

NEW RAILWAY LINKS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION

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UP TO A FEW years ago there was only one thin long steel rail running through Manchuria, which joined the Chinese railway network with that of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Thus to travel from Nanking or Peking to Moscow and further to western Europe, one had to take a train to Tientsin, then north to Mukden in Manchuria, along the Chinese Eastern Railway to Harbin, and on to the Siberian border town of Manchouli. From there one travelled along the long Trans-Siberian Railway, crossing Siberia to the Urals and Moscow. There was an immense territory to cross, and at least ten days had to be spent in a train. A single railroad link between the European part of Russia and the Far East was unsatisfactory to the Russians for many reasons, especially economic and military ones. From the strategic point of view, the situation was catastrophic, as the Russians learned only too well during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, when the railway was not able to cope with the urgency of military traffic; this inadequacy of communications was one of the reasons for the Russian débacle.

During the Japanese occupation of Manchuria from 1931 onwards, the situation was even more serious. In case of war, a constant possibility, a bold thrust of Japanese armies could easily have cut the only link and so isolated the Russian Far East from its main bases in the west. This fact resulted in the feverish construction, with little regard for human or material wastages, of the controversial BAM trunkline (the Baykal-Amur Magistral) to the north of Lake Baykal. Up to now, it is not known whether the Soviet Union succeeded in completing this railway. There is not the same urgency in having it now in view of present Soviet friendship with China.

Having the friendly Communist states of Mongolia and China as neighbours brought about the bold idea of constructing two new major railway lines, which would bring both states closer to the Soviet Union, and would shorten travelling distances between the Far East and Europe. First, a railway was built from the east Siberian city of Ulan-Ude (formerly Verkhneudinsk), located on the Trans-Siberian Railway, east of Lake Baykal, via the border town of Naushki to Ulan-Bator (formerly Urga), capital of the Mongolian Republic.¹ This steel link at last brought the medieval Mongolian metropolis into closer touch with the rest of the world, through the Soviet Union. Since 1949, when the whole of China fell under the communist control of Mao Tse-tung, it has become imperative for Soviet planners to end the isolation of Mongolia from China, since both states have become partners with the Soviet Union in an international consortium. In addition to the railroad to Ulan-Bator, the lines Choibalsan-Solovyevsk, to connect with the Borzya station on the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the lines Ulan-Bator-Nalaykha, were built with Soviet Russian aid.² At the same time, it was decided to connect China with Ulan-Bator by rail. The old camel caravan routes between Peking and Ulan-Bator via Kalgan were replaced by a railway, the construction of which was completed in the autumn of 1955. This line joined the Chinese railway network, starting at Tsining, with Ulan-Bator via the border town of Erhlien.

The construction of the 710 kilometre long Mongolian sector of the Ulan-Bator-Tsining line was begun in 1953, and completed in 1955.³ The Chinese sector of the

¹ Yakimov, A. T., 'Vtoroi piatiletnii plan razvitiya narodnogo khozyaistva i kultury Mongolskoi narodnoi respublikii' (The Second Five Year plan for the development of economy and culture of the Mongolian People's Republic), *Sovetskoe vostoковедение*, 2 (1956) (Moscow).

² *Izvestia*, No. 163, 11 July 1954.

³ *Pravda*, No. 38, 7 February 1955.

line between Tsining and Erhlien, which is 338 kilometres long, was completed in December 1954. With the completion of the whole line from Tsining to the Trans-Siberian Railway via Ulan-Bator, the travelling distance between Peking and Moscow was shortened by 1141 kilometres.¹ That the railway was constructed mostly by Soviet Russian effort and expense was openly stated by the Mongolian Prime Minister, who expressed his gratitude to the Soviet Government for its assistance in the construction of the line in Mongolia. This line from the Siberian border to the border of China is 1100 kilometres long.² Even though the construction of the line had been decided on as far back as 1952, it was only in 1954 that the joint communique of three states (Soviet Union, Communist China and Mongolia) declared that the Soviet Government and the Government of the Mongolian People's Republic jointly undertook the construction of a railway from Ulan-Bator to the Chinese border through the town of Dzamiin Uude. For its part, the Chinese Communist Government was to build a railway from Tsining through Erhlien to connect with the above-mentioned line at the Mongolian border.³

