance movement in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation. It will do so by delineating the difference between bandits and legitimate resistance forces. To do so, the historiography of both resistance in Manchuria and banditry in China will be investigated to determine how the field deals with the issue of banditry and resistance in Manchuria.

In order to distinguish between banditry and resistance movement, a general definition of insurgency will also be constructed using texts by leading thinkers on both insurgency and counterinsurgency. This definition will then be applied to two examples of Manchurian banditry. First, it will be used to distinguish insurgency from the activities of a group of confirmed Manchurian bandits in 1925, years before the

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<sup>3</sup> A.R. Lindt, *Special Correspondent: With Bandit and General in Manchuria* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1933): 22.

<sup>4</sup> Mao Zedong, *On Guerilla Warfare* translated by Samuel B. Griffith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961): 45.

occupation. This example will serve as a baseline of bandit activity in Manchuria. The definition will then be applied to “bandit” groups in post-1931 Manchuria in an attempt to determine if these “bandits” had evolved into insurgent groups in response to Japan’s presence. The next section will detail the activities of confirmed resistance fighters during the occupation and compare them to bandit groups.

Finally, the paper will look at how the Japanese responded to both insurgents and bandits. These sections will collectively demonstrate that the Japanese and CCP were largely correct in labeling these groups as bandits; however, this paper also contends that the bands of criminals roaming the countryside constituted insurgents by proxy; by forcing the Japanese to undertake repeated bandit suppression campaigns and provide military escorts to travelers in certain areas, they helped to drain the occupation’s limited resources.

### **Historiography - Resistance and Banditry in Manchuria**

The English language works pertinent to this paper can be divided into two topical areas: the first area contains the works that deal with the resistance to the Japanese annexation of Manchuria and the second area contains the literature dealing specifically with banditry in China during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In general, the existing historiography illustrates that there is a gap in the literature with regards to banditry in post-1931 Manchuria. Studies of resistance generally focus on the leftover remnants of standing armies and communists, while studies concerning bandits all choose 1931 as their stopping point.

Within the English literature, resistance in Manchuria has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. The two texts that directly deal with the issue are Anthony

Coogan's 1994 article "Northeast China and the Origins of the Anti-Japanese United Front" and Rana Mitter's 2000 book *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China*. Coogan deals with the difficulties the CCP had in crafting a viable response to Japan's annexation of Manchuria during Manchukuo's early years; while Mitter assesses both collaboration and resistance in Manchuria and offers the most comprehensive view of the subject in English.

Coogan argues in his article that the policies devised by members of the CCP in Manchuria during the early years of Japanese occupation acted as a template for the eventual creation of the united anti-Japanese front in China south of the Wall. After the Manchurian Incident, Coogan shows how the CCP struggled to adjust to the situation; at first insisting that no change was necessary to the party's operations and forbidding cooperation with non-communist resistance movements on the grounds that they were led by reactionaries. After a short while, the CCP's leaders realized the error of this and sought to cooperate to some extent with the non-communist resistance movements, but they still ordered the communists of Manchuria to maintain a distinct presence. Finally, the communists in Manchuria took control of the situation away from the CCP's central committee, which allowed them to change their tactics to fit the situation. This made it possible to take in non-revolutionary regiments and operate joint headquarters with non-communist resistance troops. This process took from 1931 to 1935, however, and explains why the CCP failed to have a significant impact within the resistance to Japanese rule.

This article is important to this paper in two ways: first, it supports this paper's assertion that the CCP was not above calling anti-Japanese insurgents with which it

disagreed politically bandits; second, it demonstrates that there is not a clear definition that can be used to separate anti-Japanese activities from bandit activities. To the first point, the CCP early on described the anti-Japanese forces as “‘Guomindang warlords, despotic gentry, rich peasants, bandits and brigands,’” but would later “admit that what it termed *anti-Japanese “bandits”* were genuine anti-Japanese forces.”<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates how not having a clear definition of how banditry differs from insurgency allows the term to be applied to different groups for political reasons. Coogan’s quote above shows that the term “bandit” was applied to genuine anti-Japanese troops by the CCP; however, at a later point he relates that “[victory against regular Japanese soldiers], together with attacks on *bandits* who preyed on the local people...won some support (for a local communist group).”<sup>6</sup> Here the term “bandit” is attached to supposedly genuine criminal elements, but no rationale is given for this.

Rana Mitter’s book focuses on the period between 1931 and 1933 and attempts to deconstruct the cultural myths that have sprung up in China regarding the anti-Japanese resistance movement and the Chinese who collaborated with the Japanese. To do so, Mitter begins the book by laying out why the men in charge of the provinces and major cities chose to cooperate or to resist the Japanese. The book then assesses how leaders at the county level dealt with similar issues and why many of them chose to collaborate with the Japanese. Mitter then pivots away from local elites and their decisions and assesses the development of the resistance in Manchuria, focusing on the actions of

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<sup>5</sup> Coogan, 287, 298; italics in original.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 296; italics added.

Northeast National Salvation Society both in actual resistance and in crafting the narrative of resistance in Manchuria for a broader Chinese audience.<sup>7</sup>

Mitter's work is consequential for this paper in two key aspects: First, it offers some idea of the scope of the anti-Japanese resistance movement in Manchuria from 1931 to 1933; second, the book has the same trouble distinguishing between "bandits" and brigands as Coogan's article. In reality, however, the size of the resistance in Manchuria and the delineation between insurgents and brigands are related problems. Mitter uses the greater space afforded by a book to create a more nuanced view of the grey area between bandits and insurgents, using primary documents to demonstrate that accounts from Manchuria differed widely in their estimation of the composition of resistance forces, with some claiming bandits comprised 20% while other sources claimed the percentage of bandits was as high as 47%.<sup>8</sup> Mitter relates how the prevalence of bandits within the ranks of the resistance damaged the movement, stating "it does not take much imagination to...visualize the arrival of hundreds of irregulars lead by bandits, at a village, demanding that food and money be handed over and threatening reprisals for noncompliance."<sup>9</sup> Yet Mitter never explains why these bands should be considered resistance fighters as opposed to bandits using the resistance as cover for their actions.

It is at this ground level that both Coogan and Mitter's arguments lose their ability to clearly describe events. Both manage to write convincingly about the events that took place within government circles and among decision makers, and both their arguments at these levels sync up; however, when it comes to delineating bandits from insurgents, both

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<sup>7</sup> Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000): 1-20.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-198.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 199.

fail to adequately explain just what it was that separated banditry from insurgency, though Mitter does provide a large grey area within which the two ideas seem to merge.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese banditry has received a small but increasing level of scholarly interest over the years. Two prominent works on the subject are Phil Billingsley's 1988 book *Bandits in Republican China* and Patrick Fuliang Shan's 2006 article "Banditry, Outlawry and Social Order: Banditry in China's Heilongjiang Frontier Region, 1900-1931."

