

# A School in Every Village

Educational Reform in a Northeast  
China County, 1904-31

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# Introduction

In 1917 a county education official named Zhu Guangxin visited a village primary school in Haicheng county, Northeast China. Zhu commented in his report that the classroom was tidy, the desks orderly, and the teacher and students capable. He was especially delighted when, at 9:00 a.m. sharp, all thirty-one students at the school, decked out in neat hats, stepped onto a platform together and proceeded to sing a rousing song, after which they performed some military-style calisthenics.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, there appears nothing unusual about this scene. Something similar was likely occurring in village schools across China. Certainly, there was nothing unusual about the village, called Guanshaheyan. It was one of hundreds of villages in Haicheng county, many of which had their own primary schools. And there was nothing particularly notable about Zhu Guangxin either. As a representative of the county's education office, he was simply doing his job by visiting the area's primary schools to make sure they were functioning properly.

A second glance, however, reveals that although Zhu, his visit, and his observations may have been commonplace, they were all the more remarkable because little more than a decade earlier, a school like this would not have existed in rural Northeast China. Students would not have sung songs or performed physical exercise; they would not have functioned as a uniform group. The hour of 9:00 would not have mattered because village schools before then did not run according to the clock. Finally, Zhu himself would not have worked for the county education office because no such administrative mechanism existed.

By 1917, however, hundreds of new primary schools like the one in Guanshaheyan were operating across rural Haicheng county, Fengtian province (present-day Liaoning), and in many other parts of China as well. The schools exhibited many characteristics considered to be part of a modern school system; they operated according to standardized time and offered new subjects taught in new ways, and students attended them in unprecedented numbers. Furthermore, a new local state office was established to help administer them. This book closely examines the process by which these new

schools took root in Haicheng county during the late Qing and early Republic after the Qing government implemented a new and modern school system in 1904.

To be sure, this was not the first time in China's history that its leaders had articulated the need for a widespread system of primary education. At least as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the famous neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) championed a government-administered school in every one of China's many villages to provide an education for "children of all under heaven."<sup>2</sup> Although succeeding dynasties did little to advance Zhu's vision, it was not for want of trying. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the imperial government attempted to implement a school system that reached down to the level of the village. But its efforts met with limited success due to a number of factors, including local corruption.<sup>3</sup> The Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) also endeavoured to popularize elementary education when it introduced a system of charitable schools (*yixue*) in the early eighteenth century. But the *yixue* were relatively few, and the system, by and large, did not extend down to the level of the village.<sup>4</sup> Only in the early twentieth century did Zhu's dream of a state-implemented school system reaching down to the village level finally begin to be realized.

Beginning in the 1900s, the floundering Qing Dynasty, in a last-ditch effort to recover its waning power, implemented the New Policies (*Xinzheng*), a series of widespread institutional reforms significant both in reach and in scope. The New Policies were intended to penetrate below the level of the county (*xian*) all the way down to the village and were to be carried out in a number of areas, including finance, police, and defence. Arguably the most dramatic of the reforms took place in the area of education. In 1904 the Qing drew up regulations for an entirely new school system, charging three of its highest officials, Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), Zhang Baixi (1847-1907), and Rong Qing (1854-1912), with the task of designing a new school system built on three tiers – primary, middle, and university.<sup>5</sup> One year later, in 1905, the Qing abolished, for good, the civil-service examinations (*keju*), the centuries-old imperial system by which candidates were tested in Confucian classics to obtain bureaucratic appointments.

Although these two interconnected acts failed to save the dynasty (the Qing eventually fell in 1911, to be replaced by the Republic the following year), they wrought considerable changes. Whereas education had been informal and almost entirely unregulated by the state, the new school system was standardized and subject to a high degree of state direction. The Qing Ministry of Education (*Xuebu*), established in 1905, replaced the old curriculum with one that, although it still retained many traditional Confucian elements, was

heavily influenced by Western and Japanese models and offered new subjects like science, arithmetic, history, and physical education. Women's education became a hot topic of debate during this period. And in 1907 the Qing drew up regulations for girls' schools. Most significant, for the first time in Chinese history, primary-level education for boys became compulsory. To put a compulsory education program into place, villages across China were called on to set up primary schools adhering to a uniform set of standards, with the result that hundreds of thousands of new primary schools were established in rural areas.

The research for this book begins with 1904 when the new system was officially launched, continues through the fall of the Qing and the founding of the Republic, and ends with 1931 when Japanese troops occupied the northeast region. It draws on heretofore untapped local archival sources dealing with village-level education in Haicheng county. The richness of these documents allows me to move beyond central regulations and debates in order to examine educational reform at the level of Haicheng's village communities, where hundreds of new primary schools were established during the years in question. This study unites a bottom-up perspective with a top-down perspective and examines the early-twentieth-century educational reforms through an integration of local, provincial, and national analytic scales, focusing on three overlapping areas of interest: the structure and organization of Haicheng's (mostly) primary schools, the relationship of the schools to local society, and the complex interaction between local educational reform and national-level debates as well as between provincial and centrally generated regulations.

### **Too Traditional or Too Modern?**

Educational reformers of the late Qing and early Republic tended to view the then new education system as a struggle within which Confucianism, which they identified with tradition, emerged as either a clear winner or loser; either Confucianism prevailed in schools at the expense of modern and "useful" subjects or, conversely, the new system with its foreign ways overpowered traditional and (sometimes) preferable aspects of education. These reformers mostly hailed from urban areas and aired their opinions in popular contemporary journals such as the *Educational Review* (*Jiaoyu zazhi*) and in handbooks and treatises on education. Shortly before the founding of the Republic, He Jing, a representative of the National Education Federation (*quanguo jiaoyu lianhe hui*), reacting to the retention of the Confucian classics in the curriculum of the new boys' primary schools, published an article that criticized the classics for being too esoteric and too difficult for primary school students:

(In his time) Confucius never had primary-level students; students in Confucian schools were concerned with high-level scholarly pursuits ... Is it possible that eight and nine year olds today have achieved a higher level, even than Confucius's disciples? Alas! Not only is there no benefit to classical instruction for primary school students, but it actually harms them ... The meaning of the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*) and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*) is too profound and the words too strange. They are too difficult for students aged thirteen and fourteen to understand.<sup>6</sup>

As the New Culture Movement gained momentum in the late 1910s and the 1920s,<sup>7</sup> prominent urban intellectuals such as Hu Shi (1891-1962) and Guo Moruo (1892-1978), as well as the philologist and former Beijing University professor Ma Xulun and the classicist Gu Jiegang, invoked unpleasant childhood experiences of memorizing what they described as Confucian gibberish.<sup>8</sup> Critiques of Confucianism continued well into the 1930s as its detractors railed against Republican-era primers because they were still being written in the antiquated style of the Confucian literati.<sup>9</sup> One outspoken proponent of this view was Fu Baochen (1893-1984), an educational reformer and avid participant in the campaigns for mass literacy that were part of the rural reconstruction projects of the 1920s and 1930s. Fu complained that contemporary literacy primers still carried the imprint of impractical old-style literati writings and, despite their popularity, should be destroyed.<sup>10</sup> The well-known rural reformer Yan Yangchu (James Yen) (1893-1990) also expressed concern that most Chinese literature was for (male) scholars rather than for farmers, women, or children.<sup>11</sup>

An opposing camp of reformers believed there was not enough emphasis on old-style primers and Confucian texts. Republican-era educational reformers like Dong Weichuan (1901-68) and social scientists like Liao T'ai-ch'u (Liao Taichu) accused the new school system of sacrificing the comfortable familiarity of the old-style Confucian education for a new "Western" curriculum and alien teaching methods. Dong, who occupied a number of elite posts, including educational inspector (*duxue*) of the Anhui and Shandong Provincial Offices of Education, faulted Western primers for being, he argued, appropriate for industrialized societies but not for China.<sup>12</sup> Liao, who surveyed rural schools in Shandong and Sichuan provinces in the 1930s and 1940s, reported that the new schools were too foreign for the local people, who preferred to send their children to old-style schools, where they could memorize Chinese characters and study Confucius.<sup>13</sup>

Earlier Western scholarship on early-twentieth-century education loosely mirrors the dichotomous stance taken by the late-Qing and Republican

reformers. This scholarship, influenced by the defining studies of Mary C. Wright (1957) and Joseph Levenson (1968), both of whom argued that the persistence of Confucianism in China obstructed its path to modernity, analyzes the late-Qing educational system through the binary categories of “traditional” versus “modern” and evaluates the educational reforms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as failures because they did not measure up to standards based on Western and Japanese models.<sup>14</sup> For instance, Knight Biggerstaff discusses how new Western-style government schools of the mid-nineteenth century gradually supplanted traditional schools as reformers, eager for change, tried to cast off any trappings from the old days.<sup>15</sup> Suzanne Pepper interprets the continued presence of the Confucian classics in the curriculum as a sign of “conservative opposition” to the new education.<sup>16</sup> Even quite recently, Thomas Curran’s meticulous study of early-twentieth-century debates on education, despite greatly deepening our understanding of how intellectuals and central reformers envisioned the new education system, ultimately concludes that these actors failed to create a modern nation with their reforms.<sup>17</sup> Although it is true that China’s early-twentieth-century educational reforms did not always meet the goals they established, the inclination to evaluate them on such grounds obfuscates a clear understanding of what they actually did accomplish or change.

