
Here on the northern edge of Korea

Lies the Yalu River, two hundred li in length;

Cross it and outstretches the vast expanse of Southern Manchuria.

The intense cold of thirty degrees below zero,

Halfway through April the snow disappears,

While in the summer the water boils to a hundred degrees.

(The Northern Korean Border Patrol Song, 1928)¹

In a 1934 issue of the colonial Korean police monthly Keimu ihō, Japanese police chief Nakamura Mika described the harsh wintertime conditions endured by female salt smugglers on the Korean-Manchurian border. According to Nakamura, if one closely observed the area near the railroad bridge that spanned the Yalu River early in the morning, one could "witness groups of between ten to thirty old women wrapped up in rags to protect themselves from the cold."

With bodies "seemingly frozen white," these Korean women would carry "large bundles" on their backs across the frozen river.² The bitterly cold winters which, in the words of another Japanese periodical, caused dogs to "lose the energy to bark" and the Yalu's water to freeze "to the color of a bayonet" were a staple feature of river life.³ They were also a cause of regulatory concern for the colonial officials tasked with policing the river border, as the cold winter climate allowed for previously unavailable "freedom" in the movement of people and illicit goods across

¹ Kodama Toshimitsu, Natsukashi no nihon uta zenshū (Kagoshima-shi: Chiran Tokkō Irei Kenshōkai, 1972), 338.
² Nakamura Mika, "Shingishū no mitsuyu," Keimu ihō, December 1934, 86.
³ “Hokusen Kokkyō keibi.” Asahi gurafu, July 15, 1936, 7, 2.
the river's frozen surface. As one Tonga ilbo article sensationally declared, smugglers on the Manchurian-Korean border waited for the Yalu River to freeze over just as eagerly "as the Christians wait for the coming of their Redeemer."

This paper examines the seasonality of border security on the Yalu River as part of continental policy from 1931 to 1945. The riparian border between Korea and Manchuria transformed with the seasonal rise and fall of water levels and freezing and unfreezing of the Yalu River. With the changing seasons came changing threats to Japanese border security policy—from summer floods that consumed local Chinese and Korean communities to winter ice that provided a convenient pathway for smugglers, bandits, and anti-Japanese guerrillas. The harsh frontier environment of the Yalu region alone did not determine the success or failure of imperial border security. The construction of the massive Sup'ung dam (1937-1943) and contemporaneous anti-guerrilla suppression campaigns brought increased political stability and lessened the river's most dramatic seasonal fluctuations. Yet the border environment continued to be defined by an unmistakable seasonality of illicit border activity that subverted the aims of Japanese administrators.

Since Benedict Anderson's influential study of nation-states as "imagined communities," the artificial nature of international borders has been taken for granted by many scholars. Most studies of the Sino-Korean border have likewise focused on the discursive, diplomatic, and ethnic rather than environmental aspects of border demarcation and policing. Yet imagining borders as merely "constructed" entities has limited utility when trying to understand the

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5 "Amnok kyōling ttara kyōnggye simŏm," Tonga ilbo, December 23, 1933.
7 For an example of a recent work on border policing and smuggling that takes geography into serious consideration, see Eric Tagliacozzo, Secret Trades, Porous Borders: Smuggling and States along a Southeast Asian Frontier (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 2005.
contours of colonial security and everyday life in the Yalu border region. The Yalu River was in part an arbitrary boundary decided by political actors, as demonstrated by the difficulty of bifurcating the liquid geography of the river into distinct "Korean" and "Manchurian" zones. But in the act of building police stations, setting up riverside watchtowers and guard posts, and stringing telephone wires, officials also helped shape a physical border environment with real implications for local communities.

An in-depth analysis of the colonial border environment requires sensitivity to a mode of temporality absent in most historical narratives: seasonal change. Scholars have devoted increased attention to climate's effect on human history. This focus, however, has overwhelmingly centered on long-term climate change or natural disasters (such as drought and flooding) brought about by short-term climatic variations. This emerging literature has illuminated much about the interconnectedness of climate and history, but has devoted less attention to more quotidian seasonal weather patterns and their effect on human life and activities. By studying the past in seasons as well as years, decades, and centuries, a critical and often overlooked aspect of lived experience in contested historical landscapes emerges. Sensitivity to the seasonality of Yalu border security allows us to glimpse what Fernand Braudel described as the "noiseless" "underlying currents" of human history, localizing human actors in a landscape

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rich with the visceral experience of changing weather and seasons and not just a sterile vacuum wherein political and economic dramas unfold.9

A focus on the seasonality of Yalu River border security allows for a more textured, ground-level look at the limits of colonial power. Scholars of Japanese imperialism in Korea have increasingly begun to question the assumptions of earlier historians about the "quality" and "competence" of the imperial state10 in areas such as relations with civic and settler society, assimilation of colonized peoples, and major engineering projects.11 Yet many works still ascribe to colonial policemen a tremendous ability to carry out their objectives. In his study of consulate police and their role in imperial expansion in continental Asia, Eric Esselstrom argues that consular police were able to "transcend borders of geography, politics, nation, ideology, and community in Japan and throughout northeast Asia during this era."12 "Geography" is invoked in this passage only to emphasize the alleged capability of Japanese security officers to "transcend" its borders, and by inference, any serious challenge it may have presented. By examining imperial power at its "borders," however, this paper portrays colonial officials as more limited by geography than transcendent of their physical environment.

The primary actors examined in this study are customs officials and border police on the Korean side of the Yalu. The decision to focus on these officials stems from their symbolic importance to the project of Japanese imperial security and the voluminous sources they left

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behind of their activities. Because of Manchuko's ostensibly sovereign status (even if virtually a Japanese puppet-state), officials on the Korean side of the Yalu River saw themselves as literal gatekeepers of the Japanese imperial heartland and publicized their activities extensively in magazines and colonial newspapers. At least one of these border officials acquired notoriety as a literary figure in his own right: Noritake Kazuo, who wrote poetry and essays for colonial literary magazines and later published a memoir entitled The Yalu River in 1943 based on his experience of working on the border. To a more limited extent, this paper will also consider the motivations and actions of Korean and Chinese smugglers, bandits, and others who contested colonial authority, as well as the Korean farmers and policemen who were mobilized to support border security efforts. While historical sources written from the perspective of these largely illiterate groups are extremely limited, police documents as well as reports in Korean-language newspapers provide a valuable if indirect (and biased) view into their operations. In what follows, I will begin with a brief description of the Yalu's nature as a contested border landscape in the centuries preceding Japanese colonial rule. I then present a seasonal view of border security from 1931-1945. Japanese control of both sides of the Yalu during this period made the river the focal

13 The "bandits" and anti-Japanese guerrillas who operated in the border region during the 1930s were predominantly based in Manchuria rather than Korea. As a result, Manchuko police in the Sino-Korean border region were more focused on internal pacification than patrolling against the unlikely possibility of crossborder attack. For Manchukuo officials, the greatest periphery threat came not from the southern border with Korea but rather from the northern and eastern borders with the Soviet Union. For an extensive study of 1930s Soviet-Japanese border conflicts, which culminated in the bloody 1939 Battles of Khalkin Gol, see Alvin D. Cox, Nomonhan: Japan Against Russia, 1939 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1985).

14 Noritake Kazuo, Oryókkō (Tokyo: Daiichi ShuppanKyōkai, 1943) (An earlier edition (with slightly different content) was also published in Seoul the year before: Noritake Kazuo, Ōryōkkō: Keibi no hitotachi ni (Keijō, Keijō Chōsen Insatsu Kabushiki Kaisha, 1942)). Born in Tottori Prefecture in 1909, Noritake first traveled to Korea in 1928, where he worked as a border policeman for the North Pyongan Province Police Affairs Bureau before being commissioned by the Government General of Korea to write for the National Thought Defense Association (Shisō Kokubō Kyōkai). For a biography of the author and an analysis of this work as it pertains to the "psychology" of Manchurian-Korean border security during this period, see Ozawa Yūsaku, "Kokkō keibi no shinri to riron--aru keisatsukan no shūkiyori (Nihonjin no Chōsenjinkan 6)," Chōsén kenkyū 79 (November 1968): 36-44. For a study more specifically focused on Noritake's literary activities in Korea and his friendships with Korean literary figures of the period, see Chang In-su, "Noritake Kajū wa shingminji Chosôn îi mundane," Hanminjok munhwa yǒngu 47 (2014): 301-329.
point of a newly-proclaimed "Yalu River Economic Bloc." Challenges to this rhetoric of unity such as smuggling and guerrilla activities, however, continued to reaffirm the contentious nature of the border region.

