Introduction

The research reported in this book began in response to a long-ignored issue in existing studies of community construction: How does the past failure of an ethnic people to maintain sovereignty in their homeland influence their contemporary reconfigurations of ethnic and national identities? To help address this complex question, this book focuses on the Manzu, the second largest non-Han group in contemporary China, whose cultural and historical ancestors, the Manchus, ruled China from 1644 to 1912. The Manchus failed to maintain sovereignty over their homeland of Manchuria in the last years of the Qing empire; they then failed to make Manchoukuo (1932–1945) a Manchu state free from Japanese control; and finally, they failed to establish an ethnic autonomous region or prefecture in China, as the other most populous ethnic groups (such as the Tibetans, Mongols, Uyghurs, and Hui) did in the years between 1947 and 1965.

In 1644, the Manchu royal clan led their Eight-Banner (baqi 八旗) forces down from Manchuria and across the Great Wall to conquer China. For many of the ensuing 267 years, the court tried to preserve the Manchu homeland by prohibiting Han civilians from entering Manchuria. By the late nineteenth century, that homeland had become a contested borderland. In the 1930s and 1940s, the last Manchu emperor collaborated with the Japanese in establishing a colonized state called Manchoukuo, as Bernardo Bertolucci artistically depicted in his 1987 film *The Last Emperor*. After Manchoukuo collapsed in 1945, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took over the region following a bloody civil war with the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD). Within the first half of the twentieth century, four regimes—the Qing empire under the Manchu royal clan, the Republic of China (ROC, 1912) under the Nationalist Party, Manchoukuo under the Japanese Kantō Army, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC, 1949)—defined the ethnic and national character of the Manchus. Each repositioned Manchuria on their respective political maps in accordance with different definitions of statehood.

During these periods of state succession and sovereignty contests, Manchuria was transformed from the Manchu homeland into an East Asian borderland under Japanese control, and then into China’s recovered territory after the second Sino-Japanese War (1931/1937–1945). In this process, the interactions of self-identification, the designations of
outsiders, and the state’s ascription reconfigured the hard boundaries of the Manchu community, changed the ways in which the Manchus self-identified, and redefined the social and cultural space of their identity representations.

Three major forces are responsible for the transformation of Manchu identity from the ruling group of the Qing empire to the “minority” of minorities in China today: (1) the deterritorialization and provincialization of Manchuria in the late Qing; (2) the remaking of national borders and ethnic boundaries during the Sino-Japanese contestation over Manchuria; and (3) the power of the state to recategorize borderland populations and ascribe ethnic identity in post-Qing republican regimes. I argue that while these forces defined and redefined territorially over Manchuria, the Manchus redefined their relationship with whichever polity claimed sovereignty over their homeland in varying ways. They revised the narratives about their past roles as both conquerors (in the seventeenth century) and colonized (in the twentieth), represented their homeland and historical heritage differently for different audiences, redefined their ethnicity in relation to national identity, and used their ethnicity as a social resource in a changing political environment.

The purpose of this study thus is twofold: to document a history of the Manchus in Manchuria and to examine the importance of Manchuria to the identity reformation of the Manchus from 1907 to 1985. This period has been little understood by those in Manchu and ethnic studies in modern Chinese history. Although pre-existing problems concerning Manchu identity and borderland crises in Manchuria are introduced in the book, I identify 1907 as the year when the most significant changes in both the domestic politics and international relations in Manchuria took place. That year witnessed not only the beginning of the provincialization of Manchuria, but also the Japanese expansion into the Manchus’ homeland.

Before 1907, a “vice capital” of the Qing, Mukden, existed in Manchuria, and through most of the Qing, the administrative system under the Manchu generals in Manchuria differed from that of provincial governors in China Proper. After 1907, the Manchurian regions were theoretically given the same political status as other provinces in China Proper. The same year, the headquarters of the South Manchuria Railway (J: Mantetsu 滿鉄) moved from Tokyo to Dalian 大連 in Manchuria. A series of Japanese colonial regulations imposed taxes on all residents (including Qing subjects) living in the railway zones leased to Japan in South Manchuria. In choosing 1907 as the starting point, I depart from traditional approaches to Manchu studies by integrating international relations and transnational history. I conclude in 1985, when the first Manzu autonomous county was established in Xinbin 新賓 County in
Northeast China; since then, a series of Manzu autonomous counties has been approved by the state.

Based on traditional and recently available primary sources in Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, and English, many of which were collected in provinces and counties in Northeast China, Beijing, and Nanjing, as well as interviews in Beijing, Northeast China, and the United States, this book explores the interconnections among the territoriality of borderlands and identity of ethnic peoples, textual and experiential pasts, and perceived and practiced ethnicities.

**Historiography**

In the early twentieth century, due to international contests driven by colonialism and nationalism, Manchuria attracted journalists from around the world. An American correspondent for *National Geographic* in 1929 reported, “In Manchuria, as in Egypt and Mexico, drama never dies” (Simpich 1929, 379). Manchuria also received considerable attention from academics, especially through Owen Lattimore’s books and articles on the history and current affairs of the area (1933, 1934, 1935). In the second half of the twentieth century, Manchuria has garnered significantly less political or academic interest than other Chinese borderlands. The Manzu have not been as newsworthy to the West as ethnic groups such as the Tibetans and Uyghurs, who make politically sensitive appeals. One reason for this lack of attention is that Manchuria is viewed as territory recovered from foreign control and restored to China; unlike other ethnic groups, the Manzu are not perceived to have lost their autonomy. The Manzu ethnic community of the PRC similarly is often regarded as being “Sinicized” or “Hanized,” partly due to the loss of their own language. As a result, most scholars in the field of Manchu studies focus on Qing history, and most scholars of modern Manchuria focus on Sino-Japanese relations.