As early as the late 1960s, Lloyd and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, studying political development in India during the early twentieth century, suggested that the traditional and the modern are permeable categories and that modern societies deploy many traditional characteristics to implement change and promote a modern agenda. The Rudolphs’ example is Mohandas Gandhi, who, they argue, exploited a “traditional” symbolism based on nonviolence and selflessness to carry out an unprecedented mass movement based on “modern” values such as national independence and self-determination.<sup>18</sup> Like the Rudolphs, China scholars have also critiqued the view that the traditional and the modern are antithetical. Benjamin Schwartz (1972) has pointed out that the very term “traditional” is problematic, as it has often been used to refer to the entirety of the Chinese past without recognition of any inherent vitality in that past.<sup>19</sup> In the spirit of Schwartz’s cautionary point, a subsequent group of scholars have examined the Chinese educational system’s own dynamic inner workings and have been mindful that modernization does not necessarily equate with progress. These scholars have thus highlighted the gap between the early-twentieth-century educational reforms as they were articulated on paper and the realities of Chinese rural life. They have also highlighted any local resistance to the new schools, which were unceremoniously foisted on China’s villagers. John Cleverley, for instance,

asserts that “modern” schools imported from the West had “no place in the [Chinese] orthodox education system.”<sup>20</sup> Sally Borthwick notes that traditional schools, called *sishu*, existed side by side with the new modern schools. She posits that the *sishu* were the preferred institution for rural families and that the new schools, more suitable for industrialized societies, alienated the rural populace. Benjamin Elman, in his recent work on the civil-service examinations, well illustrates the complexities, inner workings, and dynamism of the examination system. However, he characterizes the new schools as too abrupt a break with the past and argues that the interests of modern educators became increasingly distant from the “carefully formulated cultural foundations of late imperial childhood education in the Classics.”<sup>21</sup>

The Chinese historian Luo Zhitian avoids the use of the terms “modern” and “traditional” in his work, although he draws conclusions rather similar to Borthwick’s.<sup>22</sup> Luo’s research on education is driven by the question of how the abolition of the civil-service examinations impacted the countryside. Drawing on the contemporary accounts of several well-known intellectuals and observers in different parts of China, including Mao Zedong in Hunan province, Liu Dapeng in Shanxi province, and Fan Zengxiang in Shaanxi province, Luo argues that the end of the exams left an educational vacuum in China’s rural areas and that peasants and local elites were not as receptive to the new schools as they were to the old ones. They resented the new schools on the practical grounds that they were too expensive. But they were also suspicious of the new subjects and the “foreign teaching methods (*yang jiaofa*).” Luo quotes from a 1909 *Shanghai Daily (Shenbao)* article in which the author described the gymnastic training (*xi ticao*) offered in the new schools as “leaping onto roofs and vaulting over walls (*feiyan zoubi*)” and likened it to “preparing to be a thief (*qiedao zhi yubei*),” while the study of singing (*xue changge*) was little more than “preparing to be an actor or actress (*youling zhi yubei*).” Ultimately, according to Luo, the number of schools in the countryside decreased rather than increased.<sup>23</sup>

Paul Cohen somewhat more recently (1984) criticized the continued use of the tradition-modernity polarity embodied in Levenson’s and Wright’s work and suggested that the terms “tradition” and “modern” should be done away with altogether in favour of less “western-centred” descriptions of historical change.<sup>24</sup> Cohen’s proposition is admirable and intriguing, although he does not offer any immediate solution. Furthermore, not only are the two terms (as well as other dichotomous ones) convenient – so long as their inherent problems are kept in sight – but it is also especially difficult to escape them because they are used by the subjects of this study, including

central reformers, intellectual commentators, contemporary critics, county-government officials, and local reformers. Opposing terms such as “progressive” (*jinbu*) and “backward” (*luohuo*) as well as “new” (*xin*) and “old” (*jiu*) are particularly prevalent in the archival materials on which this study draws.

In recent years, inspired either directly or indirectly by the Rudolphs, Schwartz, and Cohen, scholars writing on early-twentieth-century education in China have demonstrated that the new educational system was quite complex, exhibiting both successes and failures, and furthermore that it was ultimately the product of a creative and dynamic process of negotiation. One group of scholars has provided a new understanding of the top-down perspective, illustrating how even the regulations outlining the new educational system were much more complicated and nuanced than has previously been understood; in particular, these scholars have showed how traditional and modern characteristics worked in tandem to reinforce and strengthen one another, all in the interest of forwarding a state-driven agenda of education. Zheng Yuan, studying various educational regulations generated by China’s central government throughout the late-Qing and the Republican periods, focuses on the continued deployment of Confucianism in the new schools. He identifies in the regulations a current he refers to as “conservative reform” or “authoritarian modernization,” arguing that educational reformers paradoxically sought to modernize the educational system with the purpose of restoring an autocratic form of government.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Yapei Kuo, in her sophisticated analysis of the 1904 school regulations, shows how old methods were deployed for new ends, demonstrating that the late Qing’s emphasis on classical learning in the new schools was not intended to produce Confucian scholars but rather to inculcate China’s young students with patriotism and nationalism. Also, and importantly, Kuo shows how the regulations, long understood to be imitations of school regulations from Meiji Japan (1868-1912), in fact significantly deviated from the Meiji model not only in practice but in conception as well, a point that this study also makes.<sup>26</sup> Paul Bailey, in his most recent work on women’s education in early-twentieth-century China, has usefully adopted the term “modernizing conservatism” to describe the dominant contemporary view on women’s schooling across the Qing-Republic divide. “Modernizing conservatism” is a term that embodies the thinking of contemporary reformers on women’s education – simultaneously capturing both their deep-seated belief that women must be educated publicly to achieve national strength and their view that this education must nonetheless take place within a strongly traditional framework so that women’s place in society remained unaltered.<sup>27</sup> Robert Culp has also noted striking continuities in the

new curriculum of the late Qing.<sup>28</sup> Other scholars have demonstrated how hybrid characteristics materialized in specific educational institutions that were new to the late Qing and early Republic. For instance, Cong Xiaoping's study of normal (*shifan*) schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shows how they were hybridized institutions, based on Western models but simultaneously incorporating Chinese ideals and practices.<sup>29</sup>

These works have greatly increased our understanding of early-twentieth-century educational reform and developments. However, very few of them address early-twentieth-century reform in China's villages in any significant depth. An exception that deserves mention here is Stig Thøgerson's important monograph *A County of Culture*, set in Zouping county, Shandong province. Like those studies mentioned above, Thøgerson's text notes the continuity of traditional characteristics of Chinese education throughout the twentieth century and uncovers the complexity in the interactions between various actors when it came time to implement the reforms in the rural setting. One main difference between my study and his is that Thøgerson's approach is diachronic, his main concern being to "situate the reform process in the larger context of long-term social change."<sup>30</sup> As a result, his analysis of educational transformation over the course of the entire twentieth century allows us to see how education was tied in with broader political and economic developments in Zouping and also to grasp how the goals of reformers were sometimes out of sync with those of students and their families who saw education as a way out of the countryside. *A School in Every Village*, in contrast, examines a variety of topics using a synchronic approach. This approach, while sacrificing the bird's-eye view, permits a quite detailed picture of the rural primary schools and a good sense of how the county government and villagers interacted. Another difference is that whereas Thøgerson places emphasis on the "tensions between visions, plans, and policies for making China 'strong and prosperous,' on the one hand, and popular norms, expectations, and social practices, on the other,"<sup>31</sup> this study highlights the areas where central visions meshed with local expectations.

