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On the Colonial Expansion of Tsarist Russia and the Railway Construction in Eastern Province of China

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Abstract

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Tsarist Russia built a wide-gauge railway that crossed northeast China. The Railway in Eastern province of China, its arteries start from Manzhouli in the west, passes through Harbin in the middle and reaches Suifenhe in the east, and it is connected with the Russian Rear Baikal Railway and the South Wusuli Railway in the end. Later, Russia obtained the right to build the southern line of the railway through the Renewal Contract, thus forming the trend of connecting Europe and Asia. After the opening of the railway, Northeast China was forced to open passively in the shock of the steam-powered locomotive in which capitalism was established. Although the Railway in Eastern province of China has the legal basis of the Contract of Jointly running Eastern Province Railway Company, there are various unequal treaties in political, economic, military, social, cultural and other fields derived from it, all at the expense of China's interests. In fact, it was the Russian who took the lead in the struggle for the interests of the world capitalist powers in our northeast. Starting with the Contract for the Joint operation of Eastern Province Railway Company, the Russians are able to misinterpret it arbitrarily. If they cannot explain it, they will show their strength by actual control, or regain their interests under various names such as "renewal" and "supplement". This fully reflects that many texts on Sino-Russian relations around the railway in Eastern province of China basically follow the "law of the jungle".

Keywords: the railway in eastern province of China, Tsarist Russia, northeast

1. The Relationship Between the Trans-Siberian Railway and the Railway in Eastern Province of China

Before the railway construction in Eastern province of China, Russia took the lead in the construction of its domestic Trans-Siberian Railway, the construction of the railway is a big event in the world, but also a symbol of the Russian empire strategic eastward shift, opened the curtain of hegemony in the Far East and the Pacific region. In the mid-19th century, Britain, the United States, France, Germany and other countries were sensitive to the economic value and strategic significance of the Far East, and sent various people to actively penetrate there under various identities and names, making it a field of competition for the interests of world powers.

In December 1856, British engineer Dury was commissioned by the British and French, carried out a field trip to Siberia, put forward the railway construction scheme, and proposed to the Russian government for the right to build part of the road; In March 1857, Collins, an American, submitted a report to Muraviev, governor of Eastern Siberia, suggesting the establishment of a railway company to build the railway from Irkutsk to Chita. In January 1867, the French engineer Kulkin came to the Russian government and asked for the design and construction of a railway from Paris to Beijing, which would pass through the whole Siberian region and reach Beijing through the Chinese mainland. In June 1870, the Prussian land capitalist Lichtier sent a letter to the Russian Czar, proposing that Prussia participate in the construction of the Siberian Railway by providing locomotives and railway equipment. All in all, it is the fact that the powers of each country are expanding their own interests under the pretext of building the railway. This is no doubt a pretext for the Russian Empire, which is eager to move eastward and has exclusive economic interests and strategic position in Siberia. Russia fends off applicants with different goals for various reasons, and will not allow foreign powers to get their hands on it, even if it is incapable of doing so.

In May 1858, the Ai-Hui Treaty between China and Russia was signed. The czar Russia occupied more than 600,000 square kilometers of territory north of the Heilong River, and the vast area east of the Wusuli River was placed under the "common administration" of China and Russia. 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 finance ministry and the transport ministry have been squabbling over the constraints imposed by the protracted financial crisis on railway design. The problem was solved when Witt, who had been transport minister, became finance minister with the Tsar's support.

In July 1890, Russia learned that the Qing government was going to build the railway from Beijing to Hunchun, and had sent the British engineer Ginda to survey on the spot. The Russians sensed the crisis, and Alexander III ordered at a meeting of senior officials that "the construction of this railway must proceed with haste." Foreign Minister Nicholas Karlovich Keels then declared: "The state of Russia's relations with China has led the Foreign Ministry to consider the question of building the Trans-Siberian Railway as of Paramount importance to Russia." In February 1891, the Russian Emperor held a meeting of ministers, participants agreed to immediately build the Trans-Siberian Railway and related matters were studied. The 7,112km railway is expected to be completed within 12 years, partly financed by the state Treasury and partly financed by railway bonds. On March 29, the Russian Emperor announced the news to the world. At the end of the same year, Russia established the "Siberian Railway Commission" composed of the Minister of Army, the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of property, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Admiralty, and the State Inspector General. "This commission was given full power to eliminate all unnecessary delays and to manage administrative and legislative matters concerning the construction of the railway". To highlight the status of the Trans-Siberian Railway Committee, Crown Prince Nicholas Alexandrovich was appointed its chairman, which gave a big boost to the construction of the railway.

2. The Process of Railway Construction in Eastern Province of China and Its Important Influence

In December 1892, the Committee of the Siberian Railway confirmed the construction procedure of the railway, and the whole project was completed in three phases: (1) the construction of the railway from Mias to Irkutsk via Chelyabinsk; (2) Count Town to Khabarovsk, Mesovaya to Stretiansk; (3) Lake Baikal section, Khabarovsk to Streltiansk. The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway is confronted with many difficulties, such as poor geological conditions, bad climate, numerous rivers and mountains, shortage of funds, lack of labor, large quantities of projects, etc., but it has been broken down one by one in front of the great creativity of mankind.