By positioning the reformation of the Manchu community in a broader context than Manchu or Qing history alone, and by exploring a local history of modern Manchuria beyond the background of the second Sino-Japanese War, I trace the historical roots of several contemporary problems concerning Manzu communal membership and political status in the PRC. The intent is to contribute new materials and analyses to three areas of scholarly research: borderland studies, Manchu studies, and the history of the Sino-Japanese contestation over Manchuria.

**Borderland Studies**

This study of the Manchus analyzes the impact of changes in territoriality upon the process of identification experienced by a people whose
homeland was redefined as the borderlands of others. In geography, territoriality refers to “a spatial strategy to affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area; and, as strategy, territoriality can be turned on and off” (Sack 1986, 1). History scholars have begun to investigate the interrelations between territoriality and identity. Nevertheless, studies on the connections between changes in territoriality and community formation remain underdeveloped. As Charles Maier suggests, “spatial conditions contribute more to identity formation than social scientists and historians have allowed” (Benbabib, Shapiro, and Petranovich 2007, 67). Maier argues that “territory is not just a background factor in history; it assures a stable sense of community only when ‘identity space’—the unit that provides the geography of allegiance—is congruent with ‘decision space’—the turf that seems to assure physical, economic, and cultural security” (2000, 816).

Based on Robert Sack’s definition of “territoriality,” and agreeing with Maier’s point on the interrelation between territoriality and identity, this study emphasizes the historical agencies that have defined or redefined group identities in accordance with changes in the territoriality of a contested borderland. Borderlands are a special category of space in which political contestation, shifting borders, and the consequent recategorization of population frequently affect communal membership and state-individual relations. Because borderlands by their nature are zones of contest and contact, changes in a state’s territoriality always bear upon the redefinition of the relationship between the local people and the regime that claims sovereignty over the land.

Geographical borderlands refer to areas divided and joined by borders, where political, economic, and cultural interactions and contestations among different forces occur. Cultural borderlands are the social spaces where conceptual, symbolic, and social markers divide and connect sets of dichotomies—us vs. them, old vs. new, center vs. periphery, majority vs. minority, and urban vs. rural. The character of a borderland as a “middle ground,” “contact zone,” “contested space,” or “world in-between” requires scholars to use multilingual materials, conduct multisite fieldwork projects, and employ cross-disciplinary methods to analyze the dynamic interactions among historical actors in these places as well as the social consequences of border creation and dissolution. The recent history of Manchuria provides a pertinent platform for examining the aforementioned topics for both geographical and cultural borderlands.

Borderland studies in history scholarship have witnessed the development of research on the negotiation of borders, contested territory, the development of cartography, and the disparity or even conflict between the imagined nation and the delimited state. Theories of fron-
tiers and borderlands have been developed in European and American studies, from the foundational work of Frederick Jackson Turner (1893) and Herbert Eugene Bolton (1921), to more recent works on nation building in European borderlands, colonialism and African borders, community reconstruction in post-Soviet borderlands, and individual agents in the American Southwest, as well as the debates on the difference between frontier and borderland among U.S. historians.

Theories on borderlands have seldom conceptualized borders and borderlands outside the context of American and European history or colonial studies related to the West. Historians of borderlands have yet to develop a more comprehensive study on the equivalent terms for frontiers or borderlands in non-Western contexts. For example, a number of Chinese terms are used as equivalents for borders and borderlands in different times and places. Among them, “bian” 彤 and “jie” 彉 are most used for borders, and “biansai” 彤塞, “bianchui” 彤陲, or “bianjiang” 边疆 for both frontiers and borderlands. These terms are associated with the ruling clans’ perception of their relations with people living outside China Proper during the long era of imperial dynasties. A term used to refer to Manchuria is “guanwai” 关外, which literally means “outside the pass” (Shanhai guan 海门, the Shanhai Pass of the Great Wall), because this pass was the strategic and symbolic checkpoint at which the Manchu rulers demarcated their homeland and China Proper administratively until the late Qing.

In the field of Asian studies, borderlands-related studies do not necessarily employ the terminology of, or adopt the theories used in, European and American borderland studies. Yet they have dealt with similar problems and themes: the construction of national territory based on the Western concept of territoriality and the deconstruction of a non-Western understanding of the cosmos in cartography, the Qing empire’s territorial strategies and ethnic policies regarding frontiers, the consequences for local economic and social life of border making and border shifting, and the legacy of empire building in the past for nation building in the present.

Scholars in East Asian countries have inherited an academic tradition of combining archival and archeological methods from the evidentiary scholarship (kaozhen 考证) in late imperial China. During the past century, Western ethnographic approaches and theories have been increasingly influential in East Asian borderland studies. Concomitantly, nationalism and a lineal national framework of history have often been adopted. Given that East Asian nationalism often has been defined by resistance against Western and Japanese imperialism, borderland studies in East Asia are often confined within a theoretical framework that conceptualizes a state’s borderlands as the natural frontiers of the rul-
ing ethnic group. In the United States, many studies on East Asian borderlands have abandoned nationalistic perspectives, but still focus on the existing nations and the winning imaginers. As Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt have pointed out, despite the awareness of varied connections between history and boundaries, “even some of the most knowledgeable scholars…have preferred to see China as an individual entity” (2003, 1). As a result, in the postwar years, Manchuria has attracted scholarly attention mostly in the subfield of the history of Sino-Japanese relations. The Manchus and their historical territoriality have become increasingly vague, and sometimes completely invisible, in the subfield of borderland studies on modern or contemporary China.