Billingsley's book, which covers the period of 1912-1937 with some spillover on both ends, marked the first time that theories of banditry as a social issue were applied to China; he argued that bandits were not necessarily the hardened criminals often depicted, but, rather, were peasants forced into banditry by the poor state of affairs in China.<sup>11</sup> In this telling, bandit gangs offered an escape route for peasants facing starvation, problems with the law, and other circumstances that made staying in a village difficult. To illustrate this, Billingsley looks at the geographical features that made banditry possible in North China and Henan in particular, who joined the bandit gangs and why, how the bandit gangs were organized, and how the bandit gangs fit into and helped maintain local power structures.

This book is useful to the current study in that it provides a basis for comparison with bandits in Manchuria. It illustrates the inner workings of bandit gangs in North China, shows who joined bandit gangs and why, and documents how bandit gangs fit into the local governing structure. This book will therefore provide a context for the slightly

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<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that neither Coogan nor Mitter's main subjects were banditry. This overview is meant to provide context for this paper, not critique either work in general.

<sup>11</sup> Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988): 5; The founder of modern thought on this type of social banditry is E.J. Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: New Press, 2000).

different form of banditry seen in Manchuria during the same time Billingsley covers in his work. Finally, this study provides additional support for the idea that the term “bandit” was given to political rivals and undesirable groups.<sup>12</sup>

Patrick Fuliang Shan does not disagree with Billingsley’s assertion that social banditry describes what took place in North China; however, Shan argues that social banditry cannot explain the prolific nature of banditry in Manchuria’s Heilongjiang province between the late nineteenth century and 1931. Shan instead argues that it was the frontier nature of Heilongjiang – with its lack of strong central governing institutions, wide open spaces, and large number of immigrants – that explains banditry in the region up to 1931, which is the point at which his study ends.<sup>13</sup>

This paper is of extreme importance to this study. First, it covers the same geographic location as this study, turning its descriptions of banditry, the level distribution of wealth and population in this region of Manchuria, and the level of government control into useful examples. This, paired with primary sources, will allow a baseline of bandit activities in pre-1931 Manchuria to be created, which will allow for a more nuanced assessment of “bandit” activities in post-1931 Manchuria.

What this historiography illustrates is a gap in the existing literature between studies of banditry during times of peace and studies of resistance to Japanese rule in Manchuria. Both studies of banditry cut off their inquiries with the onset of armed conflict between Japan and China, with Billingsley’s cutoff point being 1937 for China south of the Wall and Shan’s being 1931 for Manchuria. The studies of resistance also

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<sup>12</sup> Billingsley, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick Fuliang Shan, “Insecurity, Outlawery and Social Order: Banditry in China’s Heilongjiang Frontier Region, 1900-1931.” *Journal of Social History* (Fall 2006): 25-54.

struggle with this topic: Coogan relates how the CCP used the term of “banditry” to denounce what were legitimate anti-Japanese movements while at the same time acknowledging that there were real bandits operating in the region. Mitter attempts to address the issue by ascribing a wide swath of grey territory in which legitimate resistance forces and bandits intermingle, and it is undeniable that the line between resistance fighter and bandit was blurry; however, Mitter does little to clarify this line as it was not necessary to the larger study to do so.

This study will seek to bridge these gaps by first establishing a general outline of insurgency. This outline will then be applied to confirmed bandit activities in pre-1931 Manchuria to establish a baseline of activity that illustrates the criminal nature of these bands; then the model will be applied to post-1931 to determine if bandit groups changed their tactics and became resistance fighters in response to the Japanese presence, or if they continued on with business as usual. Creating this model and applying it to the English language accounts of bandits in post-1931 China will allow future efforts to do the same thing with the Chinese and Japanese language sources, and in the process provide a method to clarify the role bandits played in retarding the development of a successful resistance movement in Manchuria.

### **Defining Insurgency<sup>14</sup>**

Every instance of insurgency will differ, as terrain, population, religion, types of government, and a plethora of other variables all impact the exact form an insurgency

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<sup>14</sup> Due to current world events, insurgency and terrorism are often conflated with one another. It must be made clear that the idea that one person’s insurgent is another person’s terrorist is incorrect; insurgency is a strategy whereas terrorism is a tactic. While insurgents may employ terrorism and thus become terrorists, there are examples of insurgents who do not use terrorism at all. As the recent example of Al Qaeda in Iraq illustrates, insurgents must be careful in their use of terrorism, as it can anger a populace to the detriment of the insurgent’s goals.

will take. There is, therefore no universal archetype of insurgency; however, there are common elements that any movement that wishes to become an insurgency must have. These elements can be discerned by analyzing the writings of both prominent insurgents and counterinsurgents. Texts by Mao Zedong and Che Guevara (1928-1967) are particularly revealing on the characteristic of insurgents, while David Galula's (1919-1967) book examines insurgency from the counterinsurgent's viewpoint. What all of these sources agree on is that insurgencies, regardless of time and location, will have three basic similarities: a political cause, a well organized structure with disciplined members, and a hit and run approach to fighting the enemy.

Mao Zedong wrote his work *On Guerilla Warfare* soon after the United Front was created in between the CCP and the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) with the goal of expelling Japan from China. In his work, Mao argued that there is a role for insurgency to play in warfare, and he laid out a brief guide to conducting operations as an insurgent.<sup>15</sup> Mao identified three key areas that defined an insurgency: how the insurgents related to the people, how the insurgents were organized, and the basic strategy to be carried out by insurgents.

Insurgents related to the general populous through a political regime. Creating a compelling political message was crucial in Mao's thinking: "Without a political goal, guerilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, cooperation, and assistance cannot be gained."<sup>16</sup> In Mao's estimation, an insurgency that lacked popular support was doomed

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<sup>15</sup> There are multiple ways that this type of warfare is known, from guerilla to revolutionary to insurgency. For the sake of limiting the number of terms, this paper will only use the terms insurgents and insurgency.