In terms of geology, "the slope of the railway gradually rises above 3,500 feet on the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. From there, the steep zigzag route descends into the valley of the Yingoda River and Lake Chilka, traversing the cliffs of several high mountains and entering swampy terrain. By the way, the engineers in this swampy area had to overcome their greatest

obstacle, which was mainly due to the unfirmness of the ground."

In terms of climate, the railway is challenged by harsh weather conditions, especially in the outer Xingan Mountains, where the temperature reaches 77 degrees Fahrenheit at noon and drops to 23 degrees Fahrenheit at night every July. Because of the lack of snow in winter, the severe cold and winds keep the ground frozen all year round. In many places, the soil layer remains frozen from 24 feet in winter to 12 feet in summer. In order to lay the rail, the workers had to blast the frozen soil to make the roadbed stable, not only affected the construction schedule, but also greatly exceeded the budget.

In terms of water system, there are many fast-flowing rivers, which bring great difficulties to road construction. The bridge width of Yenisei River, Obi River, Seleng River and Ertiz River is more than 700 yards (the length unit of the United States, Britain and other countries, per yard = 0.914 meters). In addition, in order to prevent the impact of floating ice on the bridge, the requirement for the sturdiness of bridge piers is also very high.

In terms of labor force, at the beginning of the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, road construction workers were within 10,000, and with the arrival of the construction peak, road construction workers increased to nearly 90,000. The backbone of the workers are mostly local poor farmers, soldiers and exiled prisoners, engaged in earth-digging, quarrying, logging, transportation and other non-technical but very intensive manual labor. In addition, the railway is a large market for labor from China, Korea, Japan and other neighboring countries. There are even construction workers and technicians from Finland, Italy and Germany on the railway site. Every year, the Russian government recruited about 10,000 Chinese laborers from Yantai and other places in China, and the governor of Amur wrote in his book: "A large part of the railway project was completed by the Chinese. Every part of the project — whether it's digging the earth, building the bridge, building the station ticket office, barracks, guard houses, etc. — Chinese workers are involved in the construction." Nie Shicheng, a general of the Chinese Army, visited the Far East in 1893 and wrote a book called *Journey to the East*, in which he wrote: "Since the Russians built the railway, four-tenths of the Chinese and three-tenths of the Korean lived. The rest is filled by the sinners of Sakhalin."

In terms of road construction funds, it was originally expected that the total length of the railway was 7,112 kilometers, which was planned to be completed within 12 years, the cost of 350 million rubles, and the annual investment in road construction costs was 30 million rubles. As a result, the actual cost of the project exceeded the budget, and the railway from Chelyabinsk to Vladivostok and the Amur railway branch from Sretensky to Khabarovsk alone cost 1 billion gold rubles, and the Russian government had to borrow from France and issue bonds to finance the construction of the railway.

The speed of the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway was amazing, "the average annual progress of the project reached 650 versts, which was rare in the history of railway construction in the world at that time." And the construction of this great railway line across vast fields, through rushing rivers, through steep mountains, is difficult to imagine. According to the statistics of the quantity of works in 1903 alone, "there were 12 million ties, 1 million tons of rails, 1 million tons of masonry, 10 million cubic meters of earthwork, and more than 100 kilometers of bridge culverts."

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 wrote: "The Great Siberian Railway (great, not only in terms of its length, but also in terms of the unlimited plundering of the state's money by the builders and the unlimited exploitation of the road workers) opened up Siberia. Nothing symbolizes the arrival of the Siberian machine age like the Trans-Siberian railway. It connected Europe and Asia like an iron chain. It revolutionized migration and economic development in the East." The construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway made it possible to develop the eastern part of Russia, completely changing the barren and isolated situation in the past, and "the formerly lifeless wasteland began to beat the pulse of Russian life." And its international

economic and strategic significance, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer Witte best understand the relationship between the Trans-Siberian Railway and the partition of China, in his view: "The European powers and Japan probably realized that the partition of China in the near future, they think that because of the partition of the Siberian Railway, our chances will be greatly increased." He also wrote in his memoirs: "When the Trans-Siberian Railway is completed, it will reduce the journey between Europe and Asia from 35 days to 18 to 20 days. In this way, the Trans-Siberian Railway is bound to replace the Suez Canal as the main trade route from Europe to China. Through this great railway, Russia will dump large quantities of cotton, fur, woolen goods and other industrial goods into China, from which they will be transferred to Korea and Japan. Chinese tea and silk could be imported into Russia in a steady stream. 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... The Trans-Siberian Railway was also of great significance in changing the political and military situation in the East. We regard the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway as a global strategy, that it will politically consolidate the friendly political relations between Russia and the countries of the East, that it will militarily secure the Russian fleet with all its needs, and that it will provide it with a strong foothold in our Eastern ports, and that with the opening of the railway this fleet may be greatly strengthened. In the event of political entanglements in Europe or East Asia, it would control all international commerce in the waters of the Pacific and would therefore be of great importance."

