FROM "OUTLAW KINGDOMS" TO "PEOPLE'S CHINA"

Bandits in the Crossfire of the Japan — China Conflict

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The inclusion of a paper on Chinese bandits in a collection ostensibly concerned with Japan's "internationalization" would seem to require a word of explanation, perhaps even self-justification. Although the two seem totally unrelated in themselves, the way in which people have approached the two issues reveal a number of similarities that this paper will attempt to point out. Accordingly, the aim of the paper will be to suggest problems rather than present conclusions, while at the same time trying to throw some light on the little-known subject of Chinese bandits.

Perhaps the simplest definition of the word "bandit" would be: "an armed peasant who lives on the proceeds of predatory violence". The very word "predatory", however, masks certain fundamental preconceptions about the nature of property rights, class relations and cultural values which need to be made clear. A landlord, for instance, could take 50-75% of a tenant's crop after every harvest, regarding it as his natural

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This paper was originally written in Japanese for the collection of essays to be published by Momoyama Gakuin University in 1990 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the university's inauguration and the founding of the Faculty of Letters in April 1989. That paper was in turn based on a lecture given on May 10 1989 as one of a series organized to mark the same two events.

birthright to do so, and a tax-collector would follow in his wake to expropriate still more of the poor peasant's meagre income. To the victims of these exactions, who had to suffer their lot in silence, this surely was the ultimate in predatory behaviour. Yet, while such official exactions were themselves backed up by the threat of force, it was the armed peasant who sought to win back some of that expropriated income by answering force with force who was labelled "predator". There was no sanction in law for those who would "expropriate the expropriators".

Perceiving an individual's actions and lifestyle through that individual's own eyes and seeking to understand them in terms of his or her values is a basic principle not only of social and historical research, but also of relations between different cultures. Those who would write bandits off as villains with no motives beyond the lust for robbery and violence are guilty of the same crime as those who laugh at or look disdainfully upon the behaviour of individuals in cultures other than their own: they are blinded by and therefore make no effort to go beyond the values of their own community. The result is that such individuals are denied the right to an autonomous existence, a state of affairs that has led historically not only to the political and ideological hegemony of one class (or sex) over the majority of society, but also to both political and cultural imperialism.

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Peasants who armed themselves and formed bands to engage in predatory activity were certainly moved by economic necessity, but over and above that there were other motives stemming from the various needs those peasants felt as individuals —— as men, in particular, since most bandits were men. An examination of those needs can help us understand

better what it meant to become a bandit for those who were forced to "take the dangerous path". Predominant among them were the need to overcome the helplessness and powerlessness that went with the poor peasant's lot, particularly galling for men, whose lives were the antithesis of the male superiority that traditional Chinese culture prescribed for them; the consequent need to flaunt one's masculinity through deeds of bravado and destructiveness; and the evidently instinctive need to hold on to a piece of territory within which, however limited, men who would be kings could avail themselves of some of the trappings of power.

Needless to say, forming armed bands for the purpose of self-defence and/or predatory aggression was a phenomenon by no means limited to Chinese peasants. From the Mafia underground of Sicily to the outlaws of the American "Wild West" and even the juvenile gangs of the New York and London slums, young men have banded together to capture the attention of and, often, to strike fear into local people by causing mayhem, defying the police, and thereby setting themselves up as a breed apart from the rest. Even without pursuing in-depth research, one may gain some insights into this kind of behaviour by a trip to one's local cinema to watch the classic Hollywood musical, "West Side Story". The fatal rivalry between two gangs of youths for hegemony over a tiny piece of territory on New York's West Side which forms the basis of the story is a clear example of the third need described above, but even more revealing are certain scenes from the film that depict the gang's behaviour within that territory. The opening shots, for instance, show the resident gang moving with superb panache through a group of boys playing basketball in the local playground. No words are exchanged and no visible threat is evident, yet one of the boys silently puts the ball

down in the path of the gang, who, equally silently, pick it up and pass it to each other as they move by, and finally return it to the boys. Although lasting no more than a few seconds, this scene speaks volumes of the subtle relationship between a gang and the people of its neighbourhood.

Bandits have usually been depicted as rapacious social enemies who lived by the rules of violence alone. As this scene shows, however, their relationship to the inhabitants of their own territory could be quite different. Thanks to their need to sustain it as a refuge when pressed by soldiers or police ("a rabbit does not eat the grass outside its own burrow"), when on their home territory bandits restrained their aggressive energy for fear of alienating local people into reporting their whereabouts to the authorities. As long as they did so, those people would usually put up with the existence of a local gang, since on the one hand its presence was some guarantee against incursions by gangs from outside, and on the other, they felt a certain respect for men who had been brave and determined enough to heave themselves by their own efforts up and out of the resigned peasant mass. At the same time, however, that gang usually made it clear who was boss, and when necessary was not afraid of using force to back up its claim to local hegemony. For the peasants, therefore, there was no perfect guarantee that the violence the gang employed elsewhere as a matter of course would not one day be unleashed against them too. Their attitude was thus a mixture of respect and fear, and the simultaneous creation of both emotions in the same peasant breast was evidently a source of great satisfaction to the gang members themselves —— "Hao! When a 〔bandit〕 wants a thing he takes it. That is as it should be!"[1)]

In many cases membership in a gang satisfied the need felt by young

men for emotional security. Those who had lost their family ties through their parents' early divorce or death, or for whom poverty made family life less than fulfilling, often found that the camaraderie born of the sense of shared danger made gang life a comforting substitute. When faced with the alternative of a life spent as the virtual slave of some harsh landowner, not a few young men opted for the short — the average bandit lasted only some three years before being caught and put to death — and uncertain life of the bandit. Once again, "West Side Story" provides vivid examples.