<sup>16</sup> Mao, 43.

to failure, necessitating a strong political message. Mao also argued that success depended on creating a well-structured insurgency group. He wrote:

All (insurgent groups) must have leaders who are unyielding in their policies – resolute, loyal, sincere, and robust. These men must be well educated in revolutionary technique, self-confident, able to establish severe discipline, and able to cope with counterpropaganda. In short, these leaders must be models for the people.<sup>17</sup>

Mao emphasized this need for organization in reaction to the chaos seen in insurgency actions in Manchuria and areas of Northern China that Japan had overrun. He believed that these groups could not win, and thus encouraged strict discipline amongst prospective insurgents. Finally, Mao argued that agility should be the primary tactic of the insurgent, striking at enemies only to fade back into the shadows: “select the tactic of seeming to come from the east and attacking in the west; avoid the solid, attack the hollow; attack; withdraw; deliver a lightning blow; seek a lightning decision.”<sup>18</sup> This tactic was designed to maximize the small numbers of insurgent band, decrease morale amongst the enemy, and turn the enemy’s numerical superiority into a disadvantage.

Mao here lays down the first three areas that will have to be evaluated to create a general definition of insurgency: political goals, force organization, and hit and run tactics. Mao’s work was meant as more of a pamphlet than a long work, and it is thus short. Before these elements can be rolled into a larger definition, further corroboration will be necessary.

This can be found in the writings of another well known insurgent: Che Guevara. Guevara wrote his work, *Guerilla Warfare*, in order to pass on the lessons he had learned during his time overthrowing the Batista government in Cuba. What emerges is an

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<sup>17</sup> Mao, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 46.

account of insurgency that reiterates much of what Mao said, but from a tactical point of view. In Guevara's work, an insurgency required a political message, "hit and run" tactics, and insurgents dedicated to the cause.

Guevara emphasized the need for a strong political message for the same reason as Mao:

The guerilla band is an armed nucleus, the fighting vanguard of the people. It draws its great force from the mass of the people themselves...Guerilla is used by the side which is supported by a majority, but which possesses a much smaller number of arms for use in defense against oppression. The guerilla fighter needs full help from the people of the area. This is an indispensable condition.<sup>19</sup>

Tactically, Guevara argued for "Hit and run, wait, lie in ambush, again hit and run, and thus repeatedly, without giving any rest to the enemy."<sup>20</sup> This is remarkably similar to what Mao argued for, but Guevara adds a psychological element in as much as these tactics would wear out enemy troops while providing fame for the insurgents.<sup>21</sup> Guevara also makes explicit that, for insurgents, weapons, ammunition, and supplies will largely be acquired from fallen enemy troops. For this reason, Guevara considered discipline among the ranks to be crucial, and he felt that insurgents should be physically fit individuals dedicated to the political cause of the insurgency and willing to further that cause at the cost of their own lives.<sup>22</sup>

In Guevara's mind then, an effective insurgency would have a political message capable of attracting the populace to its cause, hit and run tactics that harried an enemy and sapped its morale, and dedicated and disciplined fighters willing to die for the cause. This follows closely with Mao's ideas, and Guevara adds a further layer to this by

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<sup>19</sup> Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Guerilla Warfare* (U.S.A.: BN Publishing, 2008.):11-12. .

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 77-80.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 41-50.

speaking to the dedication necessary among insurgents to accomplish successfully the political goals of the movement.

David Galula, a French lieutenant colonel, fought insurgencies in Algeria and Vietnam and assisted the KMT in combating the CCP after WWII. He took these combined experiences and wrote one of the most important texts on counterinsurgency of the twentieth century, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, which was published in 1964. This work delves into the workings of an insurgency from a counterinsurgents standpoint, and Galula relates that an insurgency seeks to win the support of the population, take advantage of the enemy's weaknesses, and take advantage of the terrain.

Like Mao and Guevara, Galula stresses the absolute necessity of a cause that the insurgent can exploit to gain popular support, stating that "The insurgent cannot seriously embark on an insurgency unless he has a well-grounded cause with which to attract supporters among the population."<sup>23</sup> The successful exploitation of a cause is crucial in Galula's thinking; he argues that the population is divided into an active minority that supports the insurgent, an active minority that supports the counterinsurgent, and a great middle which can be swayed to either side; whoever wins the middle wins the conflict. Galula also argued that, at a strategic level, an insurgent will strive to exploit weaknesses within the ruling regime, such as political instability, a rigid judiciary unable to adapt to the conditions of insurgency, and weaknesses within a nation's armed forces.<sup>24</sup> Finally,

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<sup>23</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 1964): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 17-22.

Galula argues that an insurgency will make successful use of the terrain: crossing borders to avoid military patrols and setting up bases in remote areas.<sup>25</sup>

From an analysis of these three sources, two from insurgents and one from a counterinsurgent, a general idea of what constitutes an insurgency can be derived. An insurgency must have a political message aimed at the general population. All three authors declare that this is essential, and they are unanimous in their assertion that an insurgency must have popular support or it will fail. While the size of insurgent groups may differ from conflict to conflict, there is also general agreement between the three authors that strong leadership is needed and that the insurgents themselves must be disciplined and dedicated. Tactically, all three authors agree that insurgents will strike targets of opportunity and fade back into the shadows, forcing the enemy to expend large amounts of time, money, and effort to police the populace. Finally, successful insurgents will also take advantage of the terrain. These relatively broad principles, then, are what this paper will use as a general definition of insurgency in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation.

### **Manchuria: Pre-1931 Banditry**

Banditry in Manchuria was an established practice at the time of the Manchurian Incident, with recorded attacks going back to 1900.<sup>26</sup> However, banditry began to increase year by year starting in 1920. This led to an ever larger number of foreign captives being taken hostage, and it is from the memoirs of these prisoners that the bulk of information regarding banditry comes from, as the bandits themselves left few written accounts of their lives. This stems from the fact that many bandits were illiterate, that

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 23-25.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Fuliang Shan, "Insecurity, Outlawry and Social Order: Banditry in China's Heilongjiang Frontier Region, 1900-1931." *The Journal of Social History* 40 no. 1 (Fall 2006): 26.

banditry was a violent enterprise whose practitioners tended to die relatively young, and the fact that the few bandits who managed to transition to government service were unlikely to benefit from having their unscrupulous activities written down for posterity's sake.<sup>27</sup> The goal of this section is to establish the reasons for the increase in banditry throughout the 1920s and the factors that enabled the increased number of bandits to flourish. It will do so through the use of Harvey J. Howard's (1880-1956) memoir of his time in captivity to establish a baseline of how bandits operated in pre-1931 Manchuria.

