

that rejection of the party form and of the idea of the historical centrality of revolutionary theorists (“great men”) makes it difficult to pursue radical politics in anything that resembles its earlier styles. Bourrinet cleaves in contrast to the Leninist conviction that, not the actual historical experiences of workers, but “the political and theoretical positions of revolutionary organizations are what really count”, for good or for ill (p. 518). This is why the main method of this book is the detailed examination and confrontation of programmatic texts. It suggests to this reader nothing less than the work of a Catholic theologian, who has for some reason fallen in love with the Albigensians, though he is ultimately forced to condemn their doctrine as heretical.

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CHEN, SHUANG. *State-Sponsored Inequality. The Banner System and Social Stratification in Northeast China*. Stanford University Press, Stanford (CA) 2017. xviii, 342 pp. Maps. \$65.00.

This inspired and brilliant book analyses a very specific subject – the creation of an immigrant society and the social engineering implemented by the Qing court during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Shuangcheng (located in the alluvial plain of the Songhua River, in present-day southern Heilongjiang province), an area along the northeastern Manchurian frontier previously almost uninhabited. After selecting the site because of the abundance of high-quality uncultivated land, the state relocated thousands of households from the capital Beijing and other zones in Manchuria. During this settlement, the central authorities categorized the new inhabitants of Shuangcheng into four groups, according to their identity and provenance, and gave them plots of land of different size and quality. In this newborn agrarian society, differentiated land allocation was a fundamental means by which the state forged social classes and established boundaries between them, or, in the author’s words, by which the state sponsored inequality between different social nuclei. The state-established social hierarchy and the struggle of social categories to survive and accumulate wealth are the main focus of this volume.

Among the migrant groups, the “metropolitan bannermen”, who before the transfer were registered in the Eight Banners of the capital, were a privileged elite. As the “descendants of the warriors who had helped the Manchu rulers of the Qing conquer China proper” (p. 1), they were granted the largest plots, and before their arrival other categories were ordered to clear land for them. Back in Beijing, these bannermen served the state as soldiers and received stipends, but, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, providing for their livelihood had become a great burden for the state. In fact, the main goal of the Shuangcheng relocation policy was to commute the metropolitan bannermen’s stipend through a one-time allocation of land by means of which they were thereafter supposed to support themselves. In the 150 years before moving to Manchuria, metropolitan bannermen had grown accustomed to urban life and were not trained in farming land. Therefore, despite

their privileges, they found it extremely difficult to adapt to the new, rural environment. This caused a setback in the manoeuvre when, between 1838 and 1844, one seventh of the metropolitan banner households who had settled in Shuangcheng became extinct or fled (pp. 57–58). Because of their lack of knowledge of agricultural practices, metropolitan bannermen had to rely on people from other categories for farming, so they hired them as labourers or rented land to them.

People who moved to Shuangcheng from other parts of Manchuria are referred to as “rural bannermen”. Their expertise in farming and familiarity with the environment of Manchuria made it relatively easy for them to adjust to their new home. They were assigned plots half the size of those allocated to metropolitan bannermen and were forced to clear land on their behalf. Nonetheless, many rural banner households became wealthy, acquiring more land on their own and working as tenants for the metropolitan bannermen. The first two categories, proactively resettled by the state, are identified as the “haves” of Shuangcheng. The other two were bannermen from Manchuria and northern China, known as the “floating bannermen”, and civilian commoners – a population not registered in the Eight Banners – who migrated to Shuangcheng on their own initiative. Having had no official permission from the state to relocate, these immigrants were not entitled to landed property and are therefore called the “have-nots”. They could survive only by working for land-owners or by renting land.