In one key scene, the leader of the resident gang, Riff, is trying to persuade Tony, a former member who has washed his hands of gang life, to represent the gang in a showdown with their rivals. Tony refuses, saying he is seeking something more than gang solidarity, and tells Riff that he wakes up every night to find his arms outstretched as if searching for something. Riff's interpretation is a classic instance of outlaw psychology: "When you're not in a gang you're an orphan, out in the cold". Later in the film, in the scene featuring the song "Gee, Officer Krupke", the gang members appeal to the neighbourhood patrolman to consider their family backgrounds before clamping down on their unruly behaviour: "Pa's run off, Ma's a drunk, my sister's a whore and my kid brother pushes dope — is it any wonder we're such punks?"

So important in China was the role of the bandit gang in replacing sundered family ties that many gangs themselves took on the paraphernalia of the patriarchal family organization. Chiefs were often known as "family heads" (*dangjiadi*) or "patriarchs" (*dajiazi*), and their followers referred to each other as "younger brother" (*didi*) or "elder brother" (*dage*). Just as in the traditional family siblings had no right to dispose of family property without the patriarch's blessing, so in the

bandit gang individual members were expected to turn over their personal takings and accept whatever share of the overall proceeds the chief deigned to award them. What distinguished the bandit gang from the traditional Confucian family, however, was the strength of fraternal relationships alongside the paternalistic one between chief and followers. Awareness of mutually shared danger, supported sometimes by the swearing of vows of blood-brotherhood, often produced great loyalty and solidarity and helped create an egalitarian atmosphere within the gang that undoubtedly provided considerable emotional warmth.

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Attempting to understand bandits' behaviour in terms of their own values has not been the strong point of analysis to date, since that analysis has generally been carried out by people whose own values are those of the class to whom bandits appear as bitter enemies. Governments, in particular, have found it useful to employ the word "bandit", with its connotations of aimless violence, as a label to pin on political enemies. When the Chinese government used words like *tufei* and *zei* to refer to revolutionary leaders like Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) and Mao Zedong, it was setting itself upon a pillar of unassailable moral superiority, for these words negated that individual's very right to exist. Denying the political qualities of their activities in this way also made it easier to mount crackdowns and purges, which could be written off as no more than "bandit suppression". When Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) justified his campaigns against the Red Armies in the 1930s as suppression of the "Mao bandits" (*Mao-fei*), and when Mao himself turned the tables after 1949 by calling for elimination of the "Jiang bandits" (*Jiang-fei*) on Taiwan, they were merely repeating a pattern established

by autocratic Chinese rulers more than two thousand years before.

At the same time, however, for many Chinese intellectuals there was an irresistible mystique attached to the bandit or rebel image. Countless Chinese men, not least revolutionary leaders like Mao Zedong, were reared on bandit romances like the *Shuihu zhuan*. Upright Confucian gentlemen, while paying lip-service to conventional values, often spent their spare time reading stories of the "knights errant" (*wuxia*) or "noble robbers" (*yizei*) who "robbed the rich to help the poor" (*jiefu jipin*) and "carried out the Way on Heaven's behalf" (*titian xingdao*). As the proverb put it, "their persons stood at the gates of the Emperor's palace, but their hearts were in the rivers and lakes" (*shen zai weique, xin zai jianghu*) —— "rivers and lakes" (*jianghu*) was a popular euphemism for the Chinese underworld. In dramatic performances the bandit chief often appeared wearing the red make-up of heroes, and was surrounded by a Robin Hood-like aura of righteous indignation at the ills wrought by society against its weaker members. If the pattern of autocratic rule goes back two millenia, so does the tradition of the "noble robber", inspiring not only the leadership of the communist movement that finally seized control of all China in the name of the common people some forty years ago, but also the student rebels who stood up in Beijing in 1989 to protest against a government which they considered to have betrayed its heritage.

That this tradition of the "noble robber" had sunk equally strong roots among the common people too was shown by the fact that as late as the 1920s, in Shandong province, site of countless peasant rebellions against bureaucratic oppression and economic hardship, one could still find ornate temples dedicated to the memory of the semi-legendary "Robber Zhi" (*Dao Zhi*), who had evidently become a sort of "patron

saint" of the region's strong bandit subculture. Even the Daoist classic scripture known as the *Taiping jing*, in its depiction of the utopia inevitably destined to succeed the present world tainted by sin and corruption, is not without its references to bandits. Just as the supreme Daoist elder, Lao Zi himself, had acknowledged that "robbery, too, could be an expression of the Way" (*dao yi you dao*), so too the compilers of the *Taiping jing* seem to have recognized that, in a world created by human hands, some degree of banditry was unavoidable.

Needless to say, not all bandits were of the noble variety, as an examination of the hold-ups, train-wrecks and kidnappings that studded the history of China from the 1911 Revolution to the 1949 Liberation can testify. Following the virtual collapse of the central government in 1916, the country fell under the sway of regional militarists known as "warlords", and their constant struggles for political and military supremacy soon led to economic chaos in many parts of the country. In the name of survival pure and simple, many peasants, especially those living in inhospitable mountain or delta areas, or in border regions where even the long arm of government rarely reached, turned to banditry to augment their meagre income. Desperate men do not easily become Robin Hoods, and some of the atrocities committed by bandit gangs during this period were second only to those committed by the warlords' own unruly soldiers (whom the peasants feared much more than they feared the bandits). Bandits, at first in the expatriate treaty-port press whose readers saw a world of privilege slipping away from them faster than they could comprehend, later in the vernacular papers whose leader-writers began to complain that the country had changed from a "republic" (*minguo*) to a "bandit nation" (*feiguo*), became one of the primary symbols of twentieth-century China. Amidst all this, however, as the

bandit population began to be counted in the millions for the country as a whole, those young peasants who set off along the "dangerous path" of banditry in the depths of disillusion and despair unwittingly carried within them the seeds of a new consciousness that would eventually, with intelligent leadership, make possible China's rebirth as a "people's republic".