The persistence of banditry in Manchuria had its roots in the geography of the region. The geography is dominated by an arc of mountains that run throughout the territory, hilly regions, great stretches of plains, and large rivers.<sup>28</sup> The utility of this geography was accentuated by dense forests and fields of sorghum, which grew to be several meters high and acted to conceal the activities of bandits on the plains. This combination of geography and vegetation made finding bandit bases extremely difficult while allowing bandits to move about with relative impunity. The rivers of Manchuria, particularly the Sungari aided the bandits in moving from place to place and also funneled potential targets towards the bandits, as rivers stood with railways as the principle means of transporting goods and people. Thus the geography of Manchuria lent itself to the profession of banditry.

While this geography explains the presence of bandits in Manchuria, it cannot explain why banditry saw the increases it did in the 1920s. To explain this increase, it is necessary to look at the economic and political events that were taking place during this decade. Politically, Manchuria was ruled by the warlord Zhang Zuolin, who was himself

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<sup>27</sup> Xu Youwei and Philip Billingsley, "When Worlds Collide: Chinese Bandits and their 'Foreign Tickets.'" *Modern China* 26 no. 1 (Jan 2000): 38.

<sup>28</sup> Owen Lattimore, *Manchuria: Cradle of Conflict* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1932), 13-17.

an ex-bandit, and had risen through the ranks until he ruled all of Manchuria.<sup>29</sup> Once in power, Zhang began to increase his military's size and budget; however, many of these troops were poorly trained, and they often deserted and turned to banditry to make a living. It was this militarization of the province that generated many of the bandits and led to the increase in raids.<sup>30</sup>

This increased number of bandits was sustained by the growth of Manchuria's economy throughout the 1920s. In 1920, Manchuria's imports stood at 205,129,451 Haikwan Taels and its exports at 225,926,429; by 1929 those numbers had grown, with imports at 329,603,869 and exports at 425,651,491.<sup>31</sup> These increases were mostly due to extensive soy bean cultivation, with Manchuria supplying 63% of the world's soy beans in 1929.<sup>32</sup> This increase in economic fortunes, which was in marked contrast to the stagnation faced by China south of the Wall, led to higher rates of immigration to Manchuria by peasants; these peasants had always come to Manchuria as seasonal laborers, but were now staying year round instead of returning home.<sup>33</sup> The increased wealth associated with greater economic activity combined with a larger population to sustain the increases in banditry Manchuria witnessed during the 1920s.

It was during this time that the practice of kidnapping bandits for ransom became common. Bandits targeted foreigners for several reasons: first, foreigners were high value targets that promised to bring in high ransoms; second, foreign captives drew the attention of high ranking officials, offering the bandits a chance for political

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<sup>29</sup> Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northeast China, 1911-1928* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), 15-45; warlord was the title given to the military governors of China's provinces.

<sup>30</sup> Mitter, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Minami Manshu Tetsudo Kabushiki Kaisha, *Second Report on Progress in Manchuria to 1930* (Dairen: South Manchuria Railway, 1931), 136-137; hereafter this source will be called RPM2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>33</sup> RPM2, 13-15.

advancement; third, bandit groups holding foreign captives were often immune from outright assault by the authorities, as the authorities were loath to put the foreigners in danger and risk the wrath of foreign governments; fourth, and finally, bandits preferred to deal with the representatives of foreign governments, as they were more trustworthy than local officials.<sup>34</sup>

One individual who became a “foreign ticket” of the bandits was Harvey J. Howard. Howard, an ophthalmologist who worked for a hospital in Beijing, was visiting a friend’s ranch in Heilongjiang Province when it was attacked by bandits. In the fight, Howard’s friend was killed and Howard was taken captive. His time in captivity, which lasted roughly ten weeks, allowed Howard to glimpse banditry up close, and his fluent command of the Chinese language allowed him to interact with the bandits and learn a considerable amount about them. After he was released, Howard wrote about his experience, and the book shows a great deal about the men who became bandits, how they operated, and how they fit into the local governing structure at the time.

The bandits who abducted Howard fell into two categories: those who chose banditry to pursue their opium habit and those were forced into banditry by circumstances beyond their control. The majority of bandits fell into the first group, with Howard relating:

During the course of the night more than fifty of the seventy-two bandits smoked opium, several of them more than once...During the days the followed I was given the opportunity to see with my own eyes how banditry and the opium business were bound together...<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, a large number of the bandits fell into the former category of bandit. The importance Howard places on the opium use of bandits is in marked contrast to scholarly

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<sup>34</sup> Xu and Billingsley, 44-43.

<sup>35</sup> Harvey J. Howard, *Ten Weeks with Chinese Bandits* (New York: Dodd Mead and Co., 1932), 66-67.

studies of banditry, which rarely mention opium at all. The other type of bandit, less common than the first, consisted of men forced into the profession by circumstances:

Hai Feng told me his story with a tone of bitterness and hate. He had been, until recently, a police magistrate...But a sudden change in the political situation had made him a refugee. In order to save his own life and to seek revenge, he had become a bandit...<sup>36</sup>

The men in the second category were usually not opium smokers. Regardless of their relationship with opium, banditry was hard on those who joined the gangs. Howard's profession led him to treat many wounds and illnesses, and he recounts how he treated gunshot wounds, eye ailments, and other minor injuries.

It is, however, safe to say these men joined a definite gang, or organized criminal structure. In fact, it was not atypical for these bandit organizations to control large swathes of territory, often as large as a county. Within these territories, they built bases and managed to control certain areas for several years with large forces of up a thousand bandits.<sup>37</sup> Howard provides firsthand evidence of this, as he is first moved to a bandit safe-house near where he was captured where approximately seventy bandits were staying; he was then moved to a bandit stronghold located in a swamp. While being moved, Howard's bandit escorts encountered friendly farmers, woodcutters, and others willing to help them on their way.<sup>38</sup> This system of safe-havens, bases, and willing non-bandit accomplices gave the bandits the ability to move about with relative impunity in their area of operations. With this infrastructure in place, the bandits plied local farmers for goods – especially opium. Howard writes:

I had a conviction that the pressure brought to bear upon the legitimate farmer to provide opium must be very great...The pressure applied upon

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>37</sup> Shan, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Howard, 78, 114.

these farmers by the bandits may have been nothing more than immunity from molestation, but it evidently had greater weight than did the decrees and the threats of the military and civil officials.<sup>39</sup>

However, it is likely that many of those providing opium to the bandits were bandits who had taken up the occupation, as it was highly profitable. Owen Lattimore (1900-1989), a scholar who specialized in Central Asia, traveled through Manchuria a few years after Howard's ordeal and wrote an account of his travels, in which he notes that "A frontier opium-producing region is, on first acquaintance, lawless and bandit infested; but in reality there is far more peril for the stranger than for the people of the region."<sup>40</sup>

Lattimore went on to credit the rapid expansion of Chinese settlements into Manchuria to the cultivation of poppies. Clearly, the region that Howard found himself in fell into this description of a frontier area populated by poppy farmers and inhabited by bandit gangs.