The Origins of Yalu Border Security

The Yalu River (Chinese: *Yalu jiang*; Korean: *Amnok kang*; Japanese: *Ōryokkō*) originates 2,500 meters above sea level at its headwaters on Mount Paektu on the Sino-North Korean border, before flowing approximately 803 kilometers (499 miles) eastward into the Yellow Sea. It is the longest river on the Korean peninsula and one of the major rivers of northeast Asia. Its length exceeds the longest river in Japan proper, Shinano-gawa, by some 436 kilometers, making it for a time "the number one river in Japan" during the period of Japanese imperial expansion in continental Asia. For much of its course the river carves deep, meandering canyons through the surrounding mountainous terrain before becoming progressively wider and slow-moving at its lower reaches. The region around the river is characterized by a "continental climate" with four distinct seasons. Frigid temperatures cause much of the river to freeze over in the winter while summers are marked by intense heat and humidity.

For centuries preceding Japanese expansion into mainland Asia, the Yalu River and the neighboring Tumen River formed a contentious border between ruling dynasties in northeast Asia. Challenges to this rhetoric of unity such as smuggling and guerrilla activities, however, continued to reaffirm the contentious nature of the border region.

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China and Korea. The 1628 treaty signed by the Chosŏn dynasty in Korea and the Late Jin dynasty in northeastern China (renamed the Qing after 1644), designated the area within sixty li (approximately 34 kilometers) of the Yalu as an off-limits buffer zone to travel and settlement. Later Qing policies further attempted to seal off the region from Chinese and Korean migration (fengjin) to preserve both the sacred homeland of the Qing's Manchu rulers, centered around the Changbai (Paektu) mountains at the headwaters of the Yalu, and the tenuous peace that existed between Qing China and its Korean tributary state. Meanwhile, Korean officials on the other side of the river enacted similar prohibitions against cross-border travel, designating strict punishments, including death, for "illegal border crossings" (pŏmwŏl). Yet despite official proscriptions against settlement of the Yalu border, waves of Korean and Chinese migrants streamed into the area, lured by the region's rich natural resources, especially ginseng, furs, and timber.

For the most part these migrants escaped punishment. According to historian Andre Schmid, only an “unfortunate few” were detected or unsuccessful at bribing officials to look the other way. Although Korean officials had erected a series of watchposts and other defense works along the river, the intensity of surveillance varied seasonally. In Kanggye province, a key area of ginseng production, for example, only 16 of the 126 guard posts established by the Chosŏn government operated year-round, while the rest were staffed mainly during the summer

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22 Ibid., 231.
ginseng-harvesting season. The fact that the Chosŏn state was more concerned about policing ginseng growers than creating an impenetrable year-round border elicited complaints from Qing officials, who worryingly noted the number of Koreans crossing the river in winter to illicitly harvest furs.

By the late nineteenth century, modern state-building projects in both Qing China and Chosŏn Korea resulted in less tolerance for open borders. In the 1870s, the Qing government began to incorporate settlements along the Yalu into its realm, while further opening up the region for immigration. In 1907 a customs office was established at the border city of Andong near the river's mouth. Korean surveillance of the river increased as border security became part and parcel of an effort to reassert national sovereignty in the face of new threats from neighboring powers.

Concurrent with this renewed focus on border security was the arrival of an imperial power that would dramatically shift the balance of power in mainland Asia--Japan. Competition between Japan and China over the right to station troops in Korea resulted in the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). Japanese and Qing forces fought two major battles near the Yalu: the Battle of Jiulianzheng, in which Japanese forces constructed a pontoon bridge across the river and occupied key fortifications on the Chinese side, and the Battle of the Yalu River (or Yellow Sea), a key naval engagement fought near the river's mouth. Establishing itself as a prominent, if not yet dominant, power in the region, Japan began investing in the development of

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26 Schmid, 231.
the Yalu river basin's rich stands of virginal timber. This helped fuel an imperial rivalry between Japan and another emerging power in the region, Russia, which culminated in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). After a series of fierce battles, including one fought directly on the banks of the Yalu, Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 ensured that the river would now be an integral feature of Japan's emerging continental empire.

Turn of the century imperial expansion presented Japanese rulers with the unfamiliar challenge of securing land-based colonial borders. Japan's earliest colonies: Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan, were islands much like the main Japanese archipelago. Beginning with Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), however, the country rapidly acquired a series of new overseas colonies (Southern Sakhalin and the Kwantung Leased Territory in 1905, Korea in 1910) that shared territorial borders with neighboring countries such as China and Russia. Of these, the Sino-Korean border with its considerable length posed the greatest challenge to imperial governance. As administrators wrestled with these new problems, terrestrial border patrol became integral to the framework of colonial security and the identity of a newly emerging Japanese Empire. As stated by Japanese border officer and writer Noritake Kazuo in his 1943 memoir, "the history of border security in Japan is not long, but it is in every way connected to the development of our nation." 

Climate and geography immediately began to challenge Japanese efforts to control the flow of goods and peoples across the Sino-Korean border. After the brutal suppression of the March First demonstrations in 1919, when millions of Koreans joined in vigorous non-violent

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30 Noritake Kazuo, Ōryōkkō, 46.
protest against Japanese colonial rule, many Korean nationalists fled across the Yalu and Tumen rivers to Manchuria. These anti-Japanese groups took advantage of the region's rugged terrain to launch attacks across the border on imperial outposts in Korea. In 1920, "bandit" raids on the Manchurian-Korean border, which included attacks by Korean independence fighters or "recalcitrant Koreans" (futei senjin), numbered as many as 1,652. The fear provoked by anti-Japanese groups crossing the Yalu was heightened by the freezing over of the river in winter. In January 1922, a notice published in the Korean-language newspaper, Tonga ilbo, informed its readers that pedestrian travel on the frozen river's surface in the vicinity of Úiju would be allowed only between 8am and 5pm. Anyone caught traveling on the ice outside the designated hours would be shot immediately. By the mid-1920s, further regulatory measures of regulation had dramatically reduced the threat of anti-Japanese activities on the border. But the challenges of regulating travel across the vast frontier river persisted.

If the outburst of anti-Japanese activity in the wake of the March First Movement prompted the first major crisis of border security, the second undoubtedly came as a result of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. As a long-time border official named Satō Shigeichi wrote, the region entered a "state of war" (senji jōtai) as a result of the political upheaval that accompanied the creation of the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo. Guerrilla groups, many of whom were trained and equipped by the Chinese Communist Party, launched raids on

31 Shu Wanmin et al, Zhong Han guanxishi: jindai juan (Beijing: Shehui kexuewenxianchubanshe, 2014), 194-195. Esselstrom talks at length about Japanese efforts to police Korean independence activists in Jiandao, a Manchurian region immediately north of the Tumen river that became a hotspot for resistance activity due to the high concentration of Korean immigrants in the region. See Esselstrom, 66-115.
32 Kobayashi Kaneshige, Kokkyō to kono keibi, inset.
33 "Apkang pingsang ūi tonghaeng kyōnggynec," Tonga ilbo, January 9, 1922.
34 Such measures included a key 1925 agreement allowing for cooperation between Japanese and Chinese officials in the arrest and capture of Koreans attempting to illicitly cross the river. Later dubbed the "Mitsuya Agreement," the provisions of the treaty included statements that "Chinese authorities would order all resident Koreans to refrain from entering Korea with arms, offenders to be arrested and handed over to Japanese officials" and "Chinese and Japanese police would not trespass into each other’s territory," the latter being a response to the frequent incursions of Japanese border police into Chinese territory. See Esselstrom, 87, 73.
Japanese outposts. At the same time, smugglers, hitherto considered a relatively minor threat to Japanese interests in the region, took advantage of the increased trade between Korea and Manchukuo to develop new illicit economies around the Yalu.

Under the banner of "Manchurian and Korean unity," Japanese promoters of regional development spoke idealistically of a "disappearing" national border at the Yalu. The reality, however, was far from it: the river remained a heavily policed zone of contact between two separately administered territories of the Japanese empire. In September 1932, the same month the "sovereign" state of Manchukuo was founded, the total number of police on the Korean side of the Korean-Manchurian border was 1,753 stationed at 249 different police stations and substations, in addition to customs officers and policemen on the Manchurian side of the river. By September of 1939 this number had risen to 2,366, further belying the official rhetoric of Manchurian-Korean "unity."