This study has been shaped by all of the works mentioned above. I show how the rural primary schools in Haicheng county were shaped and inspired by foreign models of education but also emphasize that various foreign elements, such as clock-driven time, a new curriculum, and new modes of organization, were filtered through multiple layers of interpretation – first at the level of the central government and national reformers, later at the level of the county government and its representatives, and finally at the level of the villages themselves and their inhabitants. The result was that these schools

were fluid institutions that reflected an interpenetration of old and new, Chinese and Western, and “traditional” and “modern” characteristics. For instance, Haicheng’s new primary schools retained many characteristics of old-style education, particularly heavy emphasis on the Confucian texts and morality, even as they incorporated many features that were completely new to rural society. Simultaneously, many old-style sishu reformed according to government directives, retaining many traditional and familiar elements but also introducing a new curriculum and new teaching methods. The retention of old characteristics and institutions permitted Confucianism to retain an important role in rural social life and provided villagers with a sense of community. Simultaneously, the reformers’ conscious introduction of new subjects, along with unprecedented standardization, facilitated a process of modernization through education at the local level.

### **Village Communities and Their Role in Modernization**

Challenging the tradition-modernity binary also leads us to question the relationship between the state and the village community as well as the role of the Chinese village in modernization. Certainly, when it came to implementing the state’s vision of educational reform, village communities were key administrative units, as the vast majority of the primary schools established in the wake of the New Policies were in rural areas. Village leaders (*huishou*) along with village heads (*cunzhang*) were charged with the task of establishing and managing primary schools in their own areas of administration.<sup>32</sup> The village schools were intended first for children who lived in the village, and they drew funding largely from the village community itself.<sup>33</sup> However, little is known about how the state-mandated imperative to set up schools actually impacted the state’s relationship with the village communities.

Many studies of commercialization and early-twentieth-century state making in the developing world assume a binary of an intrusive and modernizing state – albeit a weak one unable to fund and control its grand project, especially in the rural setting – in opposition to defensive village communities that are charged with the responsibility of paying for state programs. Perhaps the best-known proponent of this model is James Scott, whose moral-economy approach is derived from his studies of Southeast Asia.<sup>34</sup> The moral-economy approach has been extensively deconstructed, criticized, and modified in scholarship, so I recount here only what is applicable to this study. Moral economists maintain that precapitalist village communities operated according to a moral code characterized by patron-client relations, reciprocity, and community ownership of village property, especially land. Capitalism

and, by extension, state making had a destabilizing effect on “traditional” village communities, which responded through resistance and, in the more extreme cases, protest and violence. Moral economists also adhere to the view that when state making brought about new relationships between village communities and higher administrative organizations, these relationships were neither co-operative nor mutually beneficial but, instead, a manifestation of state penetration and extraction.

When it comes to the more extractive aspects of early-twentieth-century Chinese state making, such as taxation and military conscription, this assumption has been well borne out. Both Philip Kuhn and Philip Huang have discovered that late-Qing and early-Republic state building increased the tax burden on village society and set the stage for hostile state-society relations. Kuhn characterizes the taxes that were a part of the late-Qing modernization project as “a major burden upon the populace.” Philip Huang, in his study of rural North China, also describes how in the area of taxation, expanding local government exerted a heavy financial burden on society.<sup>35</sup>

On the other side are those who suggest that state making (and the call for a modernized school system) ultimately brought about the breakdown of communities – or, at the least, the dissolution of practices that had long reinforced community ties, particularly religious life. These assumptions have been informed partly by studies on the rise of European nation-states. For example, Charles Tilly concludes that the expansion of the state in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe was powerful enough to destroy complex local networks of pre-existing organizations and relations, although not without serious resistance. Once resistance was done away with, however, the way was paved for the rise of nation-states.<sup>36</sup> With respect to education, Eugen Weber’s discussion of the conversion, through schooling, of rustic children into polished French citizens rests on the assumption that education “eased individuals out of the [local group’s] grip and shattered the hold of unchallenged cultural and political creeds.”<sup>37</sup>

In the China field, Prasenjit Duara, in his seminal study of the Shandong and Hebei countryside, describes, as does Tilly, a state-making scenario replete with increased bureaucratization followed by local community resistance. But he successfully modifies Tilly’s approach to show that in China, unlike in Europe, state making and nation building were inextricably intertwined and that state making took place in the framework of nationalism.<sup>38</sup> Duara describes the place of the state in the elaborate matrix of networks, organizations, and societies that comprised Chinese rural society as an extractive tax-collecting apparatus. Like the moral economists, he shows how the Qing

and the Nationalist governments extended their state-building bureaucracies into the lowest levels of society, creating tension, hostility, and resistance. But he also argues that one of the most important components of state making – the establishment of new schools in villages – effectively destroyed the networks and organizations and, along with them, many aspects of community life, most notably religious life.<sup>39</sup> On this view, we might expect either that activities to reform schooling and education resulted in violence and hostility or that they disabled the strong ties and identifications of rural peoples with their own communities, replacing these loyalties with allegiances to a larger community based on the nation-state.

To look past these two views, this study draws on some relatively recent scholarship on modern France that challenges the notion that the local community was swallowed up by the process of modernization. For instance, Stéphane Gerson in his study of local memories in nineteenth-century France argues against the notion that “the nation state alone ostensibly innovated and it alone therefore carried historical significance and [that] ... affection for the nation progressively but irrevocably superseded local loyalties.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Shanny Peer’s study of the Paris World’s Fair of 1937 demonstrates how, in the early twentieth century, the attachments of the French to their various provincial and rural traditions and folklore were creatively retooled to facilitate France’s modernization; these attachments were not, as some surmise, anti-modern expressions. Moreover, Peer shows that there was not one seamless path to modernization in France. The French were able to draw on new methods and adapt them to local as well as national exigencies. In other words, France did not need to disconnect itself from its past in order to “embrace progress.”<sup>41</sup> Deborah Reed-Danahay in her anthropological study of contemporary schools in the commune of Laviaille, Auvergne, notes that although the Laviallois strongly identify with their own locality and sometimes resist aspects of national schooling, this tendency does not preclude that “the primary school in rural France is an important cultural site for the construction of both local and national identity and for the negotiation and conflict between families and state.”<sup>42</sup>

*A School in Every Village* similarly complicates the tradition-modernity and state-society dichotomies. This study acknowledges the existence of a tight framework of state control, especially in Northeast China. However, its focus on education permits a view of the state as considerably more porous than the above-mentioned studies suggest and subject to a multitude of influences. Put simply, the new educational system was not created by the state and imposed on local communities. Although the state mandated and

designed the new school system, as well as required villagers to help fund it, the system itself – from regulation down to practice – was moulded through a complex and adaptive process by central reformers, provincial and county officials, village communities, and individuals. This diverse group struggled and negotiated to create a school system both distinctly modern and distinctly Chinese, rooted in pre-existing understandings of education but concurrently inspired by new and unprecedented attitudes toward education, many imported from abroad.

In addition, this book argues that villagers themselves played key roles in establishing the new school system by determining how the educational reforms were implemented in their localities and by exerting their demands and interests in a way that could inform central and provincial policies as well as local administrative decisions. Far from being hostile and resistant to schooling – a common misconception – villagers simultaneously drew on previous understandings of education and on the exhilarating sense that they were participating in something new and important, taking an active part in forging a system in which the state-prescribed curriculum and modern education were amalgamated with traditional subjects and with village concerns and practices. In this way, they marked and strengthened their membership both in their local communities and in a larger, national community.