Thus this study on the Manchus and Manchuria calls attention to historical paths aborted and nations not formed. The Manchus’ loss of sovereignty in their homeland led to an alternative understanding of the historical track of borderland transformation: the homeland of the former rulers became a borderland, while the people were ethnicized and deterritorialized. The perspectives of the borderlanders, rather than of the ruling group of central power holders, provide us with a better understanding of the consequences of failed nation building.

**Historical and Ethnological Studies on the Manchus**

In twentieth-century China, borderlands have referred to areas that are geographically remote and culturally different from the Han of China Proper; thus an ethnic dimension is inseparable from borderland studies. The Chinese term for “ethnic group,” minzu 民族, can also be used to mean “nation.” When it is used together with bianjiang 边疆, it refers to non-Han ethnic groups; when used with Zhonghua 中华, it means the Chinese nation. In Han-language studies of the history of China, research on borderlands has stemmed from questions about how to handle relations between the Han and non-Han populations. In the PRC, the “ethnic work” (minzu gongzuo 民族工作) focuses specifically on how to understand the cultures, customs, and histories of ethnic groups in borderlands in order to help the borderland people preserve their ethnic heritage while developing the local society along a modernizing path of socialism. In some areas, ethnic groups have cooperated closely with the central government; in other areas, some are still seeking their own political regimes in self-claimed territories, and some attempted but failed to maintain sovereignty or autonomy over their homelands. Studies of China’s borderlands can hardly put aside the question of how redefined territoriality has influenced the community reformation of local inhabitants.

In East Asian ethnic studies, two approaches have dominated. One focuses on the imagination or construction of ethnic boundaries in the
discourse of the elites and the state, as well as the cultural presentations of ethnic groups for ideological purposes; the other focuses on the disparity or conflict between the self-identification of the members of an ethnic group and the ethnic identity assigned by the state. My approach is holistic, exploring the historical roots of contemporary ethnic issues, documenting local experiences, and analyzing the complicated relations among the historical agents that have jointly reformed an ethnic community in both domestic and international settings. The reconfiguration of Manchu identity provides a suitable vantage point from which to examine the interconnection of past and present experiences, communal membership and state interpellation, and domestic and international struggles, as well as collective and individual identification.

This approach has been chosen because ethnic identity is not constructed simply from cultural markers or through self-identification. External identification is itself a historical process “that has no counterpart in the domain of self-identification: the formalized, codified, objectified systems of categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions” (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 15). Every human group is a people of “immense age,” which defines and redefines what they are with different identifiers, labels, and notions of human grouping, available and acceptable at different moments and places. As one category of identity, ethnic identity entered the Chinese vocabularies of human groups before the concept was adopted and adapted by the state to categorize and manage its population. The historical processes of such adoption and redesignation of ethnic identity reveal the procedural and experiential connections between conceptualized and practiced identities.

“Ethnicity” is a term and concept to which voluminous publications and massive attention have been dedicated. Scholars have debated what constitutes ethnicity and what social relationships and political effects ethnicity produces. Despite all kinds of subtle or obvious differences in their definitions, scholars agree that ethnicity refers to a social phenomenon about the binary “us”–“them” distinction and “has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships” (Eriksen 1993, 3). Some study ethnic groups as minority peoples, while others include majority populations into categories of ethnicity. Some focus on the constructability of ethnicity, while others ask why ethnicity-related discourse has had “primordial” affection and persuasive effect in political mobilization (Barth and Geertz, among others). Most studies on ethnicity have examined the dialectic interactions among three variables that define how this identity is formed, changed, and practiced: self-identification, other-perception, and participation or practice of ethnicity.

This introduction cannot restate all the old and new theories on, or approaches to, ethnicity in various fields. Yet I must point out that the
theories on ethnicity that have been applied in recent China-related ethnic studies include the Barthian theory on ethnic boundaries composed of cultural marks, Said’s theory on orientalism, Hobsbawn’s theory on modernity and nationalism, and Anthony Smith’s theory on the ethnic origin of nation. These generally stress the presentation and construction of ethnicity. This book suggests that the questions of Manchu and Manzu identities should be examined with and beyond ethnicity and positioned in the complicated contexts of territorial change, population recategorization, and the simultaneous reconceptualization of ethnicity and nationality in China during the early twentieth century. “Ethnicity is constructed in relation to other significant social identities” (Yelvington 1991, 167). Ethnic identity, minzu shenfen 民族身份, is one of the identity labels and terminologies that the Chinese imported in this period, though various criteria used to distinguish “us” and “them” had long existed. To study the communal transformation of the Qing Manchus to the Manzu of today, other identities and identifiers—such as banner identity for those affiliated with the Eight-Banner system from the Qing, Manchurian identity in Manchoukuo, northeastern identity in wartime, and Chinese national identity—should all be taken into consideration.