Just as climate and geography had posed challenges to border security in earlier times, the Yalu border from 1931 to 1945 continued to be a militarized boundary shaped by environmental as well as political forces. Through the writings of officials stationed on the border, the majority of whom were ethnically Japanese, one can gain a glimpse of a security landscape that shifted with the ebbing and rising, freezing and unfreezing of the river. Each season brought different new environmental challenges for police and opportunities for illicit

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40 "Kokkyō Dai issen, Dai nisen keisatsukan haichi kankei." The border police force was nearly 77 percent Japanese as of March 1937. The ratio of Japanese to Korean police was much higher on the border than for the colonial Korean force in general, which in 1937 was 58.9% Japanese and 41.1% Korean. See Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen sōtokufu tōkei nenpyō: shōwa 12nen* (Keijō: Chōsen sōtokufu, 1938), 270. The disparity suggests a greater concern about the accountability of Korean officers on the politically sensitive Korean-Manchurian border.
border crossings, particularly in the form of the frozen river and the Yalu basin's remote frontier topography. While such officials occasionally exaggerated the hardships they faced, their narratives nonetheless offer a valuable window into the Yalu's shifting seasonal geographies and their impact on the local operation of imperial power.

**Kaihyōki- The Yalu River Border in Spring and Summer**

The coming of the spring and the advent of the Kaihyōki (thawing-out period) was a time of elation and relief for border officials as warming temperatures caused the Yalu's thick layer of winter ice to break up and dissipate. The exact timing of the Kaihyōki varied by year and by region. In Yongamp'o, located at the mouth of the river near the Yellow Sea, the ice began melting as early as mid-March, whereas upstream at Chngangjin on the Korean side of the river it may not have thawed until late April. As described by Japanese policeman Yoshimura Yoshizō, the joys of the "blissful spring" (ureshii haru) could only be known by people who lived in the region. As another border policeman noted, the most cheerful time for border patrol was not New Year's (shōgatsu) or Obon, the typical days of greatest festivity in the Japanese calendar, but rather the brief, "festival-like" three or four day period at the beginning of the Kaihyōki when flowing chunks of ice stopped the movements of bandits, anti-Japanese guerrilla and smugglers across the border. While seemingly hyperbolic in tone, such statements by border officials underscored the perceived challenges of the winter "frozen-over period" and the relief brought by the coming of spring.

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42 Kokkyō keibi, 167.
43 Kokkyō to konokeibi, 19.
Yet border officials were also aware that illicit cross-border activity did not simply disappear with the melting of river ice. Pronouncements from police leaders stressed the need for continued vigilance during the kaihyōki and admonished patrolmen against using the rising temperatures and melting ice as an excuse to relax their guard.44 As the primary methods of transport across the river changed from sledge and foot to boat and ferry, border patrol agents adapted to the changes in the river's topography, including the implementation of a "ceaseless" watch of river ferries and boats traveling up and downstream.45 Because the yearly cycle of border security was largely oriented around the "frozen-over period," however, for much of the 1930s the overall number of police stationed on the border declined in the spring.46

Smugglers were among those who attempted to capitalize on the spring-time decrease in police force to carry out their illicit cross-border trade.47 Rural poverty in northern Korea, high tariffs in Manchuria, and Japanese merchants' eagerness to sell goods stockpiled amidst an ongoing global depression provided a potent set of economic conditions for smuggling to thrive on the Manchurian-Korean border during the 1930s. Goods smuggled across the river included gold, opium, textiles, alcohol, salt (subject to a strict government monopoly in Manchuria), and oxen.48 The bulk of this trade was concentrated around the sister cities of Andong and Sinŭiju, located near the mouth of the Yalu River and connected by means of a railway bridge constructed by Japanese engineers in 1911. By the 1930s Sinŭiju was Korea's most important entrepôt of trade for goods circulating between Korea and Manchuria, and by 1931 Andong

44 Kokkyō keibi, 45-46.
45 Ibid., 85.
46 Kokkyō keibi, 168.
48 "Shingishū no mitsuyu," 78-79

Traversing the iron bridge between the two cities on rail or by foot was a preferred method of cross-border travel for many residents in the region, though smugglers largely preferred to transport their goods via the river to avert the watchful gaze of customs officials. These smugglers would then use the railway to transport goods to other parts of the empire once the initial border crossing had been made. As estimated by Sinŭiju police chief Nakamura Mika, in 1933 alone 2,578,680 rolls of cotton cloth were smuggled into Manchuria from Sinŭiju via the river, yet customs officials succeeded in confiscating only 7,275 rolls of cloth transported over this route. Officials were slightly more effective at confiscating goods smuggled by means of rail, though they were unable to check the massive smuggling operations on the Yalu itself.\footnote{Nakamura Mika, "Shingishū no mitsuyu," \textit{Keimuihō}, January 1935, 94-95.} 

As noted by border officer Yoshimura Yoshizō, spring was a time when smugglers' activities occurred "in earnest." Or as a March 1934 article in the \textit{Tonga ilbo} reported, while the Yalu's ice had retreated, the problem of smuggling had not. Customs officials on both sides of the Yalu were "gravely considering" methods of suppressing this illicit trade, including the purchase of four high-speed boats for use in Sinŭiju and the erection of searchlights on the Manchurian side of the river.\footnote{"Andong, Sinŭiju segwan ūi milsudan pangŏjin," \textit{Tonga ilbo}, March 30, 1934.} 

Even with these technologies, however, the constantly shifting liquid geography of the riparian border made prosecution difficult. As established by previous agreements, the boundary between the Japanese colony of Korea and Manchukuo lay at the deepest point in the middle of the river. But because most smuggling took place at night, it was frequently impossible for officials to determine where a smuggling crime had been committed. Using small wooden boats to transport their wares across the river, smugglers exploited the
ambiguity of the Korean-Manchurian border on the Yalu to their profit and advantage. The response to this ambiguity among customs officials in Manchukuo, the destination for the majority of smuggled goods flowing across the Yalu, was to begin pursuing smuggler's boats even to the Korean side of the river. In one incident on May 23, 1936, customs officials pursued a Korean-manned smuggling vessel to the Korean side of the river where it then toppled over, drowning nine of the ten people aboard. Such "atrocities" stoked the anger of Korean-language newspapers as well as the ire of Japanese police and customs officers in Korea who resented the intrusion of Manchukuo officials into their administrative territory. The realities of riparian border patrol not only revealed the arbitrary nature of the dividing line between Korea and Manchuria, but also exposed the deeper tensions that emerged under the "Manchurian-Korean Unity."

With the breakup of the Yalu's ice, colonial police elsewhere on the Manchurian-Korean frontier began the "spring cleanup" of border communities in search for suspected "bandits" and smugglers. In an essay written for a commemorative album on border security published by the North Pyōngan Province Police Affairs Bureau, Japanese policeman Yoshimura Yoshizō described the problems he encountered in regulating smuggling while being stationed on Sodori, a river island upstream of Sinŭiju. The proximity of the island to Manchuria, combined with its forested topography, made this particular river island an ideal location for smuggling. While many as three police officers and six young men from the locally-organized jikeidan (self-defense corps) patrolled the island in the "frozen-over period," the number shrunk to just two policemen. One day in May, while Yoshimura was making his usual patrol rounds around the

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52 "Shingishū no mitsuyu," December 1934, 84.
55 Kokkyō keibi, 170.
island, he was interrupted by a strange noise. A local villager then came to him saying that someone had just been killed by marauding bandits while fishing. Suspecting that the killed villager was a smuggler, Yoshimura angrily barked, "Don't lie to me saying that he was fishing! He came to sell salt, didn't he?!" He was then led to a covert smuggler's cave, where he discovered the corpse of a salt smuggler covered in fresh blood after being beaten by bandits.56

Writing on this episode later, Yoshimura castigated the "idiotic" smugglers who "gambled" their lives on this illicit cross-border trade while threatening the "security" of the entire empire.57 In his study of the contentious border politics between European states along the eighteenth-century Rhine river, French historian Lucien Febvre observed, "What engraves a frontier powerfully in the earth is not policemen or customs men or cannons drawn up behind ramparts. It is feelings, and exalted passions— and hatreds."58 In the case of the Korean-Manchurian border, the annual melting of the Yalu ice did little to dissipate the intense resentment felt towards those seen as threatening border security.