Lastly, this book, with its emphasis on education in the rural setting, provides new perspectives on early-twentieth-century Chinese modernization. For the most part, scholars assume that rural communities did not play a significant role in China's early-twentieth-century modernization process; when they try to better understand modernization during this period, they generally look first toward urban spaces and phenomena. For example, Joseph Esherick writes of the Chinese city, "If a nation was to modernize, the cities had to take the lead," and "urban reforms ... were arguably the most successful Chinese efforts at modernization in the early twentieth century."<sup>43</sup> Esherick is certainly correct to assert that urban areas played a vanguard role in modernizing China. But this scholarly emphasis has led to the village being largely ignored, an oversight that, even now, can be attributed to a longstanding presumption in Western scholarship that modernization and national identity emerge from the breakdown of communities and are inevitably accompanied by a move toward urbanization. *A School in Every Village* shifts our attention away from the city, the presumed locus of modernizing movements, to show how the countryside also played an important role, thereby illustrating the variety of possible paths to modernization. The new school system, appeared quite different in its local implementation than it did on paper. The manner

in which it was reworked, negotiated, and struggled over illustrates how large changes could impact localities without completely erasing local loyalties and identification. What emerged on the ground was an alternative, rural-based modern school system that was meaningful to the many different parties with a hand in its creation, from multiple levels of state authority all the way down to individual villagers.

This study further argues that a spatial shift – from the urban to the rural – also necessitates a temporal shift away from the standard watershed moments of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, which birthed the Republic and the subsequent New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s and early 1920s, and back to the late Qing. As several scholars point out, this rigid temporal model, grounded in the notion that the most exciting transformations in early-twentieth-century China occurred *after* the fall of the Qing Dynasty, needs to be recast. These scholars identify instead the Hundred Days Reforms of 1898 (despite their obvious immediate failures) as ushering in an important historical period when many Chinese began to question and probe the status quo. Timothy Weston astutely points out that “the extraordinary power and significance granted to the May Fourth period as the moment of transition from the early modern to the modern has discouraged scholars from exploring in full the ways in which China’s transition to modernity was well under way in the last several decades of the Qing dynasty.”<sup>44</sup> Although Weston refers mostly to urban intellectual developments, his general point is relevant to this study. In Haicheng county and, I suspect, elsewhere, it was during the late-Qing, not the Republican–May Fourth, period when some of the most important developments in primary education took place. And, importantly, it was also during the late-Qing period when China’s rural denizens began to imagine themselves as part of a national polity that was in the process of achieving modernity.

A related point is that educational reforms in rural localities occurred in a temporal manner that did not always follow the same trajectory as centrally generated regulations and trends but instead occurred with an independent momentum. Sometimes new practices in Haicheng appeared to follow directly what was stipulated at the central level, especially earlier in the century. But just as often, they did not. For instance, although the late-Qing regulations of 1904 were obviously hugely influential on both regional and county officials, changes made by China’s central government to primary school regulations in 1912 and especially later in 1922 appeared less dramatic. In fact, whereas the 1912 regulations made some impact, the 1922 regulations were almost imperceptible in Haicheng county.

Finally, Haicheng's location in Northeast China adds a unique dimension to this study. A number of works have discussed the impact of the New Policies in the North China rural setting.<sup>45</sup> But we understand little about how the New Policies may have affected rural life in the Northeast, especially in the area of education. Recent and welcome scholarly attention to the region tends to focus on two distinct time periods. The first body of work addresses developments during the era of Fengtian warlord control (*Fengxi junfa tongzhi shiqi*) (1916-29) under Zhang Zuolin (1873-1928) and his eldest son and political heir, Zhang Xueliang (1901-2001). The second concentrates on the post-1931 period during Japan's colonization when China was governed as "Manchukuo." These studies are extremely important, as they highlight the activities of a diverse group of actors during the occupation, including Chinese, Japanese, and Russian, and shed light on the complexity of the political, social, and economic climate in the Northeast during the early twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> This study draws on these works, among others, to provide a picture of what made Haicheng county both similar to and different from the rest of China.

### **Sources and Methodology**

This book is the first on late-Qing and early-Republic educational reform to rely on county-level archives as its main source base.<sup>47</sup> In China extant county archives contain information on all manner of administration within the county's borders, including law, finance, culture, taxation, household registration, and education. With the notable exception of ethnographic surveys, county archives are one of the best sources for written documentation of village society. We are lucky to have a body of documents such as the one from Haicheng county, now stored in the Liaoning Provincial Archives in the provincial capital of Shenyang.<sup>48</sup> During the first half of the twentieth century, due to poor preservation, exigencies of war, and even vermin, local-government archives from across China sustained heavy damage and loss.<sup>49</sup> The present-day existence of these documents owes much to the Japanese government's collection and preservation efforts during its period of colonial rule in Northeast China (1931-45) as well as to later efforts made by the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>50</sup>

I did not choose Haicheng county as an object of study so much as it chose me. Out of eighteen county and city archives housed in the Liaoning Provincial Archives, the Haicheng county government generated the largest number of documents pertaining to education, more than 3,000, during the years in question. The documents include detailed reports and records on establishing and funding schools, hiring teachers, recruiting and enrolling students, pur-

chasing school equipment, curriculum, examinations, graduation lists, student complaints, and, especially valuable, inspections by county educational administrators. These inspection reports offer a high level of detail about the daily operation of the schools as well as other important information, such as evaluations of student and teacher performance.

Some of the documents were generated by the schools themselves and later appropriated and saved by the county government. Most of the documents are official communications within the county government itself as well as between the county government and its administrators, village communities, and individuals. As with all written records, there are limitations to what they can tell us. The most glaring one is that the voices of the students and their families are subdued, leaving us to evaluate the new educational system based on what the county government, the village leaders, and the teachers said about it. The absence of student voices is especially acute when it comes to girls and young women. Great changes were taking place in girls' education during the early twentieth century, and the number of rural girls who attended school grew dramatically. However, our understanding of this development in Haicheng is informed mostly by the voices of male reformers and educational administrators. Another limitation is that these documents do not reveal a great deal about the complexities of village politics and class structures. Although there are exceptions, village communities in Haicheng county were usually represented by the village head and village leaders. Therefore, these sources are excellent for revealing how village communities as a collective group responded to educational reform, but they may not offer the best means to examine the power dynamics within a particular village.

Nevertheless, the sheer richness, detail, and amount of new information available in the Haicheng County Archives ultimately surpass their limitations. These documents, although official, are not one-sided; local voices ring clear, if sometimes indirectly. The biggest strength of these documents is their insight into how the state interacted with village society in the educational sphere. It is possible to know the concerns of the county government in regard to education, how the implementation of new schools at the level of the village actually took place, how both the state and villagers coped with problems, the degree to which the state co-operated with village communities, the degree to which the two entities overlapped, and how both the county and villagers responded to the centrally generated initiatives to establish schools. Furthermore, although student voices are subdued, we learn much about the students through their actions, which are widely reported in the documents. Thus we can know how they performed as a general group, what they might have been studying on a particular day, and how many were attending school.

I use the local archival materials in conjunction with a variety of other sources, including archives from the Fengtian Office of Education generated during the same period and numerous early-twentieth-century directives and regulations pertaining to schooling and education generated at the national level. I have supplemented these with materials that pertain to the national-level discourse on education. Another indispensable body of materials has been *Liaoning jiaoyu shi zhi ziliao* (Materials on the History of Liaoning Education), a four-volume compendium of primary documents compiled by a group of scholars at Liaoning University. The volumes contain materials from local gazetteers, articles from local newspapers, which published numerous provincial directives regarding province- and county-level education, and lists of statistics. A useful source of local perspectives from other parts of China is the rich ethnographic data generated by the Japanese South Manchurian Railway Company (Minami Mantetsu). Many of the Mantetsu studies were conducted at the village level and provide information such as teachers' salaries and living conditions, ages and social status of students, and how the students and villagers viewed the new school system.<sup>51</sup> The Mantetsu studies of villages in North China (i.e., Hebei and Shandong provinces) are particularly helpful because they confirm that many patterns that hold true for North China are similar to what I have discovered in Northeast China. Finally, local gazetteers (*xianzhi*) from Haicheng county and elsewhere have been indispensable for establishing the local framework of educational reform, providing overviews of the county's educational history and statistics pertaining to village schools, number of households per village, and amount of landholdings per village.