With the completion of this major trunk line, not only was the Soviet Union joined with Mongolia, but this new railway provided a second rail link with China as well, in addition to the original Chinese Eastern Railway in Manchuria. Furthermore, this line, as has been mentioned already, shortened the travelling distance between Russia and central China by more than 1000 kilometres. Inauguration of passenger and freight traffic along this "international" line was started on 1 January 1956. It is significant that the Chinese sector of the line from Tsining to Erhlien is of the same broad gauge as the Russian and Mongolian lines.⁴

Perhaps an even more vital link between China and the Soviet Union is now under construction in China. This is a long trunk line which will run through the remote region of Sinkiang to connect the city of Lanchow on the Chinese railway network with the Soviet Turksib Railway in Soviet Central Asia, in the vicinity of Alma-Ata, capital of the Kazakh S.S. Republic, and traffic will be inaugurated in 1960.⁵ This new rail link, stretching through the most isolated and detached portion of China, will not only bring Sinkiang closer to China proper, but at the same time will bring China and the Soviet Union closer to each other. It will certainly be the shortest and least vulnerable rail link between these two countries; thus Russia and China will possess three railways which can become channels of closer cooperation, both economic and strategic. The construction of the new trunk line forges ahead steadily, and by the end of 1955 more than 400 kilometres of the railway were completed, reaching the city of Changyeh. In the course of 1956 the railway will have been extended further west to connect Lanchow with Yumen, the centre of rich oil deposits in China.⁶ (For further information see page 477.)

The western world may look with certain misgivings at this closer link between the two giants of the Communist bloc, but it is not impossible that one of these two countries will one day reverse its stand towards its neighbour. In this connection it is interesting to consider the situation in Manchuria after the Russo-Japanese War, when Chinese immigration flooded into the empty lands by means of the new Russian railways, challenging Russian influence and finally thwarting the ambition of the Tsarist Government to control or even to acquire Manchuria. A similar situation might well arise in Sinkiang, a province which has hitherto been remote from China and dangerously close to Russia; quite often, Chinese officials appointed to Sinkiang have had to travel there through Russian Siberia on the Russian railways. The

¹ *Pravda*, No. 347, 13 December 1954; *Pravda*, No. 2, 2 January 1956.

² *Izvestia*, No. 90, 16 April 1955.

³ *Novoye Vremia*, No. 42, 16 October 1954; *Pravda*, No. 285, 12 October 1954.

⁴ *Pravda*, No. 293, 20 October 1955; *Pravda*, No. 2, 2 January 1956; *Izvestia*, No. 3, 4 January 1956.

⁵ *Pravda*, No. 99, 8 April 1956.

⁶ *Pravda*, No. 241, 29 August 1955.

isolation of this province from China, its proximity to Russia, and the fact that the Chinese were a minority there in relation to the Turki majority, all this held Sinkiang to China very loosely. In times of Chinese civil strife, in times of trouble, or when it was advantageous to the Russians, this province was not infrequently occupied by Russian troops both in the times of the Tsars and of the Bolsheviki, for preservation of peace, and protection of Russian economic and political interests. Only a trickle of Chinese could reach this province by tortuous camel routes (later by trucks), leading across deserts and high mountains. Sinkiang was even more remote from Peking than was Manchuria. Naturally, construction of a railway joining this province to the rest of China would be looked upon with certain misgivings by Russians, even in the special circumstances of the present time. With the completion of such a railway, Russian influence in Sinkiang Province must diminish and Chinese influence increase. An influx of Chinese immigrants is inevitable, which will flood Sinkiang as Manchuria was flooded soon after the Russians built the Chinese Eastern Railway there; should a strong China ever become antagonistic to Russia, Sinkiang would become a potential danger to the Soviet Union.