As the bloody anecdote detailed in the preceding paragraph demonstrates, another group that challenged border security efforts after the spring-time "thawing-out period" were the so-called hizoku, or "bandits." As employed by colonial authorities, the term "bandit" had an inclusive meaning. It was used to refer to bandit groups that operated on the Sino-Korean border such as the Great Sword Society, a "semi-religious, self-governing body" in Dongbiandao on the Manchurian side of the Yalu, and "mounted bandits" that had traditionally been a staple feature of the politically unstable frontier regions of Manchuria.59 It also included the Communist-

56 Kokkyō keibi, 168-171.
57 Ibid., 170.
59 Chong-Sik Lee, Revolutionary Struggle in Manchuria, 74. For more on the problem of banditry in China historically, see Phil Billingsley, Bandits in Republican China (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).
organized First People's Revolutionary Army and other anti-Japanese guerrilla forces, Korean and Chinese, that arose in response to the Japanese creation of Manchukuo.

With the unfreezing of the river, these "bandit" groups carried out periodic raids on boats traveling up and down the Yalu in addition to riverside communities and police stations. As inferred by the above anecdote, sometimes these attacks targeted smugglers, who were known for carrying large amounts of cash and not always willing to report attacks to the authorities lest their own illicit activities be uncovered.60 Another occasional target were floating lumber rafts, a regular feature of Yalu river life and the thriving local timber trade, which numbered as many as 5,157 in 1934.61

What especially aroused official ire were raids on the "propeller boats" (cargo boats equipped with airplane-like propellers to help navigate the shallow depths of the Yalu River) that navigated the route appointed by the Government-General of Korea from Sinŭiju to Singalp'a at the upper reaches of the Yalu.62 Operated by the Yalu River Shipping Company (Ōryokkō Yūsen Kōshi), these "propeller boats" were used to transport gold, mail and provide regular passenger service to Korean communities on the remote upper reaches of the Yalu, making them indispensable to border administration and development but also convenient targets for "bandit" attacks.63 To combat raids on propeller boats, border officials in colonial Korea began arming these vessels against possible attack. On 1934, the North Pyŏngan Province Police Affairs Bureau made provisions for three machine-gun armed police officers to accompany the boats on

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60 Kokkyō keibi, 169.
61 Tani Mitsuyo, Manshū kasenshi (Shinkyō :Manshū Jijō Annaijo, 1940), 288. This number would soon decline, however, as a result of dam construction of the river from 1937-1943 and the increasing use of railroads to transport lumber afterwards. See Hirose Teizō, “Shokuminki chōsen ni okeru suihō hatsuden jo kensetsu to ryūbatsu mondai,” Niigata Kokusai Jōhō Daigaku, Jōhō bunka gakubu kiyō Vol. 1 (1998), 39-58.
62 Tani Mitsuyo, Manshū kasenshi, 266-267.
63 Kokkyō keibi, 127.
significant portions of their route. The boats themselves were also armed with machine guns, a tactic that spread to other steamships and large-scale vessels that operated regularly on the Yalu.

Machine guns and propeller boats were but part of the arsenal of technology used by border patrol officials to try to control the Yalu's vast riparian space. In his study of Dutch and British colonial border patrol in Southeast Asia, historian Eric Tagliacozzo states that "guns, ships, and detectives" were used to increase the "tensile strength" of geographic borders sketched out in distant metropolitan boardrooms. The same was true of the Manchurian-Korean border. For Japanese officials, the keys to increasing the "tensile strength" of the border were airplanes and telephone wires. Airplanes were first introduced for border security use in February 1935 when the North Pyŏngan Police Affairs Bureau purchased two Salmson 2-type biplanes for reconnaissance purposes. As a contemporary newspaper noted, the police use of aircraft was a first not only in Korea but in the entire Japanese empire. Airplanes afforded a previously inaccessible birds-eye view of the Yalu river region, which allowed border officials to trace the movements of "bandits" and smugglers and their "hideouts" more effectively. From five hundred meters in the air, as one Japanese pilot remarked, the "snake-like" river looked like a mere "sandbank pushing up against another," as the geographic obstacle posed by the river's flowing water seemed to disappear.

Another technology considered critical in reducing the spatial challenges posed by Yalu border security was the telephone. The installation of telephone wires connecting the numerous,
remotely-situated police sub-stations and branch stations on the Yalu's riverbanks was a priority of officials throughout the 1930s, and villagers living in riverside communities were often mobilized to provide the labor for telephone pole construction. As Daqing Yang has previously argued, the expansion of Japan's telecommunications network was essential to its consolidation of police control in Korea and elsewhere in the empire. But just as border officials installed these wires to strengthen their regulatory reach over the river, anti-Japanese guerrillas and other groups attempted to subvert the imperial gaze by cutting them down. As suggested by the autobiography of anti-Japanese guerrilla leader and later president of North Korea Kim Il-sung, guerrillas appropriated parts of telephones to use for other purposes, including extracting the sulfur from telephone insulators for use in gunpowder production.

Even as the colonial authorities deployed various technologies to assert control over the Yalu, they continued to struggle to monitor the river in its vast entirety. This was demonstrated by Kim Il-sung's successful guerrilla raid on Poch'ŏnbo, a small Korean village in Hyesan County near the Yalu's headwaters. On June 3, 1937, nearly two hundred guerrillas under Kim's command succeeded in destroying local government offices as well as setting fire to a Japanese police box, the local elementary school and post office, occupying the town for a full day before retreating into Manchuria. Preparation for the attack began days earlier with the construction of a raft bridge across the Yalu. As was later related in Kim's autobiography, "a strange tension" allegedly gripped his "entire body" as he and his forces made their way across the river, which he

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69 Kokkyō keibi, 48-49.  
71 When a group of approximately 150 guerrillas crossed the Yalu to attack the Taegil substation on March 25, 1936, they first cut the station's crossborder telephone wires before then crossing the frozen river. Noritake, Ōryōkkō, 236-237.  
was surprised to find less heavily patrolled than he had initially expected. The temporary success of Kim's guerrillas at Poch'ŏnbo shook the confidence of border police, drawing comparisons to earlier wintertime attacks like the Tonghŭng Incident of 1935 (to be discussed later) as efforts were made to increase the security apparatus around the Yalu and neighboring communities.

In addition to unanticipated cross-border raids by anti-Japanese guerrillas, challenges to summertime border security came from changes in the river itself, specifically in the form of annual flooding. The summer months of July and August saw higher levels of precipitation on the Yalu than any other time of the year. Flooding during this annual "rainy season" posed unique obstacles to border security. Riverside patrols during the rainy season assumed an added layer of risk as roads used to navigate between watch points were commonly washed out. If one were not careful, wrote Japanese police officer Mizuno Takusaburō, they would find themselves swept away into the river's roaring current, where it was "doubtful that one could stay afloat forever." According to Noritake Kazuo, not only was flooding in the summer months of July and August and immediately after the unfreezing of the river ice in March and April a yearly occurrence, but deaths from flooding happened at a regular interval of two to three years. In a chapter on his Yalu-themed memoir entitled "water bandits" (suihi), Noritake narrated a particularly large flood event in July 1935 that displaced many living in the river's floodplain as well as many communities built on islands in the middle of the river. As police and other officials rushed to rescue those stranded in the flood's path, thieves exploited the ensuing chaos

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75 "Hamgyŏng kukkyŏng e chei Tonghŭng saɡŏn," Maeil sinbo, June 6, 1937; Kankyŏ nandŏ keimubuchŏ to Chōsen Sŏtokufu keimukyokuchŏ, "kokkyŏ keibi no jūjitsu kyōka ni kansuru ken," Kannan keihi dai 502 go, National Archives of Korea.
76 Manshū kasenshi, 259.
77 Kokkyŏ keibi, 87.
78 Noritake Kazuo, Ōryŏkkō, 176.
to loot flooded homes before they were finally captured. These were likely the "water bandits" of Noritake's chapter title, though the tone of his narrative also suggested that the unruly currents of the Yalu itself acted as a type of "bandit," upsetting the order and stability of life along the colonial river.79

A more mundane but no less noticeable feature of Yalu border life was the intense heat and humidity during the summer. As noted by German geographer Otten Lautensach, the range between lowest winter and highest summer temperatures in Chunggangjin on the Korean side of the river was a dramatic 81.6 degrees Celsius.80 It is little surprise then that media written to commemorate the activities of border police such as the song introduced at the beginning of this essay frequently mentioned the "boiling" summer temperatures reaching nearly 40 degrees Celsius along with the frozen river and winter nights of below -40 degrees Celsius.81 Writing about his experience of standing watch over summertime ferries, police officer Mizuno complained about the sweat that "drenched my whole body" as he stood on the shade-less river bank. One could not find relief from the heat by drinking from the river, however, lest the dirty water induce multiple harried trips to the toilet.82