To keep track of the profits made from the activities in their sphere of influence, the bandit gang had an account keeper who doled out the opium proceeds to gang members who smoked, or credited non-smoking members for their portion of opium.<sup>41</sup> The gang also maintained a bank account, which higher ranking members could draw from in order to make emergency purchases. The gang operated as a meritocracy, with members choosing their leaders. At one point, a group of bandits offered Howard the chance to be their chief, as a group of them had agreed his attributes qualified him to be their leader (beyond his size and medical skills, they were under the impression he had been a member of a bandit gang in the US because of Howard's association with a college fraternity).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>40</sup> Lattimore, 195.

<sup>41</sup> Howard, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 90-91.

Howard's memoir also reveals the tactics the bandits employed in their operations. The main tactic the bandits employed was to use the geography of their territory to their advantage. Towards this end, the bandits situated their camps in prime locations. The first camp Howard stayed at was located near the Sungari River, which allowed the bandits located there to harass the steamers that plied the water. The second base that Howard was taken to was situated in the middle of a swamp along a creek that fed out into the Sungari. When government forces were closing in on the bandits' location, the bandits were able to use the creek to make their escape. After this, the bandits fled to the mountains with Howard, and used the terrain to their advantage, often avoiding government troops that were nearly on top of them in the dense forests and ravines of the mountain.

Another tactic the bandits employed was that of crossing provincial borders to confuse pursuers, as jurisdiction changed with each border crossing. This created confusion and allowed the bandits to escape more easily than would have otherwise been possible. The bandits were also savvy in their ability to disrupt government communication, as their cutting of the telegram cables to Fuchin illustrated.<sup>43</sup> These tactics were often extraordinary, as they were being chased by hundreds of government troops who were attempting to retrieve Howard, but it is clear that, even under these abnormal conditions, the bandits employed many of the tactics that would be employed by an insurgent.

Howard's memoir also provides some glimpse into how bandits interacted with soldiers and those in power. At the very beginning of Howard's ordeal, bandits were laying siege to a hamlet under the supervision of Howard's friend; however, soldiers who

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 246.

had been sent to protect the area from bandit raids refused to fight, claiming they had only been ordered to protect the area's headquarters.<sup>44</sup> Later on when Howard talked with some of his captors, several hinted that they were army deserters who had kept their army-issued weapons. Howard also suspected that much of the ammunition the bandits used was bought from soldiers still serving in the military.<sup>45</sup> Later, after a brief skirmish with soldiers sent to reclaim Howard had cost a bandit his life, Howard recounts how:

...two soldiers in full uniform had come in during my absence. Their presence surprised me, but not so much as did the evidence of cordial relationship which I observed existed between them and the bandits. My curiosity finally got the better of me, and I asked the chap...who these men were. He grinned, but merely said, "Friends."

This tight relationship between the bandits and soldiers would manifest itself again in the way in which Howard was finally released. After weeks of captivity, Howard was finally rescued by soldiers; however, Howard was skeptical of the true nature of his rescue, suspecting that a deal had been worked out between the bandits and the soldiers that allowed the bandits to escape with no punishment while the soldiers got to claim a victory.<sup>46</sup> This relationship between the army and bandits was confirmed by later scholars who documented how bandits were co-opted by local governments or individual officials when it was convenient.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, Howard offers a revealing glimpse of banditry in pre-1931 Manchuria. The bandit gang Howard was abducted by was a well structured organization, with a support infrastructure that consisted of local farmers and woodcutters, a hierarchy determined by merit, accountants and bank accounts, and a well developed set of tactical

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<sup>44</sup> Howard, 23.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 95-96.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 258-259.

<sup>47</sup> Mitter, 38-41.

skills that masterfully exploited the geography of the group's area of operations. It is also obvious that bandits in pre-1931 Manchuria maintained a close relationship with the military, using it to supply the group with recruits, weapons, and ammunition. Political deals between the military and the bandits allowed both to save face. What stands out about these operations is the striking resemblance they bear to the definition of an insurgent group, particularly in regards to their tactics and co-option of the local populace. The main dividing line, the thing that sets them apart, is their utter lack of a political agenda. These bandits were out to make money and were not at all concerned with the political structure around them. It may not be too large a stretch to say that they had a vested interest in seeing the political structure of the mid-1920s maintained, as it was willing to deal with bandits when necessary. This is what makes this group a criminal organization as opposed to an insurgency; yet the Manchurian Incident must have affected these bandit organizations in some way, as the political order was upturned and the country thrown into chaos.

### **Manchuria: Banditry post-1931**

As the previous section illustrated, banditry in Manchuria was an established profession in Manchuria prior to the Manchurian Incident; however, the Manchurian Incident acted as a catalyst that created a surge in banditry. While post-1931 banditry shared many of the characteristics of pre-1931 banditry, it initially differed in a few critical ways. First, the increase in the number of bandits and bandit gangs destabilized the existing patterns of banditry, which led to a breakdown in the organized structure of the groups. Second, the annexation of Manchuria by the Japanese also changed the political environment that bandits operated in, creating a three way system between

resistance forces, the Japanese and their puppet government, and the bandits themselves. As a result, the already thin line between bandits and soldiers all but disappeared. Finally, the political chaos and devolution of the structure of the bandit gangs meant that bandits lost much of their support among the local population, which forced them to steal their daily necessities from farmers and villages. Tactically, however, bandits maintained many of the same practices that characterized their activities in pre-1931 Manchuria; and after a few years of Japanese rule, the evidence indicates that bandit groups were moving back towards a more normal mode of existence.

The explosion of lawlessness in the aftermath of the Manchurian Incident was documented by several sources. A report by the South Manchurian Railway covering a two month period from September to November recounted that “the number of Chinese bandits and irregular-soldiers committing atrocities day and night around the South Manchurian Railway line...totals not less than thirty five (sic) thousand.”<sup>48</sup> The thirty-five thousand incidents reported consisted of pillage, rape, the murder of Korean immigrants, and a bevy of other activities associated with marauding groups.<sup>49</sup>

One individual who experienced firsthand the chaotic state of Manchuria and wrote about his experiences was A.R. Lindt (1906-2000), a Swiss journalist who traveled to Manchuria immediately after the Manchurian Incident via the Siberian Railway. Lindt’s account immediately reveals differences between pre-1931 banditry and post-1931 banditry. While pre-1931 banditry was a rural phenomenon, post-1931 banditry infested the cities as well. Another dichotomy is that while in the 1920s banditry

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<sup>48</sup> Minami Manshu Tetsudo Kabushiki Kaisha, *Second Report on the activities of Chinese bandits and irregular-soldiers along the S.M.R. lines: arranged according to districts: September 19-November 15, 1931* (Dairen: S.M.R Research Office, 1931): 1.

