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RAILWAYS IN NORTHEAST CHINA  
SINCE VICTORY OVER JAPAN

Ho Shih-lun

During the South Manchuria Railway Period Before 14 August 1945

During the period of the Japanese occupation, all railways in Manchuria (Northeast) were operated by the South Manchuria Railway Company, Limited. At that time, the total kilometrage was 11,230; personnel numbered 185,000; and there were 1,800 locomotives, 3,000 passenger coaches, and 40,000 freight cars. The number of passengers carried annually was 163,555,426, and the passenger-kilometrage amounted to 16,720,528,405. The highest annual freight tonnage was 84,621,212 tons and the ton-kilometrage 28,090,388,219. During the latter part of World War II, when Japanese sea trade was seriously threatened, the railways of Manchuria were of the utmost importance to Japan.

Destruction by Soviet Troops During Their Occupation

The Soviet Union occupied all of the Northeast after the Japanese surrender in August 1945. By a distorted interpretation of the terms of the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, they not only seized control of the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un Railway, but also greatly damaged the other railways of the Northeast, particularly the Chin-Ku line /Chin-hsien--Ku-pei-k'ou line/ and the Shen-Chi line /Mukden-Kirin line/. The former is a link between the Northeast and North China and the latter is a line competing with the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un Railway. Before 18 September 1931, the Chinese used this line in competition with the South Manchuria Railway. The Soviet authorities were jealous of this competition and heavily damaged the Shen-Chi line, carrying off a great deal of machinery, materials, and rolling stock.

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Conditions at the Time of Nationalist Take-Over

When the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the various provinces of the Northeast came under the occupation of the Soviet armies. The representatives of the Chinese government sent to take over the railways were unable to carry out their mission. Only after the Soviet troops withdrew in 1946 were Nationalist troops able to take over and dispel the menace of the Chinese Communist forces. It was not until then that the railway personnel appointed by the Nationalists were able to enter upon their duties in the wake of the KMT military forces. The condition of railway affairs at that time was follows:

1. War conditions prevailed throughout the Northeast /KMT-CCP conflict/. Only about 3,000 kilometers of the railways were operable. The lines were frequently under attack and the operable mileage constantly changed.
2. Under Soviet control the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un Railway, with its "T" formation, occupied the strongest position among the railways of the Northeast. The other state railways of the Northeast became supporting subsidiaries of the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un line, instead of being helped by it.
3. Because of hostilities and the breakdown of public order, the railways could operate only by day. Because of the shortness of the winter days in the Northeast, the daily operating period was only half that of the South Manchuria Railway. This resulted in great reduction of transport capacities.
4. Freight transport performance in the Northeast was very uneven. In spite of the best efforts of the South Manchuria Railway the highest loading ratio for freight cars reached only 76 percent. In 1941 it had dropped to 71 percent. After the Ministry of Communications took over, the lines were busy with military transport. In each train sent out there were many empty cars and likewise on the return, hence, there was much haulage of empties both ways. This was especially true of coal trains. As a result of this, and the fact that urgent repair work in progress on various railroads put so many cars out of use, the loading ratio for freight cars fell to less than 40 percent.
5. In 1935, the South Manchuria Railway's locomotives were burning 25 kilograms of coal per train-kilometer. In the ensuing years, this amount rose until in 1943 it had increased to 37 kilograms, an increase of 50 percent. This resulted from the use of lower grade coal from overworked mines, improper maintenance of locomotives, and the employment of less efficient operators.

After the Chinese took over, these faults were greatly accentuated. These faults, plus the disorder in the country, the impossibility of night travel, and the fact that the locomotives had to be kept fired up, resulted in great losses.

Policy After the Take-Over

On taking over the Northeast railways the Ministry of Communications was confronted with two main difficulties, namely: lack of materials for rapid repair of damage done by Communist military forces and lack of locomotives and cars to meet the requirements of military transport. The Japanese had good reserves of railway materials, especially ties which were produced in the Northeast and of which the South Manchuria Railway had an exportable surplus. However, the reserves accumulated by the Japanese were all carried off by the Soviets. The timber for ties was in the northern portion of the Northeast which was under the control of Communist military forces, and thus ties were unobtainable. Hence, branch lines had to be cannibalized for rails, ties, and bridge materials which were moved in to repair the main lines. To secure locomotives it was necessary to borrow as many as possible from the Peiping-Tientsin Railway Bureau and to rush repairs on broken down locomotives cast off by the Russians, in order to meet the requirements of military transport.

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After taking over, the Ministry of Communications regarded the office of its special representative in the Northeast as the highest level of administrative authority for the unified and centralized control of train operations and of receipts and disbursements. Under the office of the special representative there were set up four railway bureaus, namely at Chin-chou, Mukden, Kirin, and Ch'i-ch'i-ha-erh. This system was somewhat similar to that of the South Manchuria Railway, but somewhat unlike that of the railways inside the great wall. Later, because the office of the special representative was a temporary one, it was changed to the Northeast Transport Administration.

Both external and internal factors were involved in this plan of organization. The external factors involved relations with the Russians. When the Soviet troops withdrew from the Northeast, the Soviet civilian railway representatives remained. They appeared very reluctant to divide the property of the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un railway according to the provisions of the treaty. (The treaty provided that all property owned by the railway before 1905 should be the property of the railway and all property acquired after 1905 should be the property of the Chinese government). Hence, the Chinese administrators found it somewhat difficult to make full use of the rolling stock and electrical communication facilities. Consequently, it was necessary for the special representative of the Ministry of Communications to centralize the administration to meet these problems.

Internal factors involved included the following:

1. The various separate lines were not all self-supporting, hence, a central receipt and disbursement control system was necessary.
2. Since there was a shortage of locomotives and cars, and the quantity and urgency of military transport was great, it was necessary to have a central control system to ensure efficiency.
3. An enormous amount of rolling stock needed repairs. The only sizeable shop available was the Huang-ku-t'un shop at Mukden. Materials for repairs were in short supply, the disbursement budget was low and any build-up of supplies difficult, hence, a unified system of planning and distribution was necessary to meet the various requirements.
4. A centralized control system was necessary for the business affairs of all the railways to keep transport on an even keel.

The Northeast railway authorities of the Ministry of Communications began to push the rapid restoration of the railways damaged by the Communists and restoration of the Mukden-An-tung line. To meet military transport needs and to cope with the situation due to the isolation of the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un Railway from the state-operated lines, the ministry attempted to restore the Mukden-Kirin line with a view to making it the main state-operated line to the regions in the north. (The Mukden-Kirin line had been destroyed by the Russians. To reach Ch'ang-ch'un and Kirin, Nationalist forces were obliged to use the Chinese Ch'ang-ch'un line, which during the period of Russian occupation had deteriorated greatly. The Mukden-Kirin line was repaired for through traffic by April 1947, but was cut by the Communists in May and through traffic was never restored).

Before 18 September 1931, the Japanese regarded Dairen and Ch'onglin in Korea as important terminal ports, essential for carrying out their policy of having two ports and two lines for removing materials from Manchuria to supply Japan's needs. After their occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese had turned over the operation of the North Korean railways to the South Manchuria Railway Company in line with their policy of coordinating the economy of Japan, Korea, and Manchuria, and of gradually cutting the economic bonds between Manchuria and North China.

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