### **Overview of the Book**

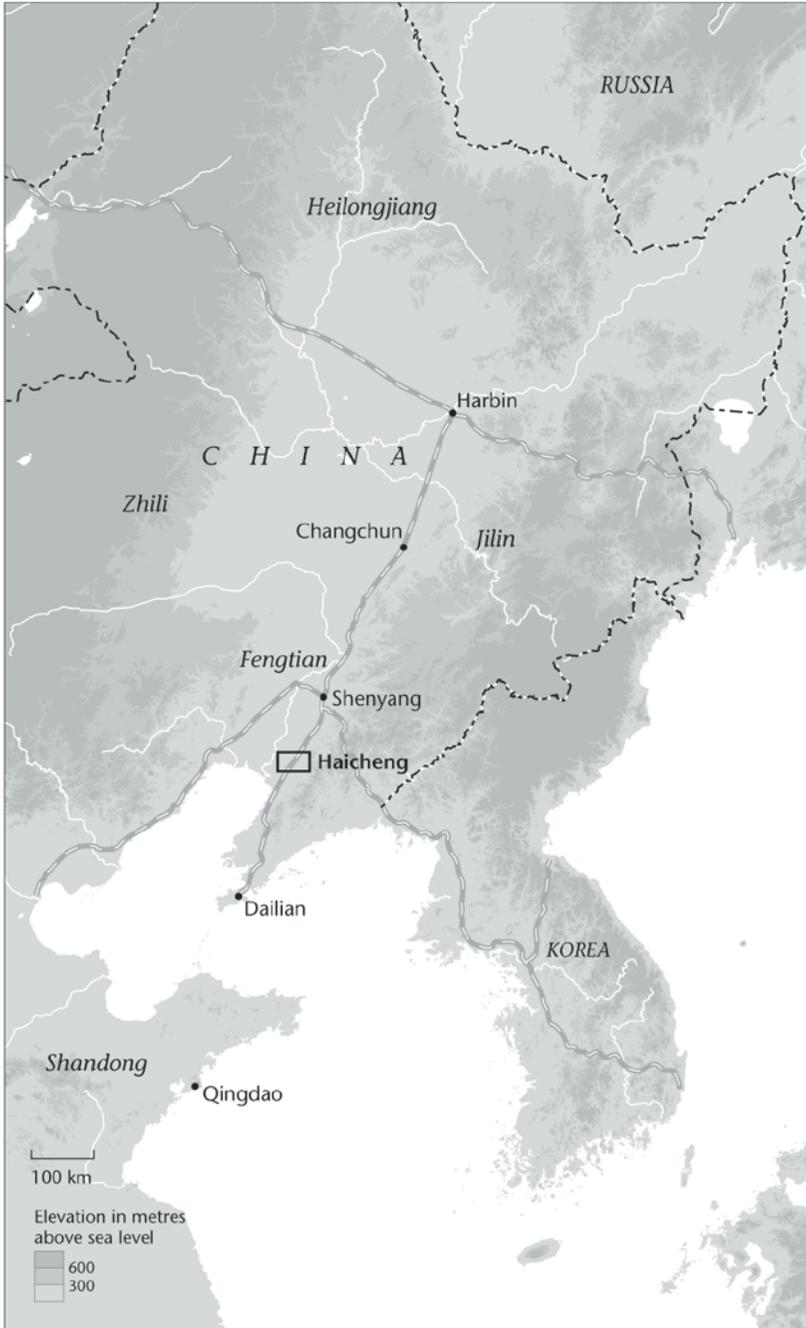
*A School in Every Village* comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the regional and local characteristics of the Northeast and Haicheng county and the factors that allowed educational reform to be carried out at a distinctly energetic pace, including the advent of railways, a succession of reform-minded leaders driven by an anxiety to erase the Northeast's reputation as a backward, frontier society, an increased Japanese presence, a fairly healthy agricultural economy, and a historical familiarity with Chinese educational and cultural patterns. Chapter 2 looks at how the state confronted the persistence of the old-style sishu. Multiple levels of authority, including centre, province, and county, attempted to reform the sishu in order to bring them into conformity with each other and with new educational standards. Although the Haicheng county government summarily abolished any sishu

that did not reform, many others successfully transformed into hybrid institutions that combined old and new characteristics and that complemented rather than competed with the new schools. A surprising finding is that reformed sishu played an important role in girls' education. The key institution in implementing local educational reform was the Educational Promotion Bureau (*quanxuesuo*), an administrative office new to the early twentieth century and the subject of Chapter 3. The community-staffed bureau, accountable to but not officially part of the county government, served as the main mechanism by which the county government communicated educational regulations to the local populace and by which the local populace relayed its demands and interests back up to the county. The bureau represented a dynamic, intermediate space within which state and local society overlapped, interacted, co-operated, and – when tensions arose – negotiated.

Chapter 4, based on an article I published in *Modern China*,<sup>52</sup> focuses on how Haicheng's village communities established and funded hundreds of primary schools across the county. It highlights the contribution of these communities to China's early-twentieth-century modernization and shows how villages were willing participants in state-guided educational reform, pursuing creative and co-operative strategies that enabled them to set up the schools and simultaneously mark their identification with both the nation-state and their own local communities. Chapter 5 provides a new perspective on early-twentieth-century female education by showing that it was not confined to urban areas. After 1907, when the Qing Dynasty drew up regulations for girls' schools, there was a small but vigorous movement to establish them in many of Haicheng county's towns and villages. This chapter also recounts how local and state actors co-operated to get these girls' schools started and how they found common ground within their belief in and promotion of the "virtuous mothers, good wives" ideology imported from Japan. Chapter 6 describes how the schools actually functioned, focusing on various aspects of their quotidian operation, such as the curriculum, calendar, facilities, and equipment. Although many of the functional aspects of the schools were new, many elements from the past, long part of village educational life, were retained. This amalgamation of the old and new, the familiar and the unfamiliar, enforced multiple community membership on the part of villagers and village youth. The chapter also discusses the growth in school enrollments.

The book's Conclusion first ties the investigation together by highlighting the problem solving that characterized educational reform in Haicheng county and then speculates on the fate of these schools when Japanese troops

occupied Northeast China in 1931 and took over government offices across the region. Although this subject deserves a separate and in-depth study, I suggest that some of these schools continued to operate under the Japanese, whereas others went underground, operating as clandestine sishu. I also posit that the early-twentieth-century school system was resilient enough to serve as a base for the *minban* (people-managed) schools that proliferated in the early years of the People's Republic of China.



Northeast China in the Early Twentieth Century

Source: Eric Leinberger. Adapted from Ronald Suleski, *Civil Government in Warlord China: Tradition, Modernization and Manchuria* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

# 1 The Setting: Northeast China, Fengtian Province, and Haicheng County

Before modern education arrived in Northeast China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the “Three Eastern Provinces” (*dongsansheng*) were, in the Chinese popular imagination – and, to an extent, in reality – backward, rustic, and inhospitable.<sup>1</sup> The Northeast was not known for its educational advancement. Robert Lee describes how, in the late-imperial period, “only a rudimentary school system existed on the Manchurian frontier,” his observation confirmed by an absolutely lacklustre record of producing holders of degrees acquired through civil-service examinations.<sup>2</sup> According to statistics on the numbers of *jinshi* candidates (those who obtained the “palace graduate” degree, the highest in the system of civil-service examinations) during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the northeast provinces made a poor showing. Of a total of seventeen provinces that produced *jinshi* during the Ming Dynasty, Fengtian was the only one of the three northeast provinces to make the list, and it ranked last with a total number of only 57 *jinshi* during the entire dynasty out of a countywide number of 22,980. By way of comparison, the provinces that produced the greatest numbers of *jinshi* were Zhejiang (3,280) and Jiangsu (2,721), both in South China. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, Fengtian had not fared much better. Out of eighteen provinces, it still ranked the lowest, having produced 183 *jinshi* out of a total number of 26,747. Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces still occupied the top positions on the list with 2,808 and 2,920, respectively. In terms of regional distribution by percentage, Fengtian was also the lowest on the list with only 0.5 percent of total *jinshi* in the early Qing and 1 percent in the late Qing.<sup>3</sup>