In the early 1920s a dynamic and talented north China bandit chief named Lao Yangren began adding a new dimension to the traditional bandit practice of kidnapping rich victims for ransom. By adding foreign, especially European and American victims to his collection of captives, he not only ensured that all his demands (which included enrolment in the army) would be met in return for their release, but also unleashed a crescendo of vituperation against China. American and Japanese "China Watchers" concluded almost simultaneously that China itself was no more than a huge bandit gang, so that to understand China it was necessary merely to examine the operations of bandits.[2)]

Prejudiced and irrational as they were, these condemnations also contained a degree of truth. Twentieth-century bandits, who in their own way were the inheritors of two millenia of resistance to autocratic rule and the hardships it brought the poor, unconsciously formed the cutting edge of a new awareness among the peasants as a whole. That awareness was also expressed by village self-defence groups like the Red Spears (*hongqiang hui*). While bandits fought primarily in the interests of their gang's survival, the Red Spears defended the village itself against outside attack. Though both of them symbolized an emerging peasant determination no longer to accept their lot in resigned silence, bandits added to this the realization that foreigners, however rich and powerful, were by no means invulnerable, and that their wealth and

avarice could be used as weapons against them. As the man who masterminded this strategy, which signalled to those foreigners sensitive enough to perceive it that their special position in China no longer held true, Lao Yangren surely deserves to be remembered by historians as more than the "mere bandit" that he is dismissed as today.

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With the exception of some of the chiefs, the vast majority of bandits were from the poor peasant stratum. As the proverb put it, "politeness and righteousness are the children of wealth and contentment; brigandage and robbery are the offspring of poverty". However, bandits were not always the poor peasants' best friends. Having pulled themselves up by their own efforts out of the peasant mass, many bandits looked down on their erstwhile fellow-tillers. As one communist peasant organizer phrased it, "Despite their peasant origins, bandits change their political character the moment they undertake looting".[3] Although the need to safeguard their home area as a refuge made it necessary to maintain some degree of support — or, at least, non-antagonism — among local peasants, in the long run the peasants were the weakest of all the social classes and could not be relied upon for protection, which the risky and uncertain life of the bandit demanded above everything else.

Constantly pursued by police or soldiers, rarely allowed to sit and stare, subsisting on a diet often no different from that of the average poor peasant, the bandit's life was a far cry from the romantic greenwood ideal. Just how grim it could be was illustrated by a story that circulated widely in the 1930s about a young bandit whose army interrogator asked him shortly prior to his execution what had possessed him to take up such a life. The young man answered bitterly that the reason

could only be found by cutting open his stomach —— which the officer did, after first executing the bandit. His stomach was found to contain nothing but grass.

Compounding the poverty of the bandit life was the uncertainty of never knowing when one would be killed. Bandits lived each day for itself and rarely made plans for the morrow. The frustration and irritability which such a life engendered frequently led to outbursts of violence aimed usually at those least able to resist. This is not to say that bandits had a monopoly on violence: it was often the harsh behaviour of soldiers that had created bandits in the first place, and the fear of vicious punishment should they surrender or get caught prevented bandits from giving up. Bandit violence, that is, must be seen in the context of a social system that was based on violence, and whose principal victims were the poor. The fear of being caught or killed, and the resentment at being unable to break out of that vicious circle except by being caught or killed, underlay much of the cruelty that has characterized bandit behaviour.

A short-term solution to the everyday tensions of the bandit life was opium, which "seemed to fill their every need. It often took the place of food, sleep and recreation with them. . . . When they had plenty of crude opium, their happiness appeared to be complete. When they were without it, they were demons to live with."[4] In the short run opium's steadying effect on the nerves seems to have improved bandits' fighting ability, but when the smoker was fundamentally undernourished as most bandits were, its effect on the body was debilitating. Many bandits were prevented from leaving a gang by, among other things, their need to satisfy their habit.

In the long term, then, bandits needed to find some method which

would not merely allow them to forget their hardships but actually put their lives onto a more secure basis. What this meant, in effect, was acquiring a patron, and since, as I have said, peasants could not be relied upon for protection, survival demanded that bandits turn to the local elite. Even those "noble robbers" who fought consistently on the peasants' side against the oppressors found that, when extinction was imminent, this was their only resort. On the other hand, for chiefs whose ambition outweighed their scruples, an alliance with a local powerbroker could be the first step to recognition as a military figure or social personage in their own right. For the patron too, usually a powerful local landlord, recruiting the bandits as a personal bodyguard or even simply paying them a retainer to lend their services when necessary not only eliminated them as an enemy but also allowed him to use them in forays against rival families, as defence against bandits from elsewhere, or even as bully-boys to keep local peasants in line.

Most of the chiefs who later became recognized as military figures, such as Zhang Zuolin, began their careers in just this way. Even those who did not reach such illustrious heights managed, by way of their elite connections, to establish themselves at least as supreme within the world of the local bandit subculture. Whatever, once they came this far bandits had clearly been transformed into agents of the local power structure, and could by no stretch of the imagination claim to be representing the peasants. Only when the local power equation was altered by the outbreak of a popular rebellion could such opportunistic bandits return along the road they had travelled, and even then, having been identified as oppressors, it was often too late to escape the peasants' wrath. More frequently they behaved like any other powerholders, whose first priority is to protect that power. When local people became restive,

or when new gangs began causing trouble, their instinctive response was not to join forces to create a popular movement but to mercilessly suppress those who threatened their newly-won power.