Qing historians have played the major role in Manchu studies. Recent English publications have provided comprehensive answers to the question of who the Manchus were during the Qing dynasty (Elliott 2001, 2000; Crossley 1999, 1990). But to date, only one monograph has addressed what happened to the Manchus in the late Qing and early ROC years (Rhoads 2000). Few historians in China have studied the Manchus as an ethnic group in the early twentieth century either, due to the pervasive assumption of the Manchus’ Hanization and the ROC’s Han-chauvinistic policies. In the PRC and Japan, monographs on the Manchus in the Qing dynasty focus on the Eight-Banner system and banner people in either the capital or provincial garrisons, and often treat Manchuria as a part of early Qing history. Only a handful of titles have studied the banner people and the Manchus in Manchuria in the late Qing. Historians in the PRC have published more articles on the banner people in Manchuria than have Western scholars, and they have provided detailed information on the early Qing period and the reformers of the late Qing. Yet these studies on the Manchus in Manchuria have cast little light on the Qing-ROC or ROC-PRC transition, or on the Manchoukuo and PRC eras.

During the past two decades, scholars of the “New Qing History” group in the United States have foregrounded the “Manchuness” of the Qing dynasty (Waley-Cohen 2004). From the 1990s, U.S. scholars have debated whether it is historically appropriate to call the Manchus of the
Qing an ethnic group. Pamela Crossley has suggested that the differences in historical contexts be taken into careful consideration, pointing out that “nominalizing the Qing empire as ‘Manchu’ is an error, and here the error has again been costly to historical inquiry” (Crossley 1999, 30–31). In her 1987 article and 1990 book, Crossley preferred “race” over “ethnicity” as her analytical concept. In her 1999 book, she analyzed the confusion caused by the ambiguity of the term “identity” in scholars’ use of contemporary identity “species,” and she defined the identities of banner and Manchu in the Qing as “predecessors of ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ identities, and not in themselves demonstrably national or ethnic” (7). Crossley focused on an “internal diachronicity” in the development of the perception and construction of Manchu identity via a process from “cultural to racial to ethnic arenas of negotiation.” In the middle to late nineteenth century, she argued, ethnic identity emerged because the provincial garrisons had been isolated from the central government, and Manchu warriors in the Taiping era and Opium War years had begun to confront ethnic tensions. While the Manchus were marginalized in the late Qing, their self-perception of being Manchu—often based upon descent and cultural identification—redefined their ethnicity.12

Disagreeing with Crossley’s view, Mark Elliott argued in his 2001 book that Manchu ethnic identity existed before the nineteenth century. Elliott maintained that the development of and changes in Manchu ethnic identity could not be contained within a lineal timeline, as Crossley described. Following Barthian theories, Elliott viewed the differences in lineages, cultures, languages, religions, and gender relations—diachronic differences, mostly maintained by the banner system—as defining elements in the maintenance of ethnic boundaries between the Manchu and the Han. Although he nearly ignored the Hanjun (Han banner people) in his book, Elliott recently utilized the “expulsion of the Hanjun” in the high Qing as historical evidence to argue that the banner system “went from being a universal Qing institution to being a more exclusively Manchu institution,” and that the banner people of the Qing could be called “Manchu ethno.” Elliott also used the PRC’s categorization of all banner people as Manzu as supplementary evidence to support his argument that the Hanjun’s banner identity signified their being “halfway toward becoming Manchu” (2006).13

One of the most famous Qing historians in the PRC, Wang Zhonghan 王钟翰, also argued in a 1990 article that all banner people should be identified as Manchu. In their studies on the Eight Banners and banner people in Beijing and Northeast China, Ding Yizhuang 定宜庄 and Liu Xiaomeng 刘小萌—implicitly disagreeing with Wang—suggested that identity categories within the banners and the demarcation be-
tween banner people and civilians in the Qing were more complicated in reality than as defined in Qing policies (Ding 2003; Liu 2008). Fu Kedong and Chen Jiahua, in their analysis of the policies regarding ethnic separation within the banner system, also maintained that the “banner system was a multi-ethnic unity” (1980, 306). A recent cross-disciplinary research study by Ding Yizhuang, Guo Songyi, and James Z. Lee, based on both archival research and oral history on the Hanjun and their descendants in Liaodong, again has challenged the view that equates banner people with the Manchu community (Ding Yizhuang et al. 2004).

Beyond ethnic boundaries between the Manchus and the Han, this study looks at international, transnational, national, and local historical agents as inseparable parts of a network that reformed the Manchu community in response to the changing territoriality of twentieth-century Manchuria. The continuing historical process whereby today’s Manzu have been transformed from the Qing Manchu and other banner people should not be examined separately in the three subfields of Qing, ROC, or PRC history. The changes in both Manchu identity and Manchuria’s territoriality cross geographical and temporal lines of demarcation that are customarily used in Chinese and Japanese national histories. The subject of research in this book requires a transnational approach.

**Studies of the Sino-Japanese Contestation over Manchuria**

Most studies of twentieth-century Manchuria provide analyses of Sino-Japanese relations under both the Japanese colonial forces and Chinese nationalists. From the 1990s, more scholarship has re-examined or questioned the colonial nature of Manchoukuo and has used this regime as an example to study state formation and nation building in modern East Asia. In one such study that presents innovative research on the sovereignty and authenticity of Manchoukuo, Prasenjit Duara examines Manchoukuo not as a colony that China lost to Japan, but as an experimental field for state formation (2003). His book not only contributes to our understanding of an East Asian modern reflected through Manchoukuo, but also integrates the ethnology of a local and marginalized people, the Oroqen (Elunchun), into his comparative analysis of Japanese narratives of Manchoukuo and Chinese ethnographical understanding of non-Han peoples in frontiers.