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.

In 1894, during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, engineers and technicians of the Trans-Siberian Railway surveyed the Amur region and found that there were many difficulties along the intended route, not only through uninhabited areas, but also difficulties in geology, climate, road paving and bridge building. There were three opinions about the direction of the railway in Russia: (1) No change in the established plan, open the road along the north bank of the Heilongjiang River, build a bridge on the water, reach Khabarovsk, run south along the east bank of the Ussuri River, connect with the Ussuri railway, and go straight to Vladivostok; (2) Turn southwest from Chita and arrive at Beijing via Kyakhta and Zhangjiakou; (3) That is, the Witte plan, the Trans-Siberian Railway through China's Manchuria, can reduce difficulties, shorten mileage, save costs, and promote the railway as soon as possible. Although the outcome was not entirely this way, it achieved the purpose of controlling Manchuria to a certain extent. This design idea came from the upper echelons of the Russian ruling group, and Count Witte, who had served as transport minister, finance minister, and Chancellor, was the initiator of this route design.

The railway construction in Eastern province of China provided great convenience for the expansion of the overseas market of Tsarist Russia. On the one hand, the agricultural resources of the northeast were used to ensure the food consumption of the residents of the Russian Far East and Siberia. At the same time, some Russian businessmen bought agricultural and sideline products along the railway at a low price and shipped them to overseas markets for profit. On the other hand, it carried out extensive capital expansion, taking advantage of the status of the grain producing areas in the north of the Northeast, and invested in the construction of machine flour factories along the railway, and the products were exported to Dalian, southern China, Japan, Korea and so on.

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, 1.5 million Russian troops entered the Northeast, and 85% of the army's supplies were taken care of in Harbin and along the railway. In the spur of the war, a small soap factory in Harbin made money in a year equivalent to 50 to 100 times the capital expended by the enterprise. Not surprisingly, there is a lot of investment in new ventures. Many Russian companies have reached a scale that would have taken decades under normal conditions. On the other hand, the Russians took advantage of the opening of the railway to frantically dump goods in northeast China. In order to open up the market and take advantage of the railway, the Tsarist Russian

government formulated special preferential policies for dumping goods, mainly in light industry, textile, cement, steel, medicine and other commodities. Bed linen, leather, boots, spices, preserves, sweets, cream, dairy products, cigarettes, cans and more. In 1913, the share of Russian goods in the north-eastern part of the region was 26% in textiles, 12% in kerosene, 63% in sugar, 47% in steel and metal products, 27% in pharmaceuticals, 24% in groceries, and 53% in tobacco. Such a scale of commodity dumping has a great impact on the national capital with little capital and low productivity, so that it can only hesitate in the three national industries of flour making, oil pressing and wine making. Some people compare the railway to a straw, sucking away the huge resource wealth of China's northeast, the meandering rail is like two wires, through them endless commodity dumping, the cycle of "cheap to expensive" to drive the Northeast people into the miserable situation of poverty and weakness.

3. Discussion on the Historical Significance of Railway Construction in Eastern Province of China

Here we cannot fully describe the construction of the railway, to the northeast of China, the Qing Dynasty, the "ancestral birthplace of the king" carried out a bloody shower, which fully showed people the "ancient world collapse scene" and the "aggressive West" nature. At the same time, we also need to see that the bloody rain of the railway also contains the silent gentle wind and rain, and there is another side of the existence of the "civilized West" outside the essence of the "aggressive West".

The construction of the railway is the product of Tsarist Russia's foreign colonial expansion, which is the prerequisite that must be affirmed before discussing the problem. However, objectively, Tsarist Russia's colonial practices also brought advanced science and technology, management methods, municipal management, and foreign civilization into the railway line, and industrial civilization such as steam engine and power machinery that enabled capitalism to settle down appeared here earlier. In this sense alone, the railway in Eastern province of China set off a great "social revolution" in the northeast region. The traditional model of "politically the country is attached to the town, and economically the town is attached to the village" has changed. At the central hub and nodes of the railway, the function of railway fully embodies its geographical advantages which cannot be played in the traditional society, and makes it move from the closed geographical environment to the open one. Since the construction of the railway, "external force" has become the starter of the social civilization transformation and development of the traditional towns along the railway, and the western industrial civilization has carried out subversive changes to the traditional towns with the railway as the medium. In the past, the community system dominated by dispersed natural village economy has risen into modern city under the function of railway. Changing the name of Fujiadian to Harbin, Kuanchengzi to Changchun, Qingniwa to Dalian, is not only a simple transformation of geographical names, but in many aspects of urban composition, nature, function, population quality, production and life style, have a pioneering effect. Especially the signing of the treaty between Japan and Russia after the war, 16 cities in Northeast China were opened as an international commercial port, some of which are along the railway, and then consolidated and promoted the status and role of Northeast China in the "Eurasian land bridge" link.

The role and influence of the railway in Eastern province of China is complicated, or it has the dual nature of savage invasion and "Western learning to the east", which is reflected in the changes of many fields in modern society. In the past, when Chinese people talked about this railway, 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, cannot 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.

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