As autumn came to the Yalu and temperatures and water levels gradually dropped from their July-August highs, preparation for the imminent "frozen-over period" became a pressing priority for border officers in addition to ongoing riverside patrol. On September 25, 1932, officers stationed at the remote Sangubae police substation in Chasŏng received orders to begin constructing intensive fortifications for the upcoming winter. Before they could finalize their plans, an unusually steep drop in night-time temperatures to -18 degrees Celsius caused the river

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79 Ibid., 175-187.
80 Lowest temperatures were -43.6 degrees Celsius recorded for winter, compared to 38 degrees Celsius for summer. Lautensach, Korea: A Geography, 91.
81 Natsukashi no nihon uta zenshū, 338.
82 Kokkyō keibi, 85.
to completely freeze overnight and froze the ground to a depth of seven sun, or approximately 21 centimeters (8 inches). Using all the "tools of civilization" at their disposal, officers mobilized 796 local villagers to construct a series of fortifications around each of the police stations and substations, which included multiple watchtowers nearly twenty-two shaku in height, stone walls, trenches, and barbed wire entanglements. The result of such efforts did not go unnoticed by travelers in the region. Traveling by boat on the Yalu in 1933 German geographer Otto Lautensach remarked that the Japanese police stations in the region had been converted into veritable "small fortresses" in response to the threat from local "banditry." Throughout the 1930s, border police "fortresses" were continuously rebuilt and upgraded during the autumn months in preparation for what was seen as the primary seasonal challenge to border security, winter.

Keppyōki-- Patrolling the Frozen River

From the perspective of border security officials, fall was an important part of the year, if all too short in length. "It is usually said that a single falling leaf heralds the coming of autumn," remarked police officer Yamada Ainosuke, "but in the northern borders of Korea that does not apply. If a single leaf falls, then winter is known to be coming." According to Noritake Kazuo, the appearance of ice floating down the Yalu heralded the imminent "frozen-over period." Boats caught off guard by the encroaching ice could not be extracted until the next spring, a cause of "deep concern for river traffic," according to one

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83 Kokkyō keibi, 56-60.
84 Lautensach, Korea: A Geography, 240.
86 Kōno Yahei, Kokkyō keibi kinenshū (Sinŭiju: Heian Keishō Henshūbu, 1937), 11.
87 Noritake Kazuo, Ōryōkkō, 176.
period text.\textsuperscript{88} The average date for the onset of the "frozen-over period" varied according to region. Because the velocity of the river's flow slowed as it became wider near the ocean, communities like Yongamp'o at the river's mouth saw the river freeze over as early as mid-November, whereas upstream locations like Chunggangjin usually did not until mid-December. Due to the colder climate of the upper Yalu-the latter locations were also some of the last to welcome the \textit{kaihyōki} (thawing-out period), with the river usually staying frozen until early April.\textsuperscript{89}

The average length of the "frozen-over period" for the entire river was nearly four months, meaning that for almost one third of the year a thick layer of ice covered the surface of the flowing Yalu. The freezing of the river carried multiple meanings and uses to those who lived along its banks. As the Yalu now became off-limits to boat traffic, sledges became the preferred method of transporting goods up and down the river's course.\textsuperscript{90} For those employed in the Yalu's thriving timber industry, winter allowed newly felled timber to be easily transported by sledge over the now-frozen earth to the river, where it could then be floated downstream in the spring and summer.\textsuperscript{91} The frozen river was also valuable as a source of fresh ice, which was cut and stored for use in the warm summer months.\textsuperscript{92} For many, moreover, the frozen Yalu brought new recreational opportunities. Ice skating was a popular sport in the frigid climes of northern Korea and southern Manchuria, as large sections of the river near the cities of Andong and Sinŭiju were converted into outdoor skating rinks and skating competitions were held with some regularity on

\textsuperscript{88} Manshū kasenshi, 262.  
\textsuperscript{89} Murakami Matsusugu, \textit{Manshūkoku oyobi shāhen ni okeru shokasen no tōketsu}, 64-67.  
\textsuperscript{90} Noritake Kazuo, \textit{Oryōkkō}, 167.  
\textsuperscript{92} "Amnok kang ch'aebing nyang ch'ŭngga," \textit{Maeilsinbo}, March 6, 1931.
the river's surface. As a Japanese settler in Sinŭiju later remembered, the region even produced champion speed skaters recognized throughout the empire.93

For border police on guard against cross-border invasion by guerrilla and bandit groups, however, the frozen river was less a place for recreation or commerce than a threat to their efforts to maintain security. The greatest challenge posed by the frozen river was the ease of access it afforded between the Manchurian and Korean banks of the Yalu. According to an internal document of the North Pyŏngan Province Police Affairs Bureau, during the spring, summer, and autumn months the river served as a strategic "moat" around Korea. By carefully considering the natural course of the river's currents and likely places for river traffic to stop, officials could strategically spread their limited human and material resources along the Yalu's length to check the flow of goods and peoples across the border. But with the coming of winter this natural fortification against enemy attack disappeared. Instead, a subversive "freedom" of access was now allowed on the river's surface. It became a convenient corridor for smugglers, "bandits," and other groups whose activities threatened Japan's economic and political hegemony in the region.94 Whereas the ability to cross the river formerly required access to a boat, the Yalu's ice provided a pathway for travelers to traverse its distance by foot.

During his travel on the Manchurian-Korean border near Sinŭiju in 1936, Korean writer Chŏn Mu-gil, upon encountering the frozen Yalu, expressed admiration and awe at the "incredible power of nature," which transformed the "dark and wide waters" of the Yalu into "nothing more than a piece of ice." The ability of the ice to "connect" the two opposite riverbanks resembled some form of "Daoist magic," Chŏn wrote, claiming that "the winter

94 "Keppyōki keibi ni kansuru ken."
border does not recognize the existence of the river." From the perspective of border officials, however, this apparent disappearance of the river under a thick layer of ice provoked less awe than "anxiety" stemming from the persistent challenge of controlling the river's surface.

The constant flow of smuggled goods in wintertime between colonial Korea and Manchuria represented one form of conspicuous subversion of border security. The trafficking of smuggled goods across the frozen Yalu by foot and sledge engaged thousands who lived in communities around the river, mostly near Andong and Sinŭiju, with the number of full-time smugglers hovering around 3,000. What drew the most official ire were the large "gangs" of cloth and gold smugglers who operated on the frozen river's surface. As explained by Sinŭiju police chief Nakamura Mika, these "gangs" would typically cross the ice in groups of between 50 and 100. Preceding them would be a "suicide squad" (kesshitai) of 10 to 20 smugglers armed with stones and clubs who would engage with authorities should the smuggler's movements be detected. Rampant poverty among the colonized in the border regions attracted even more desperate and less well-organized smuggling efforts. As described in the introduction to this essay, impoverished middle-aged and older Korean women living along the border would often smuggle easily transportable salt along the river, braving the icy night-time temperatures of the wintertime Yalu and the watchful eyes of police and customs officials in this process.

In the course of the 1930s, Japanese officials adopted multiple approaches to the problem of smuggling on the frozen Yalu. One strategy was to build guard shacks directly on the thick river ice, where specially trained officers could monitor the thriving illicit trade near the twin
cities of Andong and Sinŭiju. Another method was to target the Japanese and Korean merchants who profited from smuggling. On January 27, 1934, Sinŭiju police officials held a meeting with fifty prominent cloth merchants in the city to solicit their aid in "putting an end" to smuggling and finding other means of employment for the numerous smugglers in the city. This method of appeal to suppliers proved difficult, however, as smuggling had long been considered "integral" to the economy of the border region, especially in Sinŭiju, where the vast majority of Manchuria-bound cloth was smuggled across the river to avoid hefty customs fees. A final approach was to raid communities of smugglers and forcibly employ them in other pursuits, a heavy-handed approach that Japanese officials were initially loath to enforce for fear of disrupting public order but was increasingly attempted by the mid 1930s.