The development of Chinese nationalism in Manchuria has also been re-examined. Rana Mitter scrutinized and deconstructed the “Manchurian myth” of Chinese resistance to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, tracing the process by which this myth became an essential constituent of Chinese nation building (2000). James Carter, in his 2002
book, studied how a Russian city, Harbin, was reformed by Chinese nationalists and became Chinese Harbin amid the international conflicts over Manchuria. Following or agreeing with Gavan McCormack’s 1991 suggestion that ethnic issues are important for Manchoukuo studies, more scholars recently have published research on the experiences of various ethnic groups in Manchuria (Lahusen 2001, Park 2005, Atwood 2002, Wolff 1999, and Brooks 1998).

Yet if we continue to overlook the dramatic changes in power relations between the Manchus and the Han Chinese, and the impact of the Sino-Japanese contestation upon the Manchus who had claimed Manchuria as their sacred homeland for centuries, we will be missing a significant piece of the puzzle. In the existing literature on wartime Manchuria, the Manchus are often mentioned in passing as either puppets of the Japanese, as exemplified by the last Manchu emperor, Aisin Gioro Puyi (1906–1967), or as colonized Chinese, as highlighted in the PRC’s official history on Manchoukuo.

Today, the state of Manchoukuo is regarded as illegitimate even though it once had most of the elements for building a nation-state, such as an ethnonationalist rhetoric of “self-determination,” industrialization and modernization, state-sponsored school education, and advanced and powerful media entities. When studying the nation-building process, neither the international nor local context of borderland contestation, in which the winning power draws “hard” boundaries with legal codes and social regulations to define what is legitimate, must be overlooked. The hardening of boundaries and shifting of national borders bear consequences for the life and identity of the group that loses the sovereignty contest.

To claim sovereignty over Manchuria, both the Manchoukuo and ROC governments mobilized the rhetoric of self-determination and ethnic harmony to define the legitimacy of their regimes. Both tried to construct new ethnic and national boundaries for the members of their respective states, and thus attempted to redefine the Manchus’ ethnic and national membership. During the years of sovereignty contestation and state succession, people had to reconfigure their identities in accordance with shifting national borders and ethnic boundaries. Two main factors that contribute to the reconfiguration of identity are politically constructed boundaries in the present and long-standing group affinities inherited from the past. State interpellation is not the only force of re-identification. People within an ethnic group develop different understandings of group affinity and consciousness of their historical heritage, which may comport with or conflict with the identity categorization drawn by the ruling state.

The formation and re-formation of an ethnic community are prod-
ucts of a long and intricate process whereby individuals and groups not only define their positions within a larger community, but also practice their identities in relation to the geographical, cultural, legal, institutional, subnational, and international borders perceived and defined by both the group and the community at large. The personal, local, communal, and national experiences in, and expressions of, the home place, Manchuria, and the expressions thereof in different historical periods are the essential elements that form the contemporary community of the Manzu. As the Manchus’ history in Manchuria should not be forgotten in understanding the Sino-Japanese contestation over Manchuria, neither should Manchoukuo be overlooked in a study of the Manzu.

Identity and Identification: The Manchus, Banner People, and Manzu

Because this book examines a contemporary history of the Manzu, not only against the interactive background of ethnicity and borderlands, but also at the intersection of the Qing and Republican histories, the complicated use of key terms in different historical contexts should be explained before further discussion to avoid possible confusion.

Eight Banners, Banner People, and the Manchus

The Eight Banners have been regarded as the foundation of the Qing empire. The earliest banners developed as a military organization with the rise of the Late Jin dynasty (1616–1636) and the expansion of the early Qing dynasty in Manchuria. Nurgaci (1559–1626), the founder of the Late Jin, established the first four banners in 1601 to mobilize his tribal soldiers and the Jurchen people in Manchuria. In 1635, Hong Taiji (C: Huang Taiji; 1592–1643), Nurgaci’s son, renamed all the Jurchens “Manchu” (M: Manju); the following year, he announced the establishment of the Qing dynasty. The Han and Mongolian banners came into being between 1635 and 1642. (The complicated internal categories of banner people will be discussed in chapter 1.)

The Eight-Banner system included three major divisions (Eight-Banner Manchu, Eight-Banner Mongol, and Eight-Banner Hanjun) and several much smaller units. Banner people were governed differently from civilians in various aspects such as taxation, household registration, legal codes, economic welfare, and marriage. Although they held different origins (including Manchu, Han, Mongol, Sibe, Solun, and others), they shared the inheritable banner identity and were called “qiren” 旗人 (banner people). From the early 1950s, the PRC has allowed all former banner people and their descendants to register their ethnic identity as Manzu.
For the past decades, the banner system also has been regarded as a Manchu institution that made banner identity Manchu or enhanced Manchu identity (Elliott 2001, 15; Wang 1990). Such a view has been questioned in acknowledgment of the non-Manchu divisions (such as the Mongol and Han banners) in the Eight Banners. What has been long overlooked is the question of the self-identification of banner people: Did Mongol and Han banner people usually identify themselves as “Manchu,” or did the Manchus ever call Hanjun or Mongol bannermen “Manchu” during the Qing? Undoubtedly, the banner system institutionalized banner identity for all banner peoples, and the social effects of banner identity could be called ethnic or quasi-ethnic. But when the Manchus called themselves “banner people” during the Qing, banner people of non-Manchu origin did not identify themselves as Manchu, nor were they identified as Manchu by the court, their Manchu banner fellows, or all those outside the banners.