Perhaps a short excursion into the history of the last half-century or so would here be opportune, to illustrate the case of Sinkiang by that of Manchuria. Russia received the right to build a railway across the northern part of Manchuria, to connect with the Trans-Siberian Railway in the east and west, by the Russo-Chinese Treaty of 1896. Northern Manchuria was sparsely populated at the time, and the Chinese were in a minority in relation to local tribes of Manchus, Mongols and others. Thus the Russians built their railway, which is known as the Chinese Eastern Railway, through a virgin land of practically uninhabited country. In studying the geographical position of northern Manchuria, wedged between Russian territory on both sides, one would have expected that this thinly populated and remote province of China was about ready to fall into the Russian lap at a time when the Western Powers were practically dividing China into spheres of influence. The Russian-built railway brought Manchuria so close to Russia that it became, to all intents and purposes, a Russian colony. Such was the position when the Russian government of the day made a fatal step which, leading to the catastrophic events of the Russo-Japanese War, was eventually to eliminate Russian influence from Manchuria. In 1898 Russia acquired, by treaty, the warm water port of Port Arthur at the tip of the Liaotung Peninsula in southern Manchuria and, to connect the new port with the Chinese Eastern Railway, the South Manchurian line was constructed. It was at this point in time and place that Russia met the impact of budding Japanese imperialism which was seeking expansion in southern Manchuria, and the inevitable clash culminated in the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5 which pushed the Russians back into northern Manchuria. But the railway remained, bringing Manchuria closer to China proper and joining the Russian-built line with the Chinese railway network.

A weak China, unable to oppose by force the designs of Russia and Japan on Manchuria, had a "secret weapon" in her extensive population. Gradually, China began to pour her hungry peasants from overcrowded Shantung and neighbouring provinces into Manchuria by the railway. This railway greatly simplified the problem of populating Manchuria, and Chinese hordes flooded this northern territory to the chagrin of the bewildered Russian administration. The Russian-built railway served as a funnel for the Chinese colonization of this outlying Chinese province—to an extent which can be gauged from the fact that the population of 8.1 million in 1891 increased to 15.8 million, or almost double, within sixteen years.¹

The Russian Revolution of 1917 rang the death knell of Russian influence in Manchuria, when the Chinese warlord, Marshal Chang Tso-lin, expelled the Russian administration from the province. The transfer of administration into Chinese hands led to a stepping up of Chinese migration from the south to the fertile plains of north

¹ Anuchin, V. A., 'Geograficheskie ocherki Man'chzhurii' ('Geographical sketches of Manchuria'). Moscow: OGIZ, 1948.

Manchuria. During the one decade 1923–32, from 300,000 to 900,000 new colonist-farmers were arriving annually in North Manchuria from other parts of China.¹ This fact was recorded by the Lytton Commission which studied the problem and stated in its report to the League of Nations that: “While Russia and Japan were engaged in delimiting their respective spheres of interest in North and South Manchuria, Chinese farmers took possession of the soil, and Manchuria is now unalterably Chinese.”² The same opinion was expressed by Henry L. Stimson, who said that: “While the Japanese people as a whole kept aloof, Chinese farmers have moved in and occupied the soil. The last thirty years have witnessed one of the greatest popular migrations of world history. Nearly thirty millions of people are said to have poured north-eastward from the crowded Chinese provinces of Shantung and Hopei and have occupied Manchuria.”³

This rapid increase in the population of Manchuria necessarily changed the face of the country. From being an almost uninhabited area at the time when the Russians originally came there, it became very populous within the incredibly short time of three decades. As a result of the Chinese colonization of Manchuria during the 1920's and of the natural population growth, the population of Manchuria started to increase rapidly.⁴ By 1930 there were 31–32 million people in Manchuria. The Japanese census of 1940 shows 39·2 million, and according to data for 1945 there were 46 million inhabitants.⁵ Thus in slightly over fifty years the population of Manchuria increased from 8 to 46 million. The province became completely Chinese, and all other national groups were thoroughly swallowed in this Chinese sea. This spelled the end of Russian ambitions, which were defeated, paradoxically enough, by the Russian-constructed railroad spur to the south.