<sup>49</sup> The report only lists casualties among Koreans and not Chinese. Koreans most likely received special attention because they were Imperial subjects of Japan, whereas Chinese were not.

increased along with the wealth of Manchuria, the increase in banditry in 1931 was fueled in part by the destruction of the soy bean trade that accompanied the Great Depression. Lindt, while speaking with a Russian merchant in Harbin, was told that:

‘If the soya-beans sell well, Harbin prospers. If the prices fall, Harbin goes hungry. The prices have never been so low. The town has never been so full of beggars. In the countryside the poverty is terrible. Many have left their fields to join, like the soldiers defeated by the Japanese, the ranks of the brigands, whose business, kidnapping, is the only one which still flourishes. Harbin to-day is besieged by them.’<sup>50</sup>

This would indicate that the Japan’s annexation of Manchuria came during an economic downturn that was increasing the number of bandits, and that the chaos associated with the changing of governments exacerbated this trend.

HGW Woodhead (1883-1959), who was the editor of the *China Year Book*, visited Harbin to see for himself what sort of state Manchuria was in. He wrote several articles during his time in Manchuria which were published in the *Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury*; later, these articles were collected and published in a book. Woodhead’s articles confirm Lindt’s report of lawlessness, though Woodhead goes a step further and reports that the local officials whom he interviewed seemed uninterested in confronting the problem, despite the fact that the location of the bandit’s base was well known. He concludes that:

...the kidnapping appears to be done by Chinese. They have established a regular industry. And the inactivity of the police in the face of this scandalous state of affairs can only be construed as showing a gross incompetence and cowardice, or as indicating they are the allies, not the foes, of the lawless elements of the city.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lindt, 31.

<sup>51</sup> H.G.W. Woodhead, *A Visit to Manchukuo* (Shanghai: The Mercury Press, 1933): 48.

Given the common nature of collusion between bandits and government officials in pre-1931 Manchuria, it is more likely that the inactivity of Harbin authorities to tackle criminal activity was a result of collusion, as opposed to cowardice.

This “reign of terror” was even worse in rural areas. Lindt offers a firsthand account of the countryside as well, as he left Harbin with an American reporter and a Chinese interpreter in order to track down a rebel general for an interview. Along the way he describes a free for all in which peasants huddled behind village walls to fend off raids by bandits:

Each family has its arsenal...Every stranger who approaches the village is greeted by a rifle-shot, fired into the air. It is the alarm signal for the inhabitants, warning them to take refuge inside the walls. Should the stranger be a bandit, he will know that the village is ready to defend itself. A peaceable man has but to continue his way; the peasants will let him pass in peace.<sup>52</sup>

The village Lindt describes here was willing to allow, albeit reluctantly, the travelers to enter their village. In the chaos that enveloped the countryside, every outsider was considered to be a “spy or a bandit.”<sup>53</sup> This environment of overt suspicion and near hostility is in marked contrast to the description given by Howard of the pre-1931 Manchurian countryside. At that time there was caution, but nowhere near this level; clearly the bandits had been forced to abandon their old pattern of staking out an exclusive claim to an area where they would have support villages and farms to aid them. With that structure gone, bandits used more coercive means to acquire the necessities of life, and the villages reacted to the new reality. Some villages, however, chose to become “bandit” villages in total, taking advantage of the situation to refuse to pay taxes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Lindt, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Lindt, 101-102.

This environment of mistrust was further enhanced by the unreliable character of Manchukuo troops. While discussing the utility of using Manchukuo troops on bandit suppression campaigns, Woodhead states that “it was suggested that one of their motives in enlisting is to secure munitions which they can hand over to hostile units.”<sup>55</sup> Lindt concurs with this assessment, detailing how the only difference between rebel troops and Manchukuo troops was a red arm band worn by the rebels over their uniforms. He further details a meeting between the party and a well known bandit who was ostensibly assisting the resistance through his illicit activities:

‘You are perhaps surprised that I lead a double life, commanding a volunteer corps and at the same time, under my bandit’s name, kidnapping the rich merchants of Harbin. Now, in order to provide arms for my corps, I need money. I pride myself on having one of the best equipped of the rebel troops. If I procure by brigandage money destined to finance my fight against Japan, what do you think I am, a bandit or a patriot?’

We never saw him again. From time to time I read in newspapers of the capture of such-and-such a village by his troops of lancers.<sup>56</sup>

This tendency of bandits to shroud their actions in the cloak of resistance played a role later on in the reception given to Lindt’s party at a larger city, which refused them entrance on the grounds that “bandits too wear uniforms these days.”<sup>57</sup> That the party was being escorted by the men of Ma Zhanshen, a leading general in the resistance, carried no weight with the city officials.

The observations of Lindt and Woodhead are corroborated by the account of three British sailors captured for ransom by pirates in 1933. Within the first few weeks of their captivity, the pirates who had captured them were themselves assaulted by a rival gang of bandits. The attack resulted in the slaying of the pirate leader and the transfer of the

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<sup>55</sup> Woodhead, 70.

<sup>56</sup> Lindt, 123, 125.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 132.

prisoners into the hands of the bandits.<sup>58</sup> This offers clear evidence that the territorial ranges that characterized pre-1931 banditry had broken down, resulting in a free-for-all that placed bandit groups in direct competition with each other.

A few months after this, the bandits are forced to flee the waterways by encroaching Japanese and Manchukuo troops. This event forced the bandits to seek shelter with farmers and villages as they retreated from the forces sent to take back their prisoners. None of the British sailors were fluent in Chinese, though they had a working knowledge of the language; therefore, it is difficult to determine the willingness of the local inhabitants in accommodating the bandits; however, it would appear that the bandits were welcomed in several locations.<sup>59</sup> This would indicate that, two years after the Manchurian Incident, certain bandit groups were in the process of reestablishing a local support network. It also suggests that the profession was moving back towards a pre-1931 status quo.

Tactically, however, it would appear that the bandits never deviated from their pre-1931 counterparts. The diary of the sailors describes the way in which the bandits used the waterways to move quickly while concealing themselves in the reeds along the banks of the creeks and rivers. The bandits also made use of fixed camp sights to defend themselves from other bandit gangs. When it came to combat, they refused to stand and face numerically superior forces; instead they chose to run whenever possible.