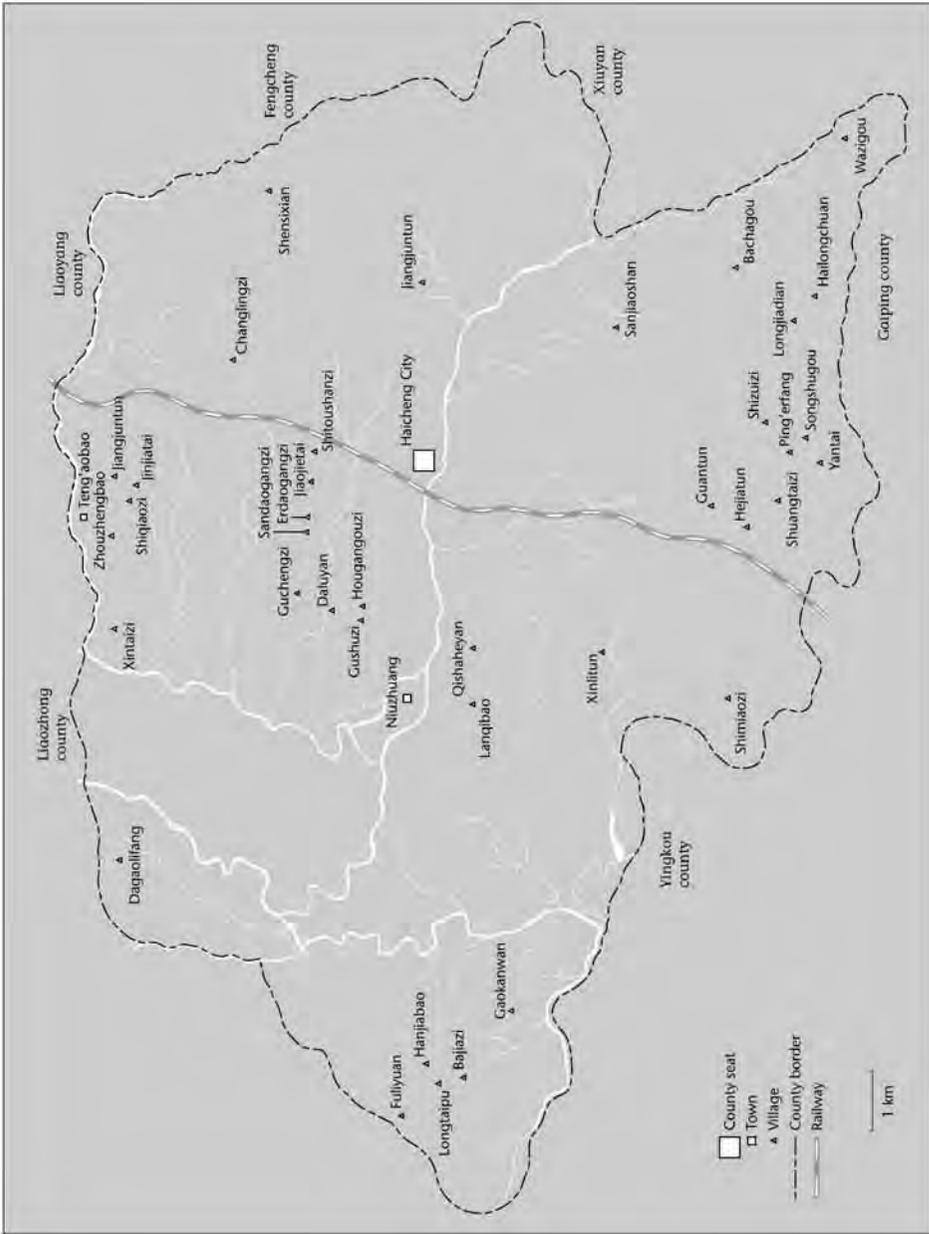
Despite what appeared to be an unpromising legacy, in the early twentieth century the Northeast saw significant gains in the educational sphere at all levels, primary, middle, and university, especially in Fengtian, where Haicheng county is located. It was in primary education, however, that the results were most impressive, especially in Haicheng county, where local officials and villagers participated in a flurry of school-building activities. By 1931, when Japan occupied and took over Northeast China, there were almost 500 primary schools operating in Haicheng’s approximately 750 natural villages. Most of

these schools were, as I refer to them throughout this study, “community schools,” meaning that they carried the official appellation of *gongli* (community-funded). The community schools were distinct from schools that were officially funded (*guanli*) or privately funded (*sili*) in that they were funded by the communities where they were established. Although community schools in Haicheng appeared on several administrative levels, including the township (*xiang*) and the municipality (*zhen*), most were set up at the level of the village.<sup>4</sup>

Haicheng county lies on the northern part of the Liaodong Peninsula, halfway between the major cities of Shengjing (present-day Shenyang) and Dalian, and extends eighty kilometres from east to west and forty-four kilometers from north to south. Haicheng is bordered on the west by Dawa county, on the northwest by Tai’an and Panshan counties, on the northeast by Anshan city, on the east by Liaoyang county, on the southeast by Xiuyan county, and on the southwest by Yingkou county.<sup>5</sup> Haicheng was and still is bifurcated by a railway line facilitating transport to the nearby major cities. During the late Qing and early Republic, Haicheng county was similar to many other counties in the area, and in northern China as well, in that it was ethnically and culturally Chinese and largely agricultural.

Certainly, the educational history of any place is influenced by the specifics of its environment, including location, cultural characteristics, economy, and even climate. To understand how the late-Qing educational reforms were carried out in Haicheng, particularly their brisk pace, the large number of primary schools established there, and the largely co-operative manner in which villagers and the local (county) government engaged in school-building activities, it is essential to examine the important transformation that Northeast China underwent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as some specific aspects of Haicheng itself that allowed its villages to readily respond to the central mandate to establish schools.

This chapter makes two points. First, it argues that the Northeast’s transformation from an imperial backwater to a modern and civilized region stemmed from the following factors: increased migration from China proper, railway construction that linked the region with major urban centres, an increasing foreign presence in the region, and – most important – the rise of a reform-minded leadership. Reformist leaders in particular, with their urgent mission to civilize the frontier and their intensified implementation of the New Policies, played a special role in the rapid growth and development of educational institutions in the Northeast. Second, this chapter makes the case that Haicheng county was poised to implement early-twentieth-century educational reforms due to a gradual process of sinification that was carried



Map of Haicheng County  
 Source: Eric Leinberger. Adapted from *Haicheng xianzhi* (XHZ) [Haicheng county gazetteer], vol. 1, Haicheng city, 1924.

out over several centuries, its location on the South Manchurian Railway Line, and its relative agricultural wealth. By the time reforms began in earnest, Haicheng already had something of an educational tradition, enough so that many of its villagers readily recognized the benefits of schooling and education. At the same time, the educational tradition there was not so entrenched that villagers were not willing to accept new ideas.

### **Northeast China: The Transformation of a Backwater**

The Northeast's backwardness in the late-imperial period and its relatively late integration into China proper stemmed from long-time, enforced isolation of the region. It was the ancestral home of the Manchus, a group of nomadic tribes that ruled China for more than 250 years as the Qing Dynasty.<sup>6</sup> In the first two decades after the Qing came to power, the court permitted and even encouraged Han Chinese resettlement in the southern part of the region, known later as Fengtian province, that had been decimated by Manchu armies in their takeover of China. But the Qing barred the Chinese from the northern provinces of Jilin and Heilongjiang to preserve Manchu customs and reserve the region's rich resources, such as sable furs and ginseng, for its own use.<sup>7</sup> In 1680 the Qing tightened its policy, restricting movement between China proper and the Northeast and imposing a separation of Manchu and Han communities already in the area. The Willow Palisade (*liutiao bian*) enforcing the border was literally two rows of willow trees that relegated the Northeast population to three distinct areas: the southern part of Manchuria, where Chinese commoners were required to stay; western Manchuria, where Mongols were consigned; and a Manchu preserve in the North.<sup>8</sup> As part of the Qing's restrictive policy, Han Chinese peasants in the south were required to live in Han villages, administered by civil officials.<sup>9</sup> The result was that the majority of the population in Fengtian province was, and remained throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Han Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