In addition, banner people in Manchuria experienced a different relationship with Han civilians. In fact, the Manchu-Han dichotomy is insufficient for a study of banner people in Manchuria or Manchuria’s importance to Manchu community. Manchurian banner people were a group of borderlanders institutionally, temporally, and spatially repositioned in and redefined by different political entities.

By the high Qing, Manchu identity was promoted by the Qing rulers. But the re-formation of the Manchu community was not crystallized or completed by the banner system or the emperors’ promotion of the Manchu Way. A study of the dynamics between self-identification and designation by others (including the state) in the local setting of Manchuria will help us understand how an ethnic group reconfigured and represented its identity during a process of state succession that transformed its homeland into a borderland.

**Banner, Manchu, and Manzu Identities**

Banner identity in the Qing has left a pervasive legacy for the contemporary Manzu community. The question of whether banner people were Manchu, or had developed Manchu ethnicity based on the institutional structure of the banners, is too simplistic. When the labeling and practice of Manchu identity are bound only with ethnicity and the contemporary Western understanding thereof, other dimensions of identity practice and changes of identifiers in the identification process may be missed. Thus it is important to examine the Chinese importation, conception, and use of the term and identity “minzu” in Chinese scholars’ studies of the Manchus in the early twentieth century and of the Manzu in the PRC period.

Here, I will use “ethnicity” as a concept avant la lettre to refer to the
imagined marks or practiced identities—cultural and institutional—that were used for identification. I will use “the Manchus” or “Manchu ethnic group” to refer to those who self-identified or identified as “Manchu” (Manzhou 滿洲, Manren 滿人) before both the terminology and identity category of ethnicity were adopted in China. I will use “Manzu 滿族” to refer to the ethnic group that was officially recognized by the PRC in 1952 and whose categorization is based on the ethnohistory and cultural features of the Manchus of the Qing. The term “banner people” (qiren 旗人) in this book generally refers to all the people who were registered with the Eight Banners in the Qing, those who had registered with the Eight Banners but who lost the affiliation in the early ROC, and the descendants of the former two groups who were still identified or self-identified as “banner people” after the banner system collapsed. As to the period between 1912 and 1952, it is difficult to choose one single proper term to refer to the people under discussion, due to both historical misunderstandings and contemporary ambiguities in the state’s categorization of population and people’s self-identification in those years. In this book, therefore, varied names are chosen for different situations and periods—according to the usage of certain group names by different historical actors and institutions at specific moments.

Minzu: Ethnic Group or Nationality?

Scholars in China studies sometimes use the term “nationalities” to refer to minzu, non-Han ethnic groups in China, following the English translations of early PRC texts. I prefer to use “ethnic group” for two reasons. First, the Manchus did not have the political or military power to claim territorial sovereignty over Manchuria for nation building during this period. Second, the use of “ethnic group” avoids confusion with the national identity defined legally as “nationality,” guoji 国籍. The question of whether to use “ethnic group” or “nationality” to refer to the Manchus also reflects an underlying political stance. As Uradyn Bulag argues, the shift during the past decade from “nationality” to “ethnic group” in the English translation of minzu reveals a political move to divest minorities of their claims to land (Bulag 2003, 223–246).

In China, a similar view holds that the CCP’s establishment of ethnic autonomous regions in fact promotes not “ethnic equality” but “ethnic privilege,” at the cost of “citizens’ equality.” Various lenient policies toward some ethnic groups enhance to a certain degree the development of a “national consciousness” among those who are seeking independence from the PRC (Ma 2004). But the contemporary Manzu community is not well known for ethnonationalist activity and sentiment, which is a major reason for its being less newsworthy in the eyes of the Western media. In addition, an “ethnic consciousness” of being dif-
ferent from the Han was the major criterion upon which the PRC recognized the Manzu as a minority group in the 1950s, as other Stalinist criteria for defining ethnicity—such as common language, customs, and economic life—were regarded as disappearing among the Manchus since the Qing. In recent years, “zuqun”族群, a Chinese translation adopted by scholars in Taiwan, is recommended as a better term than “minzu” for designating the ethnic groups in the PRC.

_Hanhua (Hanization) and Zhongguo hua (Sinicization/Chinofication)_

For years, the view of the Manchus’ Hanization (Hanhua 汉化) was well accepted not only in China, but also in U.S. academia. During the past two decades, the American scholars of the “New Qing History” group have developed insightful research into questions about how Manchu rulers had tried to reject Hanhua to maintain their cultural boundaries and ethnic consciousness. Evelyn Rawski and Ho Ping-ti debated Sinicization in the early 1990s. Ho focused on the Manchus’ adoption of Han cultural and institutional practices, while Rawski emphasized the non-Han features of Qing institutions as well as the continuity and perseverance of Manchu ethnicity. Chinese scholars from the PRC in the 1990s used “Hanhua” with caution when discussing the Manchus’ relations with the Han people, and they emphasized the Manchus’ integration (ronghe 融合) with the Han.