While normalcy, as given by the 1920s accounts of bandits, had yet to be restored, the diary of the British soldiers indicates the situation was moving back towards a pre-1931 status quo. This assessment is backed up by a report issued by the South

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<sup>58</sup> Clifford Johnson, *Pirate Junk: Five Months Captivity with Manchurian Bandits* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934): 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, 181.

Manchurian Railway, which indicated that major combat operations largely ceased in May of 1933 with the signing of an armistice with China, as the activity of bandits decreased with an end to official hostilities.<sup>60</sup> Further evidence for this return to a 1920s norm is given by a group of Japanese students who went to Manchuria in 1935 on an investigative field trip. While in Manchuria, they were forced to change their original destination, as the police told them the area they intended to go was the location of a bandit base, and that traveling to that area required a military escort.<sup>61</sup> While it is possible that the group being described by the police officer as bandits were in fact insurgents being called bandits, two things argue against that fact. First, some of the students were sympathetic with the anger they witnessed among the Manchurians at Japanese rule, and thus would have made note of the officer's use of the term "bandit" to describe an actual insurgent group. Second, the police officer informed them that a small military escort would deter any attacks on them as they traveled, and thus asked them to wait to postpone their travels so they could join a group of soldiers. This is powerful evidence that these groups were in fact bandits, as a small group of enemy soldiers escorting travelers would be an irresistible target for insurgents, but for bandits, attacking such a target would involve more danger than they would happily accept.

This section illustrates a few key points. First, banditry did undergo major changes after the Manchurian Incident; however, those changes moved bandits away from what could be called an insurgency. Before the Manchurian Incident, bandit gangs operated in much the same manner as successful insurgencies would be expected to operate, lacking only a political goal. With the Manchurian Incident, the opportunity to

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<sup>60</sup> Minami Manshu Tetsudo Kabushiki Kaisha, *Fourth Report on Progress in Manchuria to 1934* (Dairen: South Manchurian Railway, 1934): 120; hereafter RPM IV.

<sup>61</sup> Toā Dōbun Shoin Daigaku.. *Shoyōfu* (Shanghai: Toā Dōbun Shoin, 1936), 382.

claim a political goal that would transform these disparate groups into a unified force was not only ignored, but the bandits degenerated from their pre-1931 organizational structure. As a result of the influx of new bandits, the established groups lost many of their ties to the local populace, saw their organizational structures weakened, and faced rivalries from new gangs. Once the political situation in Manchuria began to calm down, bandits started reverting back to a pre-1931 system of banditry, albeit slightly altered as poor economic conditions increased the number of peasants forced into banditry.

### **Resistance in Manchuria**

While the above section clearly indicates that many disreputable groups took advantage of the chaos that surrounded the change of government in Manchuria to take on the mantle of resistance fighters for their own ends, it must be emphasized that there was an actual resistance in Manchuria. These forces were generally the remnants of regional forces led by commanders unhappy with the Japanese presence or the role the Japanese chose to give them in the new government. The most famous of these fighters was Ma Zhanshan (1885-1950), a general who won fame by halting the Japanese advance into northern Manchuria at a bridge over the Sungari River. This section will use Ma's resistance as a case study of the larger resistance movement so that the banditry that was seen previously can be put into a broader context.

Prior to the Manchurian Incident, Ma was a high ranking military officer in Heilongjiang. As was common in the pre-1931 government, Ma had reached his position after a career of banditry and military service, showcasing the overlap between the two institutions. Ma recounts how his life of fighting had begun before the age of 19 as a bandit. He then transitioned into the military, fighting Mongols, warlords, and bandits

before becoming a general.<sup>62</sup> Mitter argues that it was out of an attempt to gain greater patronage from the Japanese that Ma initiated his resistance, not out of patriotic or nationalistic feelings; in fact, Ma maintained contact with both the Nationalist forces in China and the Japanese.<sup>63</sup> However, Ma, a man of humble origins, was illiterate, and thus relied on secretaries sent to aid his cause by the former warlord, and these young men were true nationalists who turned Ma into an international figure of the resistance.

Yet a figurehead was not sufficient to defeat the Japanese, and Lindt observed that

...the young men of the staff, crammed with their nationalist doctrines and dreaming of a new China founded rather upon a few theories imported from the West than upon realities. Ma was a practical peasant, a man with both feet on earth, a man of action. The officers were idealists, perhaps a little vague. They could plan the China of to-morrow, but they could not rule or even defend the China of to-day. They had to leave the power to the generals, to men like Ma [Zhanshan] whose whole manner of life was contrary to their ideals.<sup>64</sup>

This dichotomy served to undermine Ma and his attempts to reach an understanding with the Japanese. In one instance where Ma had agreed to allow the Japanese entry into an area to reconstruct a bridge, his local commanders disregarded his orders for a ceasefire because they were unwilling to give any ground to the Japanese. This led the Japanese to view Ma as a weak commander, and it was estimated that Ma had firm control over only a third of his troops.<sup>65</sup>

With these troops Ma enacted a time honored Chinese military tradition of fighting and retreating, making sure to never get caught in a position where an all out battle could be forced by the Japanese.<sup>66</sup> However, the troops did not enjoy popular

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<sup>62</sup> Lindt, 162-163.

<sup>63</sup> Mitter, 205.

<sup>64</sup> Lindt, 149.

<sup>65</sup> Mitter, 206.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 207.

support, and were in many cases unpopular and unwelcome, as was illustrated in the previous section. This limited the ability of Ma to enact an effective resistance, and in the end Ma's efforts amounted to more of means to gain and hold international attention than actual military resistance, which was futile in the face of Japanese military superiority. Thus Ma and his officers spent more time on public relations with the outside world than they did building up the underground organization that would have been necessary for an effective resistance. While Ma had the political cause necessary to create an effective insurgency, he did not capitalize on the opportunity.<sup>67</sup>

Ma was not alone in his resistance. In each province similar forces – the remnants of old armies led by commanders seeking patronage – rose up between 1931 and 1933, and the Zhang Zoulin's army haunted the border between Manchuria and China for some time before it was driven out by the Japanese. The Treaty of Tangku, signed in 1933, ended much of the large scale resistance. In their place the groups that Coogan discusses in his article rose up, though they were ineffective at preventing the Japanese from enacting their plans in Manchuria. An example of types of activities and their impact on the Japanese occupation can be found in the diary of the Japanese students cited above. They did their research in a city in Southern Manchuria during the summer of 1935, but their research was hampered by the fact that mysterious individuals (it is clear they were not part of a bandit gang) had set fire to the city's government building, burning it, and all the documents inside, to the ground. This represented an inconvenience to the

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<sup>67</sup> The information on Ma Zhanshan is largely drawn from Mitter's work, which is one of the most recent works on the subject. The works before Mitter's tended to rely on the propaganda reports that were written about him, and thus tend to offer an unrealistic picture of his actions and motives. Mitter's work is one of the first works to attempt to write about Ma as something other than a mythological figure.