The process of administrative and cultural sinification of the Northeast was gradual, but it began even before the Qing imposed its restrictive policies. The Ming Dynasty, in an attempt to extend its control to minority areas (*shaoshu minzu de diqu*), set up a military administration in the Northeast organized along a system of garrisons (*weisuo*) rather than prefectures and counties.<sup>11</sup> In 1653, shortly after the Qing takeover, Haicheng and neighbouring Liaoyang county became the first units of Chinese-style, civil administration in the area. Over time, all of Fengtian province (including the counties and departments of Jin, Guangning, Gaiping, Kaiyuan, Tieling, Chengde, Liaoyang, and Ningyuan) and later Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces were

gradually carved up into smaller, Chinese administrative units, including prefectures (*fu*), subprefectures (*ting*), departments (*zhou*), and counties.<sup>12</sup> In the meantime, quite a few Chinese were attracted to the fertile southern Manchurian plain and successfully slipped through the Willow Palisade, squatting illegally on the farmland there. Still, the area was sparsely peopled with a population of only a scant half-million in the late seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing court, under multiple pressures, including financial constraints, excess population, and foreign aggression, began cautiously to allow limited numbers of Chinese to settle in parts of Jilin and Heilongjiang but continued to segregate Han Chinese and Manchus. Finally, in 1903, Chinese were permitted to migrate freely to the Northeast and settle anywhere they chose. Migration from China intensified dramatically at the turn of the twentieth century when millions of Chinese, mainly from Hebei and Shandong provinces in northern China, populated the Northeast. Although most eventually returned to North China, about 8 million people settled permanently in the Northeast, mainly in Fengtian province, along the Liaodong Peninsula, where Haicheng county is located.<sup>14</sup> By the 1910s the population of all three provinces was 20.3 million. And, importantly, in terms of administration, ethnic makeup, peasant livelihoods, and the density of its regional marketing systems, the Northeast very much resembled the rest of China, especially North China.<sup>15</sup>

Increasing economic development of the region was directly related to increased migration and the establishment of a Chinese administrative structure. Northeast China boasted significant natural resources that were only beginning to be exploited in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including minerals and ores like iron and coal, bumper crops of soybeans, and deepwater ports at Yingkou and Dalian. On the one hand, the growing interest in these resources created new jobs and opportunities for the Chinese migrants and settlers who were needed to produce and harvest crops and to work in mines. On the other hand, the region's riches rendered it susceptible to foreign exploitation, mostly Russian and Japanese, with Russia focusing on the north, especially the northern city of Harbin in Heilongjiang province, and Japan focusing on the south, especially the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula.<sup>16</sup>

The two powers sought access to the Northeast in a number of ways – launching military expeditions, leasing territory, establishing companies, and, significantly, constructing railways. In 1903 Russia completed construction of two railway lines, the rights to which it had been granted by the Qing court: the Chinese Eastern Railway ran across Heilongjiang province to Vladivostok;

the other line connected the Chinese Eastern Railway to the Liaodong Peninsula. In 1905, when the Russo-Japanese War ended, Japan took over Russian jurisdiction of the southern line, calling it the South Manchurian Railway. The South Manchurian Railway ran from Changchun, Jilin province, to Shenyang, Fengtian province, and down south along the Liaodong Peninsula to Dalian. Importantly, however, the presence of Russia and Japan did not preclude significant Chinese influence in the region; China controlled the strategic Bei-Ning Railway, which ran from Beijing to Shenyang.<sup>17</sup>

The building of the railways played a crucial role in integrating the Northeast economy with that of China proper and in accelerating migration from the rest of China. When initial construction began in 1903, the railways provided jobs for immigrants. After construction was completed in 1907, immigrants found it suddenly easier and cheaper to travel from North China to Northeast China. But the railways were not merely transporters of human cargo or of goods like soybeans and coal; they also carried ideas from the rest of China. As Kären Wigen found in her study of Japan's Shinano prefecture during the late-Meiji era (1868-1912), the laying of new "communication corridors" like railways permitted the movement not just of goods and people but also of information.<sup>18</sup> Bruce Elleman, Elisabeth Köll, and Y. Tak Matsusaka have more recently pointed out how railways contributed to the homogenization or hybridization of culture in Northeast China and Shandong province.<sup>19</sup> The recently opened borders and the fast, cheap transportation helped quickly to spread notions of reform and even nationalist sentiment from Beijing to Shenyang and down through the Liaodong Peninsula to its towns, prefectures, and counties, including Haicheng. It is suggestive, if not significant, that by 1908 all of the counties in Fengtian province that had more than 100 primary schools lay on the South Manchurian Railway Line, including Haicheng, Liaoyang, Kaiyuan, and Gaiping.<sup>20</sup>

Japan's presence in the Northeast grew steadily after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 and helped to incite reforms in general at the regional (northeastern) level. The Japanese in the area created an atmosphere of uneasiness and a sense of competition among local Chinese to control resources and prompted some regional leaders, fearful of foreign incursion and the possibility of cultural imperialism, to strengthen and modernize the region through reform.<sup>21</sup> During the 1910s Japanese settlers crowded into the neighbourhoods around Haicheng's railway station, and the Japanese South Manchurian Railway even established a middle school in the county seat, Haicheng city (*Haicheng shi*) in 1913, which provided a middle school education for forty-seven Chinese boys and young men.<sup>22</sup> Gavin McCormack suggests that, as in other parts of the region, the Japanese presence in Haicheng city engendered

an angry and patriotic response among locals that manifested itself in a variety of spheres, including education.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note here, however, that during the years before Japan launched its full-scale invasion of the region, outside of the county seats, northeastern villagers controlled their own agricultural economy. Even after 1931, when the Japanese government began to fund the settlement of Japanese farm families in the region, Chinese still dominated the economy, a feature that ultimately proved unattractive to many Japanese who had hoped to settle there.<sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, because of source limitations, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish definitive links between the foreign presence in the Northeast and the pace of educational reform in Haicheng and other counties. Japanese did not venture much beyond Haicheng city, and their presence seems to have had little impact on Haicheng's village life. Ronald Suleski notes that most Chinese living in the rural Northeast in the 1920s had never even laid eyes on a Japanese person.<sup>25</sup> This was certainly the case in Haicheng county. As late as 1924, there were only forty-four Japanese nationals, outside of Haicheng city, in the entire county, and most of them lived in towns, not villages. Eighteen lived in Niuzhuang (population 16,908), where they ran businesses. Another six lived in the town of Teng'aobao (population 8,082). Seven more Japanese nationals lived and ran businesses in the relatively large village of Dagaolifang (population 2,180). The remaining seven lived in four other villages.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, nationalist sentiment as a motivating factor behind villagers' and county officials' participation in school-building activities emerges occasionally, if not frequently, in the county-level documents. But such sentiment expressed a desire on the part of Haicheng denizens in general to improve China's culture and status much more than it did any overt anti-Japanese attitude or anti-imperialism.<sup>27</sup>

The most significant connection between the foreign presence in the Northeast and the fervour with which educational reform took off there was that the foreign presence served as one of several inspirations to a series of reform-minded leaders who came to administer the region, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century and continuing up to 1931. Several scholars, both Chinese and Western, who have recognized the importance of educational and other reforms to early-twentieth-century development of the Northeast highlight advances made under the tutelage of Zhang Zuolin and Zhang Xueliang.<sup>28</sup> The two Zhangs, who themselves hailed from Haicheng county, were instrumental in implementing reforms, including educational, in the entire region, mostly in Fengtian province. The younger Zhang, in particular, took a special interest in schooling, serving as the president of

Northeastern University (*Dongbei daxue*) and establishing numerous schools across Fengtian province.

In fact, however, the Zhangs' impressive activity in the educational sphere merely consolidated trends that had been in the making for an entire decade before they came to power. The now-floundering Qing government, reacting to the pressure of Russian and Japanese encroachment and anxious "to erase the stigma of the frontier,"<sup>29</sup> paid especially close attention to implementing reforms in the Northeast. Yoshiki Enatsu notes the importance of late-Qing regional leaders to the implementation of reform programs in the Northeast and suggests that because of Russian and Japanese pressure, the Qing paid especially close attention to the region. In particular, Enatsu praises the efforts of Governor-General (*dufu*) Xu Shichang and his administration in launching reforms. In 1907, after Xu was appointed by the Qing court as the first governor-general of the Three Eastern Provinces, he immediately replaced the old Qing military administration with a new provincial system of nine different departments, including, in Fengtian, a Provincial Department of Education (*tixuesi*).<sup>30</sup> The Provincial Department of Education was not entirely new. It had replaced the Fengtian Office of Education (Fengtian *xuewuchu*), established in 1905, which in turn had replaced the "Three Northeast Provinces" Office of the Provincial Examiner (*xuezheng*).<sup>31</sup>

Under Governor-General Xu's administration, impressive developments took place in the educational sphere. There was a marked surge in the number of schools built, especially in Fengtian province. By 1908 a total of 2,113 new-style schools attended by 85,565 students had been established.<sup>32</sup> Of these, three were professional schools (*zhuanmen xuetao*) and thirty-one were normal schools. Most, however, were primary schools: 1,923 lower (*chudeng*) primary schools and 105 upper-lower (*liangdeng*) or upper (*gaodeng*) primary schools.<sup>33</sup> The majority of the upper-lower and upper primary schools were set up in county seats and towns, whereas most of the lower primary schools were to be found in the villages.