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In stark contrast with the tendency of conservative authorities to morally condemn bandits out of hand, in the late 1960s and early 1970s there emerged the tendency to glorify the bandit (and also the popular sects or "secret societies") as revolutionary heroes. We have already examined the motives that drove bandits into the deeds for which they have been condemned, and located them in the context of a socio-political system based on violence. Next it will be useful to examine this claim that bandits were thoroughgoing revolutionaries by setting up a rough comparison between the two.

The first point that has to be made is that, whereas revolutionaries fought to put the world to rights, bandits fought in their own interests, and therefore saw more opportunity for advancement in the world they knew than in some projected future utopia. Secondly, while revolutionaries refused all personal reward and laid their lives on the line in the name of equality for all, bandits, by dint of the effort they had made to break free of peasant society and the hardships they had endured to stay free, saw themselves as a privileged breed. Third, while revolutionaries strove to restore to the peasants their dignity as human beings, bandits sought first of all to establish their reputation or "face" as men to be respected; in other words, to prove that they were just as much men as those formally invested with authority.

Not surprisingly when one considers these differences, relations between revolutionaries and bandits did not usually go smoothly. Despite their superficial similarities, and despite the fact that they were thrown

together on numerous occasions in common cause against dictators, the vast gap between their respective worlds made fundamental antagonisms hard to overcome. This was particularly true when a gang had already managed to create some sort of modus vivendi with local powerholders. Feeling that a revolutionary movement which sought to put the world to rights would in doing so destroy their hard-won position or take away their licence to run riot, most gangs found it easier and more natural to side with the reaction. As far as being revolutionaries was concerned, then, while many bandits had made a qualitative leap in consciousness by opting out of peasant society, their preoccupations were wholly self-centred, and the kind of vision necessary to envisage a change in social conventions was generally obstructed by the need to survive from day to day.

This is not to say that there were no examples of bandit chiefs who threw in their lot with the revolution. Over the one hundred years or so of the Chinese revolutionary process, from the nineteenth-century Taiping Rebellion, through the republican movement led by Sun Zhongshan against the Qing Dynasty, down to the communist revolutionary movement that liberated the country in 1949, countless gangs, perhaps sensing change on the wind, followed their leaders over to the anti-government side to become guerillas, shock troops and so on. Unfortunately, most of those gangs, faced with a superior enemy or finding revolutionary discipline not to their liking, had few scruples about betraying their revolutionary comrades when it suited their own interests. Behind this state of affairs lay a fundamental divergence in values which has to be examined before we can truly appreciate the behaviour of bandits who found themselves caught between the communists and the Japanese.

The majority of revolutionary leaders and militants, born and raised

in the cities, looked down upon the culturally-backward countryside, and regarded bandits and other "rustic heroes" with a mixture of disdain for their fighting qualities and distaste for their personal habits. As far as bandits' role in the revolution was concerned — if they had any role to play at all — they were to be a reserve army, a back-up force for the "real" revolutionary movement centred in the cities. Rather than comrades in the same glorious cause, bandits were fodder for the enemy's cannons, to be sacrificed when necessary to protect the revolution's regular forces. For example, while the so-called "revolutionary martyrs" who gave up their lives in the series of attentats between 1895 and 1911 are eulogized to this day both in China and on Taiwan, the countless "rustic heroes" who were mobilized for the same uprisings by revolutionary agitators, only, in many cases, to have their lives squandered, have remained unsung and forgotten. Under the circumstances, therefore, it is hardly surprising that the revolutionaries' disdain for bandits' fighting qualities should have been matched by distrust on the bandits' part for the revolutionaries' motives. From the bandits' point of view, however, there was another stumbling block to smooth relations.

While appeals to "lay down one's life for the cause" and to "die a glorious death for the revolution" may have had some attraction for idealistic city-bred youths, for bandits, who as we have seen were anything but idealistic, such appeals fell on deaf ears. Bandits fought not for the sake of glory, certainly not for the privilege of dying, but precisely in order to live, and to have themselves recognized as men to be respected. From their point of view, the test was whether or not the revolutionary movement could satisfy their desire to rise in the world; in other words, whether or not it was capable of performing the role of patron. If it was not capable of doing so, even that rare breed the idea-

listic bandit chief, though his or her head may have been momentarily turned by the revolutionaries' appeals, would not pay them any lasting heed. If the government or the counter-revolutionary side seemed capable of offering better protection, and if they offered concrete proof of the bandits' new-found status too, such as smart uniforms, badges of rank and efficient weapons, then a gang would join them without the slightest qualm.

The first generation of revolutionaries, mired in theory or fired with idealism, and usually harbouring a strong degree of instinctive aversion to things rural, failed utterly to learn this lesson. Their tendency to regard bandits as intrinsically alien to a revolutionary programme, though no doubt theoretically correct, resulted merely in driving them over to the other side, further weighting the odds against the progressive forces. What was more, from the early twentieth century a new reactionary force began to cast its shadow over the Chinese political scene, making it still more imperative that the anti-progressive camp not be strengthened any more than need be: Japanese imperialism. Through its proxies the "mainland adventurers" (*tairiku rōnin*), Japan was in fact able to set itself up as an extremely attractive patron figure for bandit gangs lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.