After the debate between Rawski and Ho, it became almost politically incorrect to talk about the Manchus’ Sinicization. The New Qing History shows that the conventional view of the Manchus’ Hanization missed a key point: “Ethnic consciousness” is essential to the continuity of Manchu ethnic identity, as exemplified in Crossley’s analysis of the three generations of the Suwan Gïwâlgiya clan. Because scholars who reject the Sinicization theory mostly based their views on studies of early- and high-Qing history before the concept of a Chinese nation became popular in China, their definition of Sinicization often includes both “becoming Han” and “becoming Chinese.” Criticism of the Sinicization theory that emphasizes the Manchus’ Hanization is often based on equating the Chinese with the Han, the confluence between the Qing’s political identity and the Manchus’ communal identities, and the mixing of “Zhongguo rentong”中国认同 (or “Zhongguo hua”中国化) and “Hanhua” in Chinese-English translation. Both “China” and “Chinese” have been problematic English terms used to refer to all the historical regimes that once ruled the PRC’s territory and to their multiethnic populations. As a result, some deductive conclusions were drawn: The Manchu empire was not necessarily a part of Chinese history. But Hanhua does not mean becoming Chinese (Zhongguo ren 中国人), but becoming Han. When Sinicization is interpreted as “becoming Chinese,”
The compositions of the “Chinese” civilization and the political entity called China in English have changed dramatically over the past centuries, but the English name—China—has not. To add more to the understanding of the Manchus’ relations with China and the Han people, I suggest that from the late Qing on, although some Manchus rejected the national identity assigned by the ROC, the Manchus’ identity reconfigurations did involve a process of becoming Chinese, Zhongguo hua. In those years, the concepts of “nation” and “nation-state” were imported, and the Manchus had to redefine “them” and “us” in accordance with the changing intellectual, social, and political environments inside and outside their empire. This process, which perhaps should be called Chinafication instead of Sinicization, has been closely related to the regime’s efforts at reforming legal codes and administrative institutions to form a modern state in accord with the rules of international politics. The late-Qing government, though regarded as the enemy of the Chinese nation by the Han ethnonationalistic revolutionaries, also began to redefine its subjects as Zhongguo ren, the Chinese.

Ethnicity is not the only way of classifying people. Other ways—identifiers and categories—have similar socially consequential effects beyond or across ethnicity, such as religion, profession, race, native place, education, region, and nation. In different historical periods and social contexts, some identities are regarded as more significant, or practiced as more definitive, than others. Since the early twentieth century in East Asia, national identity has often been considered more authoritative and legitimate than ethnic identity (despite the imaginary and constructed nature of both) in contests over sovereignty and for defining political affiliation and loyalty in evaluations by governments or historians of ethnonationalists’ efforts at territorial independence from an existing nation-state.

In studying the recent history of the contemporary Manzu, scholars cannot overlook the interactions between the legacy of Qing banner identity and the acceptance of Chinese national identity. It is impossible to determine exactly when the Manchu rulers began to see Zhongguo as their country. However, their self-identification as the emperors of not only the Manchus but a multiethnic empire by the high Qing established an important cornerstone upon which the late-Qing emperors identified their regime as China (Zhao 2006). Several examples from the late Qing are revealing: The most significant mark of the Qing court’s Chinafication came when the Qing dynasty issued the first Nationality Law that defined all its subjects to be “Zhongguo ren” (Chinese nationals) in 1909 (Shao 2009a). In many treaties signed between the Qing court and foreign powers, “Zhongguo” was used as an
interchangeable name for Da Qing Guo 大清国 in the Chinese version of the treaties. An edict of 1879 requested that the “Troops of Foreign Weapons” (Yangqiang dui 洋枪队) stop using foreign-language slogans and adopt “Chinese language and characters” (中国语言文字), not “Han” language.26 In a 1909 Manchu-Mongol-Han textbook that was compiled to teach the Mongols Han language, its twenty-third lesson, titled “China” (M: Dulimbai gurun; C: Zhongguo), concluded with a question: “As we are Chinese, how could we not love China?”27 This study thus examines the Manchus’ re-identification with broader communities at both the subnational and national levels.

Methodology: A Historian in the Field

The topics covered in this book require archival research on four different regimes, research conducted by combing through possible sources for information on an ethnic group that was overlooked in, or even obliterated from, both the political agenda and official documents in most of the years addressed here. Enlightened by previous research on the Manchus and Manchuria, I proceed from the point at which most earlier scholars in Manchu studies stopped: the early twentieth century. Primary sources that were previously inacessible now allow scholars to pose new questions and offer more comprehensive answers to old ones. In addition to conventional archives, local materials of various genres from Manchuria as well as personal narratives from local communities are also employed.

Published and unpublished texts and data in Chinese, Japanese, English, and Manchu are used in this book. They include recently declassified archives, government documents, local newspapers and magazines, scholarly writings, investigation reports, fieldwork notes, annals of local history, private genealogical records, memoirs, diaries, legal documents, and Manchu websites. Archives on the Manchus in Manchuria are difficult to trace for three reasons: the loss of archives during the civil and international wars in the Northeast during the first half of the twentieth century, the inconsistency of government institutions during the years of state succession, and the marginalization of the Manchus from the 1910s to the early PRC years. Because this project covers four regimes in Manchuria, traveling to multiple archival sites from the Northeast to Jiangnan was necessary. Furthermore, simply arriving at a local archive did not guarantee a fruitful trip. Some topics in the fields of ethnology and borderland studies are still regarded as politically sensitive, which means that access to certain archives was limited.28