By 1937 colonial officials achieved some success in their efforts to reduce the number of smuggling incidents on the Yalu, though in the face of wartime economic disruptions and encroaching winter ice these results ultimately proved elusive. Successful smuggling regulation partially owed to cooperative efforts between the Manchukuo government and the Government-General of Korea. Officials cited the transfer of around ten suspected smugglers wanted by Manchukuo authorities from Sinuiju to Andong in November 1937 as evident of increasingly close collaboration between police and customs officers on both sides of the Yalu. As regulation intensified, officials on both sides of the border also cooperated in directing smugglers' labor towards civil engineering projects and other "legitimate occupations." The respite brought by these measures was brief, however. Following the outbreak of the Second

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100 "Amnok kang ūi mil such'ul kamsi," Maeilsinbo, February 5, 1933.
102 "Kokkyō mitsubōeki no jissō," Manshū nichinchichi shim bun, October 1, 1934.
103 "Ch'wich'e ūi chōkkūkhwā ro," Maeil sinbo, November 8, 1936.
104 See also Tanaka Ryūichi, "Manshūkoku' keisatsu to chiiki shakai: keizai keisatsu no katsudō to sono mujun o chūshin to shite," Chungang saron 32 (December 2010): 262.
Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the cessation of construction projects in the face of the approaching *keppyōki* and rising commodity prices in Manchukuo served to reinvigorate cross-border smuggling activities.\(^{105}\) Despite increased collaboration between cross-border officials, the smuggling issue remained unresolved.

Climate intensified the cross-border politics of the winter-time Yalu. For impoverished Korean and Chinese farmers living along the border, especially those practicing various forms of slash-and-burn agriculture, plunging winter-time temperatures coincided with the end of the agricultural cycle and a corresponding lack of work opportunities. While the Yalu timber industry employed many local farmers, others were compelled in desperation to turn to smuggling, banditry, or participation in anti-Japanese guerrilla armies as a way of eking out a meager subsistence until the next spring.\(^{106}\) Border police were aware that the imperative of survival fueled bandit and guerrilla groups' increased raids during the "frozen-over period."\(^{107}\) In an interview allegedly given to a Korean villager captured by his guerrilla forces, Kim Il-sung bemoaned the plight of his troops:"I'm a person with blood, with tears, with a soul, but here we are spending the cold winter wandering around like this."\(^{108}\) Frostbite was unsurprisingly a major enemy of guerrilla groups in the region in addition to Japanese military and police patrols.\(^{109}\)

Accounts from Japanese and Korean border officers of the period are replete with similar descriptions of hardship stemming from frigid winter temperatures. In one border security publication, Japanese police chief Morinishi Takejirō described his experience weathering the coldest temperatures ever recorded on the Korean peninsula, -43.6 Celsius (-46.48 Fahrenheit) at


\(^{106}\) *Kokkyō keibi*, 34.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 25.


\(^{109}\) For a detailed study of guerrilla groups' attempts to fight against health problems such as frostbite, see Chang Se-yun, "Manju chiyŏk Hanin hangil mujang seryŏk ūi shiksaenghwal kwa pogŏn wisaeng," *Hanguk kŭnhyŏndaesa yŏngu* 28 (March 2004), 78-115.
the Chunggangjin police station on January 12, 1931. "It's impossible for me to describe in words the cold of -43.6 Celsius," wrote Morinishi. "Even though the fire of the ondo\textsuperscript{111} is lit and the bottom of my futon is hot to the point of burning, the top of my futon is as cold as ice." Hair washed with warm water would immediately freeze, and if one were to run his fingers through it the hair would easily break off. The eating of raw fish or sashimi was done "with bellies flat against the ondol-heated floor," lest the essentially frozen fish be digested improperly. At one point, Morinishi even had to borrow a hatchet and a saw from a local field office of the Government-General of Korea's Forestry Bureau to prepare a frozen fish for dinner. "I've lived in Korea and Manchuria for 28 years," Morinishi wrote, "but this kind of cold was a first.\textsuperscript{112}

While the frozen Yalu had long been a staging ground for illicit cross-border activity, two episodes, the "Tosŏng incident" of 1934 and the "Tonghŭng incident" of 1935, illustrate the factors that led officials to consider winter particularly dangerous. Just before midnight on January 23, 1934, approximately 140 anti-Japanese guerrillas and "bandits" led by Wang Dianying launched a raid on a Japanese police box in the village of Tosŏng near the Yalu River. To escape local police detection, the group split up into smaller contingents of three to five men so as to reduce the crunching sound under their shoes as they traversed the snow piled up on the river's ice.\textsuperscript{113} They were first noticed by two local Korean villagers conducting night-time river patrols as members of a police-organized "self-defense corps." By the time these villagers could contact a Japanese officer on patrol, the guerrillas had already reached the eastern entrance of the village. Hurriedly grabbing a machine gun, the five officers stationed at the police box engaged

\textsuperscript{110} This temperature is a full -2.6 degrees colder than the lowest-ever observed temperature in Japan proper, -41 Celsius at Asahikawa, Hokkaido in 1902.

\textsuperscript{111} An underfloor heating system used in traditional Korean homes.

\textsuperscript{112} Kokkyō keibi, 53-56.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 53-56.
with the guerrillas in a battle, which ultimately left six villagers and one guerrilla dead before the anti-Japanese force fled back across the river into Manchuria.\textsuperscript{114}

On February 13 of the next year, a larger force of approximately two hundred members of the Communist-led Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army crossed the frozen Yaluto attack the Korean village of Tonghŭng. It was not until after burning several houses, kidnapping villagers, and engaging in an intense gunfight with colonial police that lasted nearly two hours that the guerrillas finally retreated.\textsuperscript{115} The attack prompted speculation in the Korean-language media of a second, larger raid by Communist-led forces. It also sufficiently unnerved the authorities that when the summer raid of Poch'ŏnbo occurred in 1937 it was referred to as a "second Tonghŭng incident."\textsuperscript{116}

As cross-border raids such as the attacks on Tosŏng and Tonghŭng confirmed fears among border officials about the frozen river's accessibility to "bandits," specific measures were undertaken to prepare for the keppyōki. Kim Il-sung's autobiography recounts instances of colonial police so desperate to block the advance of guerrillas that they commandeered local villagers to regularly break up the river's ice.\textsuperscript{117} Though this somewhat farcical account captures the intensity of police fears, in reality wintertime security measures were much more pragmatic. In addition to the construction of fortifications and use of technologies such as telephones and airplanes, a key response to the challenges of the "frozen-over period" was the bolstering of police forces. Police officers in colonial Korea were often moved from nearby locations in the northern provinces to other stations and substations on the river "frontline"(daiissen) each

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 25-30

\textsuperscript{115} Kokkyō keibi, 8; Tonghŭngŭp sūmnae sīgasŏn, Tonga ilbo, February 14, 1935.

\textsuperscript{116} "Hamgyŏng kukkyŏng e che i Tonghŭng sāgŏn." The later prominence of the Poch’ŏnbo raid in Kim Il-sung's hagiography has led to the former incident to being largely overlooked in the historiography of the late colonial period.

\textsuperscript{117} Kim Il-sŏng. Segi wa tōburō, Volume 6 Chapter 16.1, Ebook.
winter.\textsuperscript{118} As the graph below demonstrates, for most years during the period of 1931-1940, the number of police on the border consistently rose in the winter months.\textsuperscript{119}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Police Stationed on Korean Side of Manchurian-Korean Border}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{police_graph.png}
\caption{Number of Police Officers}
\end{figure}

Source: Chōsen Sōtokufu Keimukyoku, "Kokkyō Dai ichi, nisen keisatsu haichihyō"; "Kokkyō Dai issen, "Dai nisen keisatsukan haichi kankei."

Another method used by the police to bolster border security was to mobilize local "self-defense corps" (J: jikeidan; K: chagyŏngdan). In villages along the Korean side of the Yalu, the colonial authorities began to mobilize "ideologically sound" young men (usually between the ages of 20 to 35) to form rural "self-defense corps" soon after the outbreak of the March First Movement.\textsuperscript{120} By February 1938, the total membership in "self-defense corps" had grown to 16,932, a figure over seven times greater than the number of full-time colonial police on the

\textsuperscript{118} September 22, 1935.
\textsuperscript{119} Chōsen Sōtokufu Keimukyoku, "Kokkyō Dai ichi, nisen keisatsu haichihyō, Shi Shōwa go-nen ji Shōwajūichinin (1930-1936)," National Archives of Korea; Chōsen Sōtokufu Keimukyoku , "Kokkyō Dai issen, "Dai nisen keisatsukan haichi kankei,\" Shi Shōwa jūni-nen ji Shōwa jūhichinin (1937-1942)," National Archives of Korea.
\textsuperscript{120} Kokkyō keibi, 41; "Kukkyŏng kyŏngbi ūi kongyŏngia chagyŏngdan e chi'as," Tonga ilbo, February 22, 1928.
Korean side of the Manchurian-Korean border in March of the same year (2,407).\textsuperscript{121} Mentioned previously as the first to have encountered guerrilla forces crossing the frozen Yalu during the 1934 "Tosŏng incident," members of "self-defense corps" were expected to carry out basic river patrol duties under the supervision of local police and were mobilized most often during the summer and winter months, times of greatest climatic challenge to border security.\textsuperscript{122} The plight of these young men during the frigid Yalu winter was publicized in colonial Korea and in the Japanese metropole. A 1938 article in the *Maeil sinbo* called on readers to raise funds for warm jackets and cold-weather clothing for self-defense corps members "shivering in the cold" while performing a critical role in colonial security.\textsuperscript{123} In a July 1936 issue of the-Japanese metropolitan newsmagazine, *Asahi graph*, author Noritake Kazuo described the scene of "self-defense brigade" members conducting nighttime patrol on the frozen river's ice, continuously calling out "*nuguyo, nuguyo*" (Korean: Who's there? Who's there?) in "sorrowful tone." Noritake praised these villagers for their determination "not to let bandits cross even one foot into Korea," asserting later that "the greater part of border security's success can be attributed to these young men."\textsuperscript{124}