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"Mainland adventurers" is the term usually applied to those countless young Japanese men who, from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II, crossed over to the Asian mainland in search of adventure and a place to prove their manliness, primarily by seizing control of bandit gangs: "from time immemorial, China's history has been the history of the mounted bandits (*bazoku*). . . . So off to Manchuria, and let's become *bazoku* ourselves!"[5] The feelings of these young men, who

saw the open wastes of Manchuria as the antithesis of the stifling atmosphere of steadily industrializing Japan, were summed up perfectly in the lyrics of the phenomenally successful "Song of the Mounted Bandits" (*Bazoku no Uta*) :

I'm getting out, how about you?
This poky Japan is too tiresome to live in.
Beyond the wavetops China lies,
And 400 million of its people are waiting.

Romantic as it sounds, the compulsive dream of "fighting for China" that inspired two generations of young men from the Meiji period onwards in fact constituted little more than the kernel of the patronizing ideology that later sought to draw China in as an inferior member of the "Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere". Sincere as many of the "mainland adventurers" were, the fact that they sought to live out their dreams on the territory of another sovereign country instead of seeking to make their own country a more livable place made them perfect accomplices for Japanese military expansion when it got under way. And the fact that they saw seizing the leadership of bandit gangs as the vehicle for those dreams demonstrated just how little removed they were from those ideologists who saw China as "no more than a huge bandit gang".

For many of the "mainland adventurers", it was not the "dream of Asia" itself that inspired them but the romantic, untrammelled image of the "mounted bandits" who, it seemed, roamed and raged freely across the plains of Manchuria. This in itself was a good illustration of just how little they comprehended Chinese reality. The so-called "mounted bandits" in fact originated in self-defence groups that had sprung up spontaneously to defend the interests of the villages that were scat-

tered here and there on the plains against outside attack, whether by predatory gangs from elsewhere or by government soldiers. Although basically protective, the need to be constantly prepared to ward off attacks naturally shaded over from to time into what the Nixon era would later euphemize as "preemptive counterattack", and by the late nineteenth century many of these bands had developed fairly sophisticated organization and communications networks, and were often armed with modern weapons. Not surprisingly, they appeared as eminently attractive allies to all sides in the series of international disputes that racked Manchuria in those years.

During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, both of which were fought almost entirely on the plains of Manchuria, the "mounted bandits" found themselves being wooed by both sides and many entered official service as guerillas, saboteurs or spies. Those who were lucky, like Zhang Zuolin and his cohorts, managed to have themselves subsequently recognized as regular military units. The others went back to their traditional role awaiting another conflict which would again give them a chance to improve their circumstances. The steadily intensifying antagonism between Japan and China gave many of them the chance they had been waiting for, and the agents of their conversion were in many cases the "mainland adventurers".

Although the "mainland adventurers" have all been tarred with the same black brush in the years since Japan's defeat, historically this is not an accurate assessment. While some were dispatched by military intelligence specifically to mobilize bandits for Japan's programme of aggression, others were there of their own volition purely to let off steam by causing as much trouble as possible. (Admittedly, this too meshed perfectly with Japan's plans to destabilize China to justify its

invasion.) Again, while some espoused openly Japan's long-cherished dream of subduing China and turning it into a vassal state as would later take place in Manchuria, others sincerely believed that they were fighting for the welfare of the Chinese people themselves, and nursed a strong resentment toward the methods adopted by the Japanese military. Whatever, all believed that seizing control of a bandit gang was the quickest route to their objective, and the most surprising thing of all is that many of them were in fact able to do just that.

Why were lone Japanese adventurers able to convince gangs of Chinese bandits to accept them as their chiefs? The opposite case —— Chinese gunslingers arriving in Japan and being endorsed by Japanese outlaws as their leaders —— is unthinkable. What was it that saved them from being laughed at, driven away, or even killed on the spot? There were, in fact, several factors working in their favour, all of which derived specifically from the particular rules of China's bandit subculture.

In the first place, most of the "mainland adventurers" measured up well to the requirements of a bandit chief. What bandits looked for in a chief was not merely brawn, nor merely unusual courage, but, to ensure their survival through the interminable fights their occupation demanded, a mixture of intelligence, decisiveness, and, most of all, luck. Many of the "mainland adventurers" had received some degree of military training and were excellent marksmen and superior strategists, and these abilities set them off immediately as "men to be respected". The process by which they rose to the rank of chief varied. Matsumoto Yōnosuke, rated one of the best marksmen in Manchuria though he was little more than a young tearaway, managed to pull together several minor gangs and, by defeating or persuading their incumbent chiefs, have himself elected supreme leader. Kohinata Hakurō, on the other

hand, who unlike Matsumoto concealed his Japanese identity to the very end, was accepted into a south Manchurian gang as an odd-job boy, worked his way up through the ranks, and was finally, after killing a rival in single combat, elected to the position of supreme leader. By the time of Japan's invasion he had become a figure of almost mythical proportions, his origins known only to a tiny number of Japanese military intelligence operatives. The point about all the "mainland adventurers", whether of the Matsumoto or the Kohinata pattern, was that they achieved their position only after having their prowess as potential chiefs recognized by their followers.

Luck was something that could only be demonstrated in action. Bandits, as a result of their dangerous lives, believed fiercely in providence. A leader who could take the gang unscathed through a series of bitter forays inspired a dedicated following, but those who could not, who seemed dogged by ill-fortune, soon found themselves with no followers at all. The "mainland adventurers" too had to meet this test, but in their case luck was often superseded by a still more crucial factor: through their connections to the Japanese Imperial Army they could promise strong military backing and the possibility of a regular career. This was the second element in their attractiveness to Chinese bandit gangs. As the Japanese penetration of China gathered pace, the military was able to exploit the ties of trust between "mainland adventurers" and bandits to turn the gangs either into puppet troops or into hell-raisers to "demonstrate" China's inability to govern itself.