The analogy with railway construction in Sinkiang is clear: Sinkiang, a remote province of China, hardly ever ruled by China, mostly governed by local warlords, separated from the rest of China by deserts and mountain ranges, and perilously close to Russia, will suddenly become attached to China by rail when the present line is completed. The new Chinese Communist government will undoubtedly flood this province with Chinese peasants, thus securing it against the possible insubordination or insurrection of local Turki and Moslem groups. Will the Russians, who are helping the Chinese in the construction of this railway, gain or lose politically and economically when the task is accomplished?

So long as China remains Communist, she will demand from the Soviet Union assistance in various forms—predominantly technical and military. However, if we remember the differences in Russian and Chinese character, and between the personalities of their leaders, the paths to Communism may eventually follow separate courses, and these two territorial giants may even become hostile to each other. In that case China with its 600 million people and with a railway leading right up to the underbelly of the Russian Soviet Empire could become an actual menace and a threat to the Soviet Union.

Suppose the social structure of the Soviet Union should change, still the fact of an increased Chinese population poised in Sinkiang on the Russian border, will mean only one thing: that any plan or thought of extending Russian influence in the direction of Sinkiang will have to be abandoned. Even now, Soviet leaders may well look with apprehension at the dangers to the Soviet areas in Central Asia arising from the new propinquity to Peking. Only one country is going to benefit from the completion of this new Sinkiang railway, and that country is China.

¹ Tretchikoff, Nikolai G., ‘Sovremennaya Man'chzhuria v faktah i tsifrah’ (‘Contemporary Manchuria in facts and figures’). Shanghai, China Economic Press, 1936, p. 78.

² League of Nations: Lytton Report, 1932.

³ Stimson, Henry L., ‘The Far Eastern crisis,’ New York, Harper, 1936, p. 18.

⁴ Petrov, Victor P., ‘Manchuria as an objective of Russian foreign policy’ (MS.) Doctoral Dissertation, 1954, p. 243.

⁵ Anuchin, V. A., *op. cit.*, p. 46.

The productive possibilities of this remote province with its economic potential integrated into one overall, united system of Chinese economy will be expanded manifold. Sinkiang is rich in oil, coal and non-ferrous metals in addition to having possibilities for the expansion of agriculture and cattle-raising. Production of oil in the vicinity of Yumen is increasing just as is the production of coal in the Shantan and Yungteng area.¹ Chinese sources as well as Soviet publications on China indicate that the construction of another railway was started at the beginning of 1955. This railway is to connect Lanchow with Paotow in Inner Mongolia, a distance of 1100 kilometres. Thus Inner Mongolia will eventually be connected with north-western China, *i.e.* Sinkiang.² This connection is significant, since Paotow is becoming one of the very important metallurgical centres of China. Construction of the Paotow metallurgical works was started in 1953-54, and is expected to be completed at the end of the Second Five Year Plan, 1958-62, when it is calculated it will be producing over a million tons of metal annually.³ The Paotow metallurgical works will be based on the local supply of iron ore and coal, in addition to refractory clay, the presence of which was established by extensive geological surveys.⁴ With the completion of these major lines, Szechwan rice, salt, medicinal herbs, and non-ferrous metals will flow into the interior of China and to Inner Mongolia, while machinery and metals from Paotow and other metallurgical centres will flow to Sinkiang, to supply the newly-developed province with needed industrial products.⁵ To integrate Sinkiang with the rest of China more fully, the construction of another important railway has been started to connect the great city of Chengtu in Szechwan with Paoki on the Sian-Lanchow-Sinkiang line. This line is to be completed by the end of 1956.⁶ Chengtu is already connected by a railway with Chungking, from where the mighty Yangtze river becomes its outlet to the outside world. This additional link will tie Sinkiang to China even more securely. (For further information see page 477.)