After Xu stepped down from his post in 1909, educational reforms continued to accelerate under the direction of his successors, Governors-General Xi Liang (in power 1909-11) and Zhao Erxun (1911-16), himself a native of Tieling county, Fengtian province.<sup>34</sup> During this period, which spanned the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the founding of the Republic, the numbers of schools and students jumped rapidly. Roger Des Forges has discussed how Xi, encouraged by his success in expanding education in Sichuan province from 1905 to 1907 and extremely anxious about the Japanese presence and about the need to bring rapid reforms to the region, "placed new emphasis

on the development of primary schools to achieve ‘universal education.’”<sup>35</sup> By 1913 there were over 5,042 primary schools at the county level and below and more than 200,000 primary school students across the province. By 1923, seven years after Zhang Zuolin rose to power, the province had 8,741 primary schools and almost 400,000 primary school students.<sup>36</sup>

The two Zhangs, especially Zhang Zuolin, have been portrayed as military opportunists with a weak hold on society. But they were instrumental in building on the late-Qing reforms and also implemented many of their own during their years in power. This aspect of their rule has been well documented in Chinese scholarship on the Northeast and has more recently come to light in Western scholarship as well.<sup>37</sup> Suleski notes the significant economic and currency reforms that occurred under the leadership of Zhang Zuolin.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, although Zhang himself, described by Gavin McCormack as a “mustachioed illiterate,” had purportedly attended school for only a few years, he did recognize education’s importance to regional and national strength and, even before officially taking office, actively promoted education in all three provinces.<sup>39</sup> As early as 1912, Zhang reported to Governor-General Zhao that he was initiating plans to start an educational program for his armies through the construction of an “army lecture hall” (*suiying jiang tang*) on the site of the former Dongguan military school (*Dongguan jiangwu tang*). In 1916, proclaiming that “normal education is the basis of all education,” Zhang prepared to set up the Three Eastern Provinces Upper Normal School (*Dongsansheng gaodeng shifan xuexiao*) in Jilin and Heilongjiang.<sup>40</sup> In 1918 he set up a similar school in Shenyang. Zhang was so enthused about educational reform that, when the famous American educator Paul Monroe (1869-1947) visited China in 1921, Zhang even scheduled a meeting with him to discuss education. They met at Zhang’s compound and talked for several hours about the differences between American and Chinese education. Monroe noted that education greatly interested Zhang and that he frequently met with members of local education circles.<sup>41</sup>

In 1928 Zhang Zuolin was killed when a bomb exploded in his private train en route from Beijing to Shengjing (present-day Shenyang).<sup>42</sup> Zhang Xueliang immediately replaced his father as the region’s leader. The younger Zhang, who was much more forward-thinking and less conservative than his father and had developed a keen interest in education even before he officially assumed his leadership position, was active in promoting educational reform. In 1923 he sent several letters and telegrams of support to university students in Beijing who were protesting against the Beijing government. The following year, he visited Beijing University and gave a speech to the students. In 1929 he took over the presidency of Northeastern University, which had been

established in 1922 by Xie Yinchang and his father's former civil governor, Wang Yongjiang.<sup>43</sup> Zhang also advanced the cause of middle and elementary school education. In 1928 he set up three middle schools: a boys' middle school in Shenyang, a girls' middle school in Shenyang, and, in a demonstration of hometown allegiance, a boys' middle school in Haicheng county. The same year, he helped to establish sixty-two primary schools called New Citizen's Schools (*xinmin xuexiao*) across the province.<sup>44</sup>

Taking into account the cumulative impact of the late-Qing reforms implemented by Governors-General Xu Shichang and Xi Liang, the early-Republic reforms realized by Zhao Erxun, and the later efforts of Zhang Zuolin and Zhang Xueliang, educational reform in the Northeast region and in Fengtian province achieved remarkable results. By the time the Japanese invaded the Northeast on 18 September 1931, Fengtian province had a total of 10,115 primary schools attended by 666,459 primary school students. Some of these students attended schools in the provincial capital of Shengjing that had been established by the provincial government or private individuals. However, the vast majority – well over a half-million students – attended schools in county towns and villages,<sup>45</sup> and thus the impact of the reforms in rural areas should not be overlooked.

### Haicheng County and Educational Reform

Although the compilers of Haicheng's 1987 gazetteer cite the origins of the county's educational and cultural history in the late Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), this history did not become part of the written record until the early Ming, likely because it was also during the Ming when education in Haicheng began to exhibit distinctly Chinese characteristics. With the establishment of two garrisons in the area, Haizhou and Liaohai, came the construction of several Confucian temples for the purpose of training officials.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, these early Ming settlers founded Haizhou Garrison School (*Haizhou weixue*) in 1385 in the community that later became Haicheng city, the county seat. Soon after, at least fourteen garrison schools (*weixue*) were established across present-day Liaoning province.<sup>47</sup> After the Qing came to power, schooling in Haicheng county gradually expanded. Over time, a two-tiered system of education developed, with the first tier occupied by elite, county-sponsored education and the second tier occupied by community-instigated private education.

In 1654 Wang Chuanzhong, the county magistrate (*zhixian*), founded the Haicheng Confucian School (*Haicheng xian ruxue*) in the southwest corner of the former county seat.<sup>48</sup> Although the school moved several times, it operated through the late Qing. In 1684 an elite, county-level instruction

program was established. At the beginning of each lunar month, fifteen of the county's leading licentiates (*shengyuan*) visited the main hall of the Confucian temple to pay their respects, and in the attached classrooms, called *mingluntang*, imperial decrees were publicized and explained.<sup>49</sup> In 1723 a schedule was fixed by which the provincial education examiner tested the *shengyuan* twice per year and conferred degree titles at year's end.<sup>50</sup> In addition, by the mid-Qing, Haicheng county also boasted a *shuyuan* (Confucian academy) for preparing examination candidates. Originally established in 1738 and called the Haizhou *shuyuan*, it was eventually renamed the Tashan *shuyuan*. The academy gradually expanded throughout the Qing Dynasty and by 1874, the first year of the Guangxu Emperor's reign, was replete with a substantial examination hall, a classroom, and cooking and dining facilities. The academy closed at the end of the nineteenth century and remained unused until 1906, when it was given new life as a county upper-lower primary school.<sup>51</sup>

Along with the more elite schools in the county seat that trained students for the examinations, the Qing saw the development of a less formal educational system that, at least in theory, catered to the common people. There were five charitable schools (*yixue* or *yishu*). Three were officially funded with surplus monies from the Tashan academy. The other two charitable schools were located in Haicheng's villages. One was set up by a provincial graduate (*juren*) in Xiangshuipao, a rather small village of 208 people and only fifty *mu* of land, and the other was set up by a member of the local gentry in Dingjiayu, a larger village with over 100 households and about 1,600 *mu* of land.<sup>52</sup> Although these schools were to provide poor children with an education, they could accommodate only a limited number of students. The majority of students in the county's rural areas studied at old-style Chinese primary schools, or *sishu*.<sup>53</sup>

*Sishu* had been prevalent in some parts of China since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) but did not find their way to the Northeast in significant numbers until the Qing, when Chinese pioneers established them for the purpose of obtaining simple literacy, absorbing basic Confucian ethics, and keeping simple accounts.<sup>54</sup> By the late Qing, *sishu*, possibly hundreds of them, operated in many of Haicheng's villages, thus signalling the firm establishment of Confucian educational roots in the county. Logically, it might seem that the more entrenched was Confucianism, the more resistant was the populace to change, but in Haicheng this strong Confucian base, which defined both elite and popular educational institutions, helped to pave the way for modern education's ready reception in the villages when the Qing implemented its reforms in 1904. As discussed in subsequent chapters, the surprisingly strong

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