When the full-scale invasion got under way following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 1937, Japan began to rely on its regular military forces and had no further use for bandits. Those who had been reorganized as puppet troops were thrown into the front lines to absorb the ene-

my's bullets, those who had not were ruthlessly doublecrossed and suppressed. In their heyday, however, the gangs led by "mainland adventurers" were involved in a number of celebrated episodes, including the Mongolian Independence Movement, the Mukden Incident of September 1931 that provided the pretext for Japan's occupation of Manchuria, and the Tianjin Incident of early 1932 when the former Manchu emperor Pu Yi was abducted from Tianjin and smuggled into Manchuria to be crowned as emperor of the Japanese puppet state of Manchuguo. Others were employed as guerillas to harass the Chinese forces, a role which suited not only their own natural proclivities but also, since many were killed off, the Japanese authorities, who were always glad to be rid of troublemakers.

The crucial point in the relationship between the Japanese military and the bandits was that, unlike the revolutionaries, the former was not averse to doling out in large quantities the things bandits most desired: guns, money and, most important, official recognition. Not surprisingly, these bandits were condemned in patriotic circles as "traitors" and "running dogs of the Japanese", which no doubt they were, killing anti-Japanese organizers, suppressing the peasant movement and so on. But to write them off as no more than that is to ignore the rules that governed bandits' day-to-day conduct, and without an appreciation of those rules an understanding of why they were able to join hands with the Japanese so readily is impossible.

In short, the bandits who joined their fate to that of the "mainland adventurers" and the Japanese Imperial Army were instinctively repeating a pattern that had recurred for centuries, whereby bandits sought the strongest patron available in order to acquire the protection they needed to survive. What made the twentieth century so different from

earlier periods was that, thanks to the confused situation following the Japanese invasion and the nationwide resistance movement that developed out of it, the focus of bandit-patron dealing switched from the local to the national stage. Instead of the local powerbrokers and warlords who had seemed so attractive in the past, "mainland adventurers" and Japanese military officers now seemed to offer the possibility of patronage on an unprecedented scale. While from the Japanese point of view a deal with bandits eliminated dangerous troublemakers and prevented them running over to the enemy, to an ambitious chief the apparently-invincible Japanese offered a never-to-be-repeated opportunity for making it into the ranks of the respected. In terms of bandit rules, that is, a deal with the Japanese rather than with the Chinese government forces or the communists was a supremely rational decision in view of the former's overwhelming superiority. It was hardly any wonder that accusations of "treachery" fell on deaf ears, then, for they were the product of a logic that simply did not apply.

In cultural terms, the cities which provided the seedbed for the patriotic movement and the remote mountains and border areas where bandit rules held sway were worlds apart. This lesson, which earlier revolutionaries had failed to spot or chosen to ignore, was learned by the communists only through a painful process of trial and error involving enormous sacrifices. Having forsaken the cities for the countryside in their pursuit of a successful solution to the problems of China's revolution, that cultural divergence became of crucial political importance, especially after the outbreak of war in 1937, when the communists found themselves the weakest of the three partners struggling for mastery.

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Although the communists, by engineering the "Xian Incident" of 1936*,

had forced the government of Jiang Jieshi to agree to a united front against the Japanese, actual cooperation between the two sides was minimal and armed clashes were frequent. All three contenders, therefore, the communists, the government and the Japanese, found themselves fighting on two fronts at once. As a result, the vast numbers of bandits created by the economic dislocation accompanying the war became the targets of political overtures from all sides.

Individual communist leaders' attitudes towards bandits varied, from the sanguine expectations of village-bred romantics like Mao Zedong to the aloof pessimism of urban organizers like Liu Shaoqi. While it soon became clear that over-optimism regarding bandits' revolutionary potential would lead to disaster — cases of bandit chiefs betraying credulous communist agents were legion — going to the other extreme and seeking to eliminate them entirely only succeeded in driving them over to the enemy where, given the guns and recognition they craved, they promptly became anti-communist guerillas. To the outnumbered communists, this was an equally intolerable situation. Most important of all, since the communists envisaged not only the defeat of Japan but also a social revolution growing out of the popular mobilization undertaken to prosecute the war, they knew that sooner or later they would have to face up to the problem of bandits. A positive, forward-looking bandit policy thus became a major priority.

A middle way between Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi, however, was not easy to find. Welcoming bandits into the Red Army (renamed the "Eighth Route Army" following the united front agreement of 1937) as they were had already been proven unrealistic. Obeying their own rules, bandits cared little for communist discipline. Many of those who did join the anti-Japan war effort were, as Liu Shaoqi later characterized

them, merely "Resist Japan and get rich bandits" whose objectives were no more than the time-honoured ones of other bandits. In danger they either turned their tails or turned their coats. To deal with this problem, the communists adopted a combination of political and military tactics. The political aspect essentially meant recognizing the bandits for what they were. Care had to be taken to avoid damaging the chiefs' self-respect and pride at having made themselves men to be respected, and to pay lip service to their desire to have themselves officially acknowledged. The military aspect meant persuading them to recognize that cooperation with the Eighth Route Army was the only route to realizing any of their dreams. In other words, the communists had at long last reconciled themselves to playing the role of patron.