While observers wrote admiringly about the "self-defense corps" and their service to empire, the motivations of individual members are more difficult to ascertain. Some media organs portrayed their work as voluntary, but internal documents suggest the substantial involvement of colonial police in their selection and training.\textsuperscript{125} One could also deduce from available evidence that self-preservation drove many young men in rural communities to join these law enforcement groups. Between the intimidating tactics of colonial police and the threat

\textsuperscript{121} "Kukkyŏng kyŏngbi ŭi kongyŏngja," *Maeil sinbo*, February 24, 1938.
\textsuperscript{122} Noritake Kazuo, *Ŏryŏkkŏ*, 45.
\textsuperscript{123} "Kukkyŏngkyŏngbi ŭikongyŏngja."
\textsuperscript{124} "HokusenKokkyŏ keibi," 5; Noritake Kazuo, *Ŏryŏkkŏ*, 45.
\textsuperscript{125} "Keppyŏki keibi ni kansuru ken."
of "bandit" attacks, the specter of violence was a regular fact of life for all "self-defense corps" members and a likely factor behind their involvement in border security.

Humans were not the only organisms mobilized in the fight for control of the Yalu border, and neither were they the only ones to endure its winters. In his 1936 article for the *Asahi graph*, Noritake Kazuo detailed the plight of border security, including a list of animals—120 dogs, 194 chickens, 2 ducks, and 4 pigs and cows—which froze to death in the area supervised by the Tonghŭng border police station in the winter of 1935-1936. These figures appear to confirm Aaron Skabelund’s observation that Japanese imperial expansion entailed the mobilization of "all creatures great and small." Two types of animals figure most frequently in the writings of colonial border patrol officials: dogs and pigeons. Dogs, preferably those of the hearty German Shepherd breed, were raised at border police and customs stations for use as patrol animals. In the depth of the Yalu winter, border officials wrote sympathetically of their station dogs "refusing to eat" until they had been sufficiently warmed, the cold nights draining their energy until "they had little energy to bark." Dogs accompanied border patrolmen and custom officers on riverside patrols for smugglers and "bandits," with their ferocity in fulfilling their assigned roles inspiring fear among observers in border communities. In November 1934, the *Tonga ilbo* reported that eight "heartless" German Shepherds had been imported for use by the Andong customs service from the Manchukuo Army. Published immediately before the onset of winter, the article predicted a "bloody confrontation" between these dogs and smugglers on the frozen Yalu. This article attracted the attention of colonial censors, who no doubt objected not only to

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128 Kokkyō keibi, 42.
129 Ibid., 54.
130 "I chŏn 'chamsang' hyŏpwi hanŭn chomyŏngdŭng kwa tamjŏnggyŏn," *Tonga ilbo*, November 15, 1934.
the article's sympathetic portrayal of smugglers who "put their lives on the line" to "feed their families," but also to its negative depiction of guard dogs as demonic specters of the harsh Yalu winter rather than suffering and sympathetic imperial servants.\textsuperscript{131}

While lacking police dogs' reputation for ferocity, carrier pigeons were another animal considered both essential to Yalu River border patrol and susceptible to its climatic extremes. Carrier pigeons were widely used to relay messages between police substations in remote locations such as river islands. They were also used by the border police for cross-border "searches" (\textit{naisa}) and "bandit suppression" in the Manchurian frontier.\textsuperscript{132} Accounts published by border officials contain numerous expressions of gratitude to these birds, and border police stations were often equipped with pigeon shacks in the event that their services were needed.\textsuperscript{133} Used most often during the summer months, the release of pigeons was often stopped in the winter due to climatic concerns.\textsuperscript{134} Indeed, as police chief Morinishi recorded, care had to be taken that pigeons did not freeze to death during the most severe of Yalu winter nights, when temperatures would drop below -40 degrees Celsius.\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{Mobilizing Public Support for Yalu Border Security}

In an effort to mobilize an even larger base of public sympathy and support for the plight of border police, Japanese officials used radio broadcasts, newspapers, and other forms of colonial media to bring the conflicts and "hardship" (\textit{kushin}) of border patrol on the frozen Yalu into the homes of listeners and readers throughout the empire. Special radio programs

\begin{footnotes}
\item[131] “Shimbunshi sakujo chū ki jyōshi- 'Tōa nippō',” \textit{Chōsen shūpan keisatsu geppō} 75 go, November 15, 1934.
\item[132] Yahei, \textit{Kokkyō keibi kinenshi}, 200-201.
\item[133] "Hokusen Kokkyō keibi," 4; \textit{Kokkyō keibi}, 53.
\item[134] \textit{Kokkyō keibi}, 53.
\item[135] Ibid., 54.
\end{footnotes}
highlighted the daily lives of border policemen in Korea and the Japanese metropole. A pre-recorded script for a January 30, 1938 broadcast entitled "A Night on Border Patrol" began with a description of a solitary Japanese policeman standing guard near the frozen Yalu River and narrated the experiences of policemen as they responded to reports of a nearby "bandit" attack. Period sources indicate that such broadcasts were at least partially successful in meeting their intended objectives. In March 1937, for instance, a group of forty-five local schoolchildren presented a "pure-hearted" donation of funds to representatives of the Government-General of Korea in Tokyo. Apparently they had been inspired to do so after hearing about the experiences of border police officers on the radio.

Meanwhile, officially-sponsored newspapers such as the Korean-language Maeil sinbo often featured the fund-raising activities of the "Patriotic Women's Association" and other civic organizations to purchase machine guns and winter clothes for border police stations. These same newspapers also carried notices like the one published on November 3, 1936 by the North Pyŏngan Police Affairs Bureau, which solicited readers' submissions for a song contest on the theme of border security, announcing a prize of thirty yen for the winning entry.

Media depictions of the frozen Yalu and the dangers of winter-time border security culminated in the 1943 silver-screen production of Suicide Squad at the Watch Tower (Bōrō no kesshitai). Scholars have previously analyzed this film for its propagandistic theme of ethnic harmony between Japanese officials and colonized Koreans, but not for its coverage of border

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136 Ibid., 9.
137 Heian hokudō keimubuchō to Chōsen Sōtoku ū keimukyokuchō, "Kokkyō keibi no yoru' nikan suru hōsō ni kansuru ken," Heiho kukei dai 279 go, November 12, 1937. National Archives of Korea.
139 "Kukkyŏng kyŏngbi huwŏn," Maeil sinbo, December 1, 1935;
140 "Kukkyŏng kyŏngbi ka mojip," Maeil sinbo November 3, 1936
security.\textsuperscript{141} Produced by Toho Co. Ltd., a major Tokyo film studio, the film is set in a remote Korean village on the upper reaches of the Yalu. During the summer and fall the village is portrayed as an idyllic place where residents live in harmony under Japanese colonial rule. Suspense builds, however, as winter approaches and the sound of what seems like rifle shots emanates from the direction of the river. The sound is actually that of the Yalu freezing over, which portends the coming of the "bandits" who live across the border.\textsuperscript{142} Suicide Squad at the Watchtower both reflected and reinforced the reality of the Yalu as a riparian border whose threats were seasonal as well as political, a dangerous place of conflict between border officials and the smugglers, bandits, guerrillas and other groups who challenged Japanese imperial hegemony in the region. By the time of the film's release in 1943, however, the Yalu's political and economic landscape had also undergone a series of changes that altered the seasonal cycle of river life and had significant repercussions for colonial border security.