After outlining the process of creating Shuangcheng (including household recruitment and settlement, founding villages, clearing land, establishing and developing an administrative system), Shuang Chen dedicates the second part of her book to analysing the interaction between Shuangcheng society and state policies. More specifically, this section examines those efforts made by households from different categories to increase their wealth and status, which threatened the state-mandated hierarchy and the state measures aimed at preserving that hierarchy. In Shuangcheng, wealth distribution was based on state-managed land allocation, but land assigned by the Qing court was but a small proportion of the cultivable land in the area. And although private land clearing was forbidden, the state was never really capable of controlling this. On the one hand, these factors created opportunity for all the categories – including the have-nots – to acquire more land, thus threatening the privileges of metropolitan bannermen; on the other hand, since the property rights of other groups on newly cleared land were unlawful and could not be recognized, it was possible for metropolitan banner households to appeal to the authorities to claim rights to those lands. Whenever they succeeded in doing so, rural bannermen and other groups ended up becoming tenants or workers of the land they had cleared. Yet, although they could never acquire for themselves real rights to landed property, these “non-privileged” households were often able to secure the right of use through customary practices such as the renting or conditional sale of land, which the state failed to prevent.

In the final chapters, detailed statistical data on wealth distribution at the end of the nineteenth century are presented. Based on this, the author concludes that factors such as demographic success and the ability to exploit land resources and exert rights (whether profiting from or fighting against state policy) could determine the final outcome for the single household in matters of status and wealth. This is especially true for categories at the top and at the bottom of Shuangcheng society. Some civilian households managed to secure the right to use the land they rented, eventually becoming *de facto* proprietors. As shown in Chapter seven, according to data from 1876 “the two largest landowners [...] were civilian commoners” (p. 195). As for metropolitan bannermen, only capable families were able to profit from the state-established inequality and maintain their privileges over time.

A very intriguing parallel is drawn in the epilogue between state-mandated inequality in Shuangcheng and the *hukou* household registration system of socialist China. Aimed at promoting the development of heavy industry, the system divided the population into urban and rural categories, granting far better entitlements to the former. Although, as pointed out in the book, there is absolutely no causal relationship between the two cases, the parallel is a valid one, since both policies aimed to “direct resources to the state-designated elite population” (p. 254).

The history of Shuangcheng is documented at length in Qing sources. By meticulously gathering and comparing information from the large number of primary sources – including the archives of administrative offices, edicts and memorials, gazetteers – the author was able to outline the institutional and socioeconomic development in-depth and in detail. The numerous legal cases found in the archives, in particular, shed light both on the social engineering perpetrated by the central and local authorities and on the ways households from various categories took advantage of the law or circumvented it in pursuing their interests. All this results in a comprehensive, exhaustive account of the processes of change in Shuangcheng society, which constitutes the strength of this study.

Despite the undoubtable peculiarity of Shuangcheng, some aspects of its socioeconomic structure were shared by other areas in Manchuria. Yet, the author often seems to interpret these as distinctive characteristics of Shuangcheng. For instance, inequality between the basic categories of bannermen and civilian commoners was prominent in the whole region. There, as in Shuangcheng, the former tried to maintain their privileges while the latter used subterfuges to accumulate wealth. Private clearing and farming of unassigned land, carried out both by bannermen and civilians, also was very common in Manchuria, except that privately reclaimed land was known in Shuangcheng as “rent-paying” land (the allocated plots were rent-exempted) while in other parts of the region they were termed “exceeding land”.

More importantly, although the Beijing bannermen relocation to Shuangcheng was the most successful and the best-documented case, it was not the only one. Precedents date back to as early as the Yongzheng period (1723–1735) and, as the Shuangcheng project was being carried out, some 3,000 other metropolitan banner households were transferred to neighbouring Lalin, Alchuka, and Bodune. These manoeuvres have been examined by the Chinese scholar Cong Peiyuan, who contributed the volume on the Ming and Qing dynasties to *Zhongguo dongbei shi* [*History of Northeast China*], a six-volume collection edited chiefly by Tong Dong and published in 2006 by Jilin wenshi chubanshe. In spite of its brevity, Cong’s account does shed some light on the similarities and differences between the relocation operations; nevertheless, it is not quoted in the book, nor is it listed in the references.

These are but minor shortcomings in a fascinating and inspiring book that stands out as a solid contribution to the study of the social and institutional history of Qing Manchuria. Bannermen relocation policies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remain a subject of major interest for further research, given that Cong’s work on the subject is far from satisfying. If Shuang Chen continues to devote herself to this field, she will no doubt produce further remarkable results.

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