In the spring of 1938, some six months after the outbreak of full-scale war, a small group of student activists surrendered to a 4000-member bandit gang in western Shandong and asked to be taken on as rank and file members. To flatter the chiefs' egos, since the gang had taken to calling itself the "North China Anti-Japanese Alliance", they declared that if bandits were anti-Japan, they were proud to become anti-Japanese bandits. In this way, by a combination of modesty and flattery they were finally able to persuade the chiefs to relax their guard over them and allow them to operate as fully-fledged members. They then scattered among the rank and file and began the process of converting them to a genuine anti-Japan policy. Using parody songs, skits and parables based on local folk knowledge, and appealing to the bandits' desire to see themselves as heroes, after several months they were finally able to convert the gang to their point of view, and their efforts were crowned when the chiefs actually drove away a "mainland adventurer" come to seduce the gang with material aid.

The political stage successfully passed, the next was the military one of persuading the bandits to surrender to the Eighth Route Army and be formally instated as guerillas. To this purpose the students first allowed the gang to catch a glimpse of a unit passing close to their camp on manoeuvres so as to persuade them of the communist forces' absolute superiority. Appealing to the chiefs' egos once again, they admitted that the communist political workers were lowly figures now, but insisted that after the successful prosecution of the war they were certain to become powerful men. By attaching themselves to their coat-tails now the bandits could put themselves in a good position for promotion in the future. It was a powerful message, and one that was perfectly attuned to the values that bandits lived by. A few months later the chiefs agreed to be reorganized as Eighth Route Army guerillas.[6)]

The birth of this new policy was a major departure for the communists. Instead of seeking to merely eliminate the bandits or exploit them as cannon fodder, as they had done previously and as their opponents continued to do, the communists had decided, by drawing the bandits into the revolutionary process, to eliminate the distinction between bandit and revolutionary altogether. By taking account of the bandits' own values and expectations, and by speaking to them in terms they could understand (which often implied wielding a big stick too), the communists not only achieved the working relationship with bandits that had so far eluded all political operators, but in the process hurled an entirely new set of values into the Chinese political arena.

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What does a discussion of Chinese bandits have to do with Japan's "internationalization" process? On the surface, nothing. A little thought, however, can reveal a number of related concerns. Research on a culture

other than one's own involves not only the assembling of data about that culture but also a reassessment of one's own cultural identity to ensure that its values do not interfere with objective appreciation. Ideally, it should further lead to a reexamination of one's own behaviour. For example, the question that has always been most intriguing to me is, "what made bandits tick?" What thoughts went through the minds of men who trod the "dangerous path of banditry" daily in the knowledge that it led most often to death? Would I have the courage to do the same? Or would I, like the majority of peasants, "prefer starvation to breaking the law"? A student activist myself when I began researching this topic, would I in fact have had the courage to do as those Shandong students did? In short, researching Chinese bandits provided me with an opportunity to reassess myself both as a student and as a man.

In the same way, I should like to suggest that reflection on the part played by bandits in modern Chinese history can also be of some use to the people of modern Japan, struggling to come to terms with a new era summed up in the vague term "internationalization". In saying this I am not intending to call for yet another bout of soul-searching about Japan's atrocities in China, or even merely to point out that bandits acted as excellent intermediaries through whom the Japanese military could create havoc in the Chinese countryside; these things have been said before. Rather, I would like to suggest that the long tradition of direct action in Chinese history, symbolized, for all their faults, by bandits in the twentieth century, could serve as a catalyst for all of us to rethink our own attitudes to authority, to unequally-distributed property, and to self-expression. In short, by looking objectively at the factors that underlay bandits' behaviour instead of writing them off as mere "brigands" or "robbers" should also allow us to look objectively at

ourselves. And the ability to look objectively at ourselves and at the culture we live in is, needless to say, the fundamental requirement of cultural comparison.

Just as bandits have usually been written off as unworthy of serious consideration, so the "mainland adventurers" have been dismissed as troublemakers whose role was to justify the military's invasion or to act as agents of Japan's economic expansion. As we have seen, however, both bandits and "mainland adventurers" came in all shapes and sizes. If there were bandits who set out only to cause havoc, there were also those who defended their home village to the best of their abilities. If there were "mainland adventurers" who willingly blazed a trail for the subjugation of China, there were also those who actually protested the oppressive policies of the Guandong Army. Nevertheless, forty years after the defeat that made them no more than an awkward memory of Japan's activities on the Asian mainland, the task of assessing objectively the historical significance of the "mainland adventurers" has yet to be begun. To suggest that there were in fact among them not a few who sincerely considered themselves in their own way to be fighting for China and the Chinese people tends to trigger off knee-jerk accusations of "fascism".

From the Chinese point of view, of course, it would be hard to find anything kind to say about the "mainland adventurers", who, sincerity notwithstanding, in the long run brought nothing but disaster. However, the "mainland adventurers" are primarily an aspect of Japan's modern history. What is more, as the popularity of "Song of the Mounted Bandits" showed, their attitude towards China and the Asian mainland was representative of contemporary Japanese popular attitudes as a whole. The dream that they lived (and frequently died) for, that East

Asia would enter a brilliant new era under the benevolent tutelage of Japan, was basically shared by every segment of Japanese society with the exception of certain tendencies within the socialist and labour movements. The tragedy of the "mainland adventurers" —— and of contemporary Japan —— was that they sought to realize their dreams not in their own country but in that of another people, and believed that the strength of their convictions gave them the right to impose that dream upon those people. Today there are few people who would deny that their ideals were totally mistaken. To try to pretend that the "mainland adventurers" did not exist, however, would not only be a slight to their memory, but, more important, bad history, for it would imply that their dreams too did not exist. Things do not disappear simply by being ignored. The task surely is to ask where the "mainland adventurers'" dream originated, why they were ready to live and even die for it, and what that dream entailed. Dreams are a powerful force in history, and only by reexamining them and understanding them can we be sure that the same tragedy will not recur. Unfortunately, the past few years in Japan have seen precisely the opposite trend begin to appear.