**Changes in the Wartime Yalu, 1937-1945**

The first major change to Yalu border security during this period was the declining threat of anti-Japanese "bandit" raids as a result of increasingly successful guerrilla "suppression" (tōbatsu) campaigns waged by the Manchukuo Army. In the wake of the Manchurian Incident (1931), the sheer expanse of Manchuria, several times larger than that of colonial Korea, had prevented imperial Japan from obtaining firm control over the regions north of the Yalu. Police officers and army brigades stationed on the Korean side of the river frequently crossed over into Manchurian territory to pursue anti-Japanese guerrillas and bandit groups, but occasional raids

\textsuperscript{141} See, for example, Naoki Mizuno, "A Propaganda Film Subverting Ethnic Hierarchy?: Suicide Squad at the Watchtower and Colonial Korea," Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 2 no. 1 (2013): 62-88; Takashi Fujitani, Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II(Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2011).

\textsuperscript{142} Fujitani, 307-308.
continued.\(^{143}\) By 1938, however, as military engagements from the previous year's Japanese invasion of mainland China reached a stalemate and Japanese control over the Manchukuo Army became more secure, officials were able to turn their full attention to various "mop-up" campaigns in the Dongbiandao region north of the Yalu. Within a few years of what historian Chong-sik Lee describes as an "overwhelming and brutal assault by Japanese military and political power," most major guerrilla leaders had been killed and those that survived, including Kim Il-sung, had fled to the Soviet Union.\(^{144}\)

The construction of the Sup'ung Dam between 1937 and 1943 even more fundamentally transformed the seasonal geographies of the Yalu River. Hailed as the "project of the century" by its promoters, the Sup'ung Dam was part of an ambitious undertaking to harness the force of the flowing Yalu for hydroelectric power. Upon completion it was the second largest dam in the world.\(^{145}\) Despite careful planning and extensive surveys of river levels and flow, however, engineers quickly encountered the difficulty of controlling the seasonally changing river. Fierce floods in the summer of 1940 washed away eight steel construction towers and flooded the power station and gravel pits. The cumulative effect of summer floods extended the dam's construction by two years, while the frigid temperatures of the "frozen-over period" put limitations on the types of materials that could be used.\(^{146}\) The security concerns associated with constructing a major dam on the contested Manchurian-Korean border were never far from the minds of engineers as well. Border police were mobilized not only to continually patrol the dam's massive construction site against possible attack or infiltration, but also to monitor the

\(^{143}\)Kokkō keibi, 183-184.
\(^{144}\)Chong-Sik Lee, *Revolutionary Struggle in Manchuria*, 294-296. According to Lee, tactics employed by Japanese and Manchukuo Army soldiers during these campaigns included the burning of whole villages accused of harboring anti-Japanese rebels.
\(^{145}\)Aaron Stephen Moore, "'The Yalu River Era of Developing Asia'," 115.
\(^{146}\)Ibid., 121-123.
movements of the more than 70,000 Korean and Chinese villagers displaced by the dam's construction.\(^{147}\)

As successive environmental and security challenges were overcome, dam construction permanently reshaped the Yalu's annual cycle of seasonal change. The most dramatic change resulting from dam construction was that the lower reaches of the Yalu no longer froze in the winter. Water stored at the bottom of the massive Sup'ung reservoir was insulated against changes in surface temperature. Once released downstream, it caused the lower stretches of the river to become comparatively colder in the summer and warmer in the winter. The dam's effects on the *keppyōki* were first noticed in the winter of 1941-1942, after the river near Sinuiju and Andong did not freeze over until late January. This attracted the attention of colonial media organs, who accurately speculated that the dam's construction was responsible for this irregularity in the river's seasonal cycle.\(^{148}\) In 1941-1942, the *keppyōki* below the dam was a full month and a half shorter than the previous yearly average.\(^{149}\) In subsequent winters, the lower Yalu would not freeze over at all.\(^{150}\)

In the eyes of seasoned border guard Noritake Kazuo, the lack of freezing signified the passing of an era in the river's history and the transformation of a region. The Yalu was no longer the free-flowing river of the past, Noritake wistfully observed, but an electricity-generating "lake."\(^{151}\) Lacking Noritake's nostalgia, other Japanese observers hailed the disappearance of winter ice that had long plagued river transportation as well as challenged border security. For them, the disappearance of river ice was one of many factors that increased the political stability

\(^{147}\) Heian hokudō keimu buchō to Chōsen Sōtokufu keimu kyokuchō, Heihoku keihidai 967 go, November 26, 1938, National Archives of Korea
\(^{148}\) Osaka Mainichi Shim bun, February 10, 1942.
\(^{150}\) Yamada Ryuichi, interview by author, August 9, 2015.
\(^{151}\) *Ōryōkkō*, 164.
of the Yalu region. Continued suppression campaigns by the Japanese and Manchukuo military effectively eliminated the threat of cross-border "bandit" raids. Meanwhile, hydropower-fueled industrial development in the region promised to help alleviate the rampant poverty in the region. As an article on the Sup'ung dam in the official GGK magazine confidently stated, the history of bandit raids in the region had been relegated to the watery depths of the newly-flooded Sup'ung reservoir.\textsuperscript{152} By lessening the dramatic effects of the keppyōki, dam construction made the river's seasonal cycle more congenial to the aims of the colonial state. Police deployment statistics showed this sense of declining seasonal threat as officials no longer felt the need to bolster police numbers during the winter.\textsuperscript{153} It seemed to many that Japanese technology and military power had finally conquered this colonial frontier.

Yet the illicit economies and the rugged landscape of the border region remained outside officials' complete control. Large groups of organized "bandits" had mostly disappeared from the border region, but smugglers remained a constant irritant. After the delayed onset of the "freezing-over period" in 1941-1942, the Maeil sinbo reported a "sudden spike" in the number of smuggling incidents in the Andong-Sinŭiju region. Police estimated that an average of fifty incidents occurred daily as smugglers took advantage of a dramatic rise of wartime commodity prices in Manchukuo.\textsuperscript{154} Whatever delay there had been in the freezing of the river that year, smugglers wasted little time in exploiting the river's increased accessibility to move goods across the border. Even when the lower Yalu no longer froze, the incentives for making the border crossing were too great to ignore. In the midst of Japan's deteriorating wartime situation by the mid-1940s, demand for basic commodities and a desire to circumvent strict wartime rations

\textsuperscript{152} Mine Kenichi, "Suihō damu sobyō," Chōsen, January 1944.
\textsuperscript{153} "Kokkyō Dai issen, "Dai nisen keisatsu kan haichi kankei."
\textsuperscript{154} "Milsugun kyōchōng," Maeil sinbo, January 30, 1942.
further encouraged smuggling to flourish. In 1944 Japanese officials abolished customs taxes on domestically-produced goods traveling between Korea and Manchuria. But this did little to deter smugglers intent on exploiting differing commodity price levels between Manchuria and Korea. The final blow to Yalu border security came on August 15, 1945, when the Japanese surrender to the Allied forces precipitated the ultimate collapse of the colonial security apparatus.

**Conclusion and Legacies**

Policing the movement of peoples and goods across the Yalu meant contending with winter ice, summer floods, and other aspects of the seasonal riparian geography. To police officials, the Yalu River was not one border but many, a flowing "moat" in the spring-autumn months and a ice bridge for Korean and Chinese smugglers and "bandits" in the winter. The challenges of administrating a nearly 500-mile long frontier border led to a reliance on telephones and airplanes as essential technologies of colonial security. This was combined with the mobilization of local human and animal populations to patrol against smugglers and frequent "bandit" raids. By the early 1940s, larger technological interventions such as mass "bandit suppression" campaigns and dam construction finally brought increased stability to the Yalu frontier and lessened the river's most dramatic seasonal fluctuations. Ice and bandits were seemingly being relegated to a previous era's of the region's history. Yet the Yalu remained in some ways an all too unreliable liquid barrier as smugglers continued to exploit the limits of colonial power in the region.

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156 "Ilman yangguk sanpum e kwanse myŏnje tanhaeng," *Maeil sinbo*, April 30, 1944.
157 "Keppyŏki keibi nikansuru ken."
After Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in 1945 led to the dissolution of its continental empire, the climate and geography of the Yalu presented similar challenges to other powers in the region. A few months after the outbreak of the Korean War, a United Nations military force led by the United States pushed North Korean troops to the river's southern edge. Afterwards, they were rapidly overcome not only by Chinese People's Volunteer Army forces crossing over the frozen reaches of the upper Yalu, but also by the frostbite and early winter, which, in the words of a New York Times reporter, "caused more trouble to our troops than did enemy action." Japanese colonialism had critically altered some parts of the Yalu landscape, but the challenges climate and topography presented to regional security persisted even after Japan's departure. Despite considerable political and environmental changes, security in the region remained bound to nature and the march of individual seasons.