The Yangtze river may also be reached from Sinkiang via Hankow-Wuchang, thus providing a direct route to Canton, the great southern metropolis. Formerly, cargoes had to be ferried across the wide river by boat, and quite often this caused terrible traffic jams. To allow a smooth flow of cargoes between north and south, the Communist Government of China started the hurried construction of a huge bridge (under Russian supervision) to span the Yangtze river at Wuchang. This bridge will be 1700 metres long, and 80 metres high, so that large ocean-going ships of 10,000-tonnage will be able to pass under it. The bridge will be of the two-decker type. The upper deck is designed for automobile and pedestrian traffic, and the lower deck for a double-track railway.⁷ There are indications that the construction of the Yangtze river bridge has been accelerated. It is now predicted that in the autumn of 1957 this bridge will be completed much ahead of schedule. The Soviet Russian publications say that this double-deck bridge will become an important railway and highway link between northern and southern China, creating a new direct international trunk-line, Moscow-Ulan-Bator-Peking-Hanoi.⁸

Closely tied with the plans for linking central China with Sinkiang by railway will be the grandiose plan of harnessing the unruly Hwangho (Yellow) river. This younger sister of the Yangtze has been called in the past the "Sorrow of China." The Five Year Plan for the reconstruction of China calls for transforming the Yellow river into

¹ *Pravda*, No. 225, 13 August 1954.

² *Pravda*, No. 41, 10 February 1955.

³ Astafiev, G. V., "Plan sotsialisticheskoi industrializatsii Kitaiskoi narodnoi respubliki" (Plan for Socialist Industrialization of the Chinese People's Republic), *Sovetskoe vostochnoe*, No. 5, 1955.

⁴ *Pravda*, No. 234, 22 August 1955.

⁵ *Pravda*, No. 241, 29 August 1955.

⁶ *Pravda*, No. 241, 29 August 1955.

⁷ *Ogonyok*, No. 40, 2 October 1955, p. 3.

⁸ *Novoye Vremia*, No. 36, 30 August 1956, p. 27.

a ladder or cascade of forty-six dams and reservoirs with attached hydro-electric power plants, with a total capacity of 23 million kilowatts and an annual output of 100 milliard kwt-h., which is ten times the combined capacity of all the electric power plants of China in 1954⁹. The conquest of Yellow river, together with the bringing of that huge territory of Sinkiang nearer to China proper by rail, and a series of new industrial plants planned for the north-western territories, all these achievements would move China closer to Russia geographically. In one respect, China should become (at least temporarily) industrially dependent on the Soviet Union, since a great proportion of the new industrial plants and combines is supplied with machinery manufactured in Russia, and aided by numerous Russian engineers and technicians.

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The joint commission of representatives of China and the Soviet Union, after a thorough survey of the terrain, decided that the junction of both Soviet and Chinese sectors of the railway should take place at the frontier, near Eby-Nur Lake. The two border stations, on either side of the frontier would have the same name "Druzhiba" (Friendship). The Russian sector then will join the Turksib Railway at Aktogai station, to the north of Alma-Ata (*Pravda*, No. 173, 21 June 1956). This new trunk line is supposed to facilitate export of Chinese Turkestan raw materials to the Soviet Union, and, in return, this Chinese province will receive from Russia: copper ore from Dzhezkazgan and Kounrad, Karaganda coal, and Altai non-ferrous minerals. The route of the projected railway has been carefully surveyed, and its Russian sector will follow a line south of lakes Sasyk-Kul and Ala-Kul. By 1960 the whole railway in China and Russia, including the Soviet sector which is 308 kilometres long, will be completed and in operation. For this purpose it will have been necessary to remove over 6 million cubic meters of earth (*Izvestia*, No. 177, 26 July 1956).

Addendum to page 476 (received 26 November 1956)

Additional reports on the progress of the Paoki-Chengtu line indicate that this 668-kilometre railway has been completed one year sooner than expected and planned. It passes through mountainous country, where it was necessary to build 286 tunnels and 961 bridges. The total overall length of all tunnels is 81 kilometres (*Pravda*, No. 286, 12 October 1956).

⁹ Efimov, G., "Narod-Ispolin" (People-Giants); *Novoye Vremia*, No. 40, 29 September 1955; *Ogonyok*, No. 40, 2 October 1955; *Izvestia*, No. 287, 4 December 1955; *Pravda*, No. 234, 22 August 1955.