Alongside the calls for "internationalization" that have made the word almost a household term recently, another tendency, especially evident among Ministry of Education circles, has been the sending up of trial balloons with inscriptions suggesting that the unfortunate relationship between Japan and the rest of Asia prior to 1945 may not have been all that bad after all, that there may have been extenuating circumstances, and so on. Although the two trends would appear to be contradictory, a careful examination reveals that they are in fact deeply related. That is, while at the grassroots level there are any number of individuals battling to create a new, more open relationship between Japan and

the rest of the world, at the level of government and big business, "internationalization" seems to imply exactly the contrary. Far from seeking change in the nature of Japan's international relations, those circles would appear to construe the meaning of "internationalization" as the improvement of Japan's negative image via the pouring of vast sums of money into so-called "Japan Research Institutes" to be established in various key cities. While the stated purpose of such institutes is to increase "understanding" of Japan in international circles, the word used, *"rikai"* is an extremely vague one that also carries the connotations of "to appreciate", "to accept", and so on. Thus, while the Ministry of Education progressively eliminates from school history texts references to events of which it would prefer children to remain ignorant, (the Ministry of Education, incidentally, was the only government ministry not to be totally overhauled during the American occupation), the government as a whole energetically seeks the world's "understanding" of Japan as it is. Far from being contradictory, the two trends are transparently intertwined, and their congruence marks a fundamental reluctance to come to terms with the shadow of the past. The absence of any objective assessment of the "mainland adventurers" is but one example of that reluctance.

Although I have pointed out already that many of the "mainland adventurers" were sincere in their dream of fighting for China, and suggested the need to give credit where credit is due, the fact remains that however much they cared about China's fate their attitude was basically paternalistic. Consciously or unconsciously, as emissaries of a newly-emerged power that had successively defeated both imperial China and imperial Russia, the "mainland adventurers" felt that they knew better than any the solution to China's problems, and, furthermore,

that they had the right to impose that solution. Operating in the name of "internationalism", "Pan-Asianism" and so on, most of them were no more internationalists than was the "China expert" who dismissed China as "no more than a huge bandit gang". In this sense, for all their claims, the fact that the "mainland adventurers" acted as pioneers for Japan's Asian expansion should come as no surprise at all.

True internationalization can only be based on the understanding that the methods and solutions valid in one's own culture are not universal truths and that people in other cultures have the right to determine their own destinies by their own methods no matter how illogical those methods may seem. Such a definition would obviously exclude the "mainland adventurers". A dream, however powerfully persuasive, has validity only in the culture that engendered it. As we seek to open up a new era of internationalization, the first thing we must do is to overcome the paternalism of the "mainland adventurers". That means not ignoring them and the dreams that fired them, but subjecting them to hard scrutiny. Only then can we be sure that the new era will not repeat the mistakes of the old.

* In December 1936, Jiang Jieshi arrived in Xian, northwest China, to supervise a major offensive against the communists. A few days later he was arrested by army officers who wanted him to concentrate on fighting the Japanese invaders, and held until he agreed to their demand.

NOTES

1) Tinko Pawley, *My Bandit Hosts* (London, 1935), p. 229.

2) See Harley F. MacNair, *China's New Nationalism* (Shanghai, 1925), p. 258; Osame Takeshi, *Shina dohi no kenkyū* (A study of China's bandits) (Tokyo, 1923), passim. 納武津, 支那土匪の研究 ; Gotō Asatarō, 'Shina dohi heishi ni taisuru kiso chishiki' (Basic facts about Chinese bandits and soldiers) (*Gaikō jihō* 448, 1 July 1923, p. 58, p. 71-2). 後藤朝太郎, 支那土匪兵士に対する基礎智識, 外交時報.

3) Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 475-6.

4) Harvey James Howard, *Ten Weeks with Chinese Bandits* (New York, 1926), p. 162.

5) Kuchiki Kanzō, *Bazoku senki* (The battle memoirs of a mounted bandit) (Tokyo, 1966), p. 235. 朽木寒三, 馬賊戦記

6) Gao Jing, 'Women zenyang gaizao tufeidi?' (How did we reform bandits?), in *Kangzhanzhong di Zhongguo nongcun dongtai* (The fluid situation in China's villages during the Anti-Japan Resistance War) (Shanghai, 1939), p. 101-5. 高境, 我們怎様改造土匪的? 抗戦中的中国農村動態.

Readers interested in finding out more on the subject of bandits in China are referred to my book, *Bandits in Republican China*, published by Stanford University Press in 1988, which also contains a full bibliography.

GLOSSARY

bazoku 馬賊
Bazoku no Uta 馬賊の唄
dage 大哥
dajiazi 大家子
dangjiadi 当家的
dao yi you dao 盗亦有道
Dao Zhi 盗跖
didi 弟弟

feiguo　匪国

hongqiang hui　紅槍会

Jiang fei　蔣匪

jianghu　江湖

Jiang Jieshi　蔣介石

jiefu jipin　刦富濟貧

Kohinata Hakurō　小日向白朗

Liu Shaoqi　劉少奇

Mao fei　毛匪

Mao Zedong　毛沢東

Matsumoto Yōnosuke　松本要之助

minguo　民国

rikai　理解

shen zai weique, xin zai jianghu　身在魏闕　心在江湖

Shuihu zhuan　水滸傳

Sun Zhongshan　孫中山

Taiping jing　太平經

tairiku rōnin　大陸浪人

titian xingdao　替天行道

tufei　土匪

wuxia　武俠

yizei　義賊

zei　賊

Zhang Zuolin　張作霖

（フィリップ・ビリングズリー／文学部／1989. 10. 9　受理）