Japanese occupation effort, but the students' journal entries make it clear that Japan's position in the province was in no way compromised by the activity.<sup>68</sup>

The initial lackluster response by the general population was due in part to a general lack of national feeling among the population of Manchuria, which was composed largely of immigrants from China proper who had little feeling for Manchuria as an entity. In fact, fostering a feeling of cohesion in Manchuria was one of the challenges the Japanese faced in creating their puppet state.<sup>69</sup> This environment was not conducive to the formation of an effective resistance, and as a consequence none rose up, though several unsuccessful attempts were made.

### **The Japanese Response**

The previous two sections have illustrated that both bandits and resistance forces existed in Manchuria. For the Japanese, however, these different groups were all viewed and dealt with in a similar fashion that involved a large military response. In fact, K.K. Kawakami (1873-1949), an apologist for Japanese actions, compared Japan's actions in Manchuria to the role it played in stabilizing Taiwan in 1896, and linked suppressing banditry closely with that goal.<sup>70</sup> This goal of bandit suppression was initially inhibited by the unreliable nature of the military in Manchukuo, but after a few years the efforts of the Japanese managed to create a more reliable force. They then employed many of tactics prescribed by later authors of counterinsurgency.

First, it is crucial to note that, despite applying the term bandit to a wide variety of groups, the Japanese were conscious of the differences between the groups. Woodhead, in talking with Japanese officials in Manchukuo, learned that there were four specific

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<sup>68</sup> Toō Dōbun Shoin Daigaku, 394.

<sup>69</sup> Duara, 1-7.

<sup>70</sup> K.K. Kawakami, *Manchukuo: Child of Conflict* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933): 230-231.

classifications of bandits: political forces, such as Ma Zhanshan; religious or fanatical organizations such as the Red Spears and Great Sword organizations that believed they were made invulnerable to bullets through religious rituals; traditional bandits of the type that captured Dr. Howard in the 1920s; and peasant bandits who were forced into the profession by circumstances beyond their control.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the different classifications, the strategy for dealing with each group remained the same. Militarily, the Japanese used Manchukuo troops as the main force with a contingent of Japanese troops to provide back up and air support. Initially, this strategy was hampered for reasons already stated, but by late 1933 the concept was showing success. Most notably, was a combination of Manchukuo troops and Japanese air power that harried the bandits who had kidnapped the British sailors. The Japanese also took to clearing areas with these combined forces and then leaving a small contingent of Japanese forces in place to prevent any plotting by locals and a resurgence of banditry.<sup>72</sup> The Japanese also implemented changes in the landscape to deprive bandits and resistance fighters the use of the terrain. They banned the planting of sorghum within 500 feet of railway lines and cut down the forests that lined railroad tracks in mountainous areas. To entice the bandits driven to the profession by economic hardship back into a life of respectability, the Japanese offered an amnesty program that put ex-bandits to work building up to 60,000 kilometers of road throughout Manchuria. Finally, incentives were provided to county level governments to create patrols that would keep the surrounding terrain free of bandits. These efforts were enhanced by attempts to create

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<sup>71</sup> Woodhead, 65-66; the Red Spears and Big Swords were the descendants of the forces that had fought the Boxer Rebellion.

<sup>72</sup> Kawakami, 241-242.

a strong police force.<sup>73</sup> Some of the military measures were harsh, however, this was not the norm, and the Japanese generally sought to co-opt locals rather than to fight them.

Beyond these measures, it is also important to note that the Japanese attempted to gain control of the means of communication in Manchuria. They took over the postal system, telephone networks, and radio stations in an attempt to shut down nationalist propaganda, even at the cost of angering foreign consulates and their home governments.

The Japanese thus created a three pronged attack on banditry and resistance troops: the main component of which was a military effort billed as an anti-bandit campaign. They combined this with terrain modification that denied bandits and resistance forces the ability to stealthily attack preferred targets such as trains. Economic measures were also employed to lessen the appeal of banditry to poor peasants. Finally, the Japanese sought to gain control of the communication networks to deny nationalists the opportunity to gain a wider following. These tactics had some success in restoring the chaotic situation that followed the Manchurian Incident into a more normal situation consistent with Manchuria in the 1920s, though banditry remained a problem throughout Japan's tenure as ruler of Manchuria, and it was not until 1949 that the CCP finally managed to eliminate the presence of bandits from the countryside. This situation was not identical to the 1920s however, as a low-intensity insurgency that consisted of both communists and ex-military personnel was present as early as 1935.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that both the Japanese and the CCP were correct and labeling the majority of the fighting that took place in the aftermath of the Manchurian Incident as being against bandits; however, there were actual resistance fighters, though

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<sup>73</sup> RPM IV, 120-121, 127-128.

they may not have been fighting for purely nationalistic reasons. Nonetheless, by applying a model of what an insurgent should look like, it is possible to delineate between these two groups more precisely than has been done in the past.

What this model reveals is that, surprisingly, it was the bandits who were in many ways closer to being insurgents than the actual resistance forces. The bandits had: a hierarchical structure, especially pre-1931; were capable of using the terrain to their advantage; had a network of local support that sustained them in hard times and offered them shelter from patrols; and generally chose to run when confronted by a larger enemy. The one thing bandits lacked was a political cause. The resistance forces, on the other hand, had a cause, but they lacked the following: a support network among the local populace; any sort of fixed command structure; and they were far less conscious of the terrain during the time period covered by this paper, choosing instead to stand as unified armies rather than break up into guerilla bands that could harass the enemy, as the example of Ma Zhanshan demonstrates.

Yet, in the short term, this combination of bandits that acted like insurgents without a cause and resistance fighters that acted as disorganized rabble had the cumulative affect of forcing the Japanese to undertake what amounted to a counterinsurgency campaign that drained their occupation force of men and resources. This situation was beginning to reverse by 1933, and it is likely that Japan would have eventually managed to eradicate banditry had the Sino-Japanese War not intervened in 1937. As it was, banditry survived another decade and a half before being wiped when the CCP asserted firm control over the frontier regions of Manchuria.

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