This project also incorporates personal narration from interviews
in towns and villages in Northeast China, Beijing, and the United States from 1999 on. In Northeast China and Beijing, most interviewees were people who lived and worked in Manchoukuo. The children of the Manchoukuo period are now in their seventies and eighties, and their memories come from the last generation that lived through the periods of state succession. Manzu interviewees came from various walks of life, ranging from elite scholars to illiterate housewives. These experiences in the field led me away from studying the discourse or cultural boundaries of ethnicity and toward examining the “hard” boundaries, the practice of identification, and the consequences of identities at multiple levels in domestic and international settings. Information obtained from the fieldwork reveals that the application solely of theories of boundary construction to studies of the Manchu community in twentieth-century Manchuria would be problematic. Contemporary ethnic and national communities are not constructed out of thin air, but are the products of historical processes whereby different political powers compete for control, and by which individuals redefine their place in a newly re-formed community. The interactions between self-identification and other-perception, as well as the changes in identifiers and identification categories available from the late Qing to the PRC, all need to be studied.

In addition, when oral resources are mobilized for history research, criticism about precision arises. As Gwyn Prin noticed in his discussion on oral history, personal reminiscence—one type of oral sources—“is oral evidence specific to the life experiences of the informant,” which “makes possible small-scale group histories...and geographically small-scale work” (2001, 126, 139). Prin advocated the use of personal reminiscence in history research because it permits a scholar to “be a full-range historian” and a non-historian who possesses “second record” to contribute to history research (141–142). In the field I discovered problems that arose from both the history of the Manchus and daily life of the Manzu. Accordingly, I chose the research methods necessary to examine the historical roots of contemporary problems concerning ethnic communities, and thus chose not to be limited by disciplinary demarcations between history and anthropology, or those between the subfields of Chinese history periodized by 1911, 1937, or 1949. My experiences with local communities and people cannot all be included in this book (sometimes due to the political sensitivity of the information or to the reluctance of the informants), but they led me to define the temporal frame of this book differently from the periodization commonly employed by the modern national histories of China or Japan. If I had followed the conventional periodization of modern Chinese history, conducting archival research on materials from one specific re-
gime would have been less exhausting or demanding than gathering materials from different regimes. But those well-accepted marks of historical periods—1912 for the ROC, 1932 for Manchoukuo, and 1949 for the PRC—cannot reasonably account for the different stages experienced by the Manchus in their ethnohistory. The years of 1907 and 1985 are not conventional period markers familiar in Chinese or East Asian history, but they are fundamental to our understanding of the multiple pasts of the Manzu today. They are also the turning points that mark the transformation of Manchuria from an empire’s homeland to a contested borderland in interacting local, national, and international historical contexts.

Research methodology for historians in the field deserves more discussion than what this section allows. In brief, my work in the field was not an oral history study, but an effort to seek different angles from those found in archival reading and missed links between the present and the past. The importance of such an effort lies in both the process and its result. Being on the research site and communicating with research subjects are necessary parts of ethnic and historical research, because research on identity is about not only state policies, but also their impact upon people; about not only individuals’ self-identification, but also people’s responses to state’s and others’ perception; not only identities, but also identifications; not only written texts, but also life experiences. Ethnic and national communities are not simply constructed by the state or elite intellectuals, nor are they two social phenomena to be presented separately on different pages of history; rather, they are historical products of intertwined processes that are lived by individuals and groups whose histories are not confined within the artificial disciplinary demarcations made by scholars.

Increasingly, scholars recently have crossed the disciplinary divide between anthropology and history to gain a more comprehensive perception of the continuities and connections between the past and the present in the practice of identity by people and the strategies of identification by the state. The “state” is not a faceless, abstract unity, but multiple interacting parties, including politicians, administrative agents, interest groups, and scholars, that together represent and practice state power. State-ascribed ethnic identity usually embodies planned ramifications for the economic welfare, political rights, and educational opportunities of an ethnic group. That often reflects how policymakers, intellectuals, and the populace understand the group’s relationship to the community at large. To avoid inherent limitations imposed by a lineal national history of the PRC, this book uses the periodization marks significant in Manchu history to help frame analysis and organize chapters.
This study is positioned at the intersection of the disciplines of borderland and ethnic studies and through a triangulation of perspectives. The reciprocal relationship between these fields and the interactions among states, ethnic communities, and individuals make a consideration of them together historically necessary and analytically essential. Therefore, the following chapters are organized chronologically, but not exactly along the timeline of the Qing-ROC-PRC transition customarily adopted. As this book traces the historical roots of the contemporary problems faced by an ethnic people in different historical “presents,” earlier experiences or events are recalled in discussions of identification issues in later years. In addition, the statehood of different regimes also overlapped in reality in certain years, such as that of the ROC and Manchoukuo from 1932 to 1945, and that of the ROC and PRC from 1949 on. Thus, the complexities in the interactions between Manchuria’s territoriality and Manchu identity require a shifting of chronological order in certain places.

Part I, titled “Remote Homeland, Lost Empire,” focuses on the years of the Qing-ROC transition. Existing historical studies ground my research into the experiences and theoretical patterns of this transition. To add another dimension to our understanding of this key event, the chapters in Part I focus on one problem: How did the legacy of the Qing preservation of Manchuria as the Manchus’ land influence people’s view of how Manchuria’s territory belonged to the ROC and the Manchus’ membership in the Chinese nation? Chapter 1 examines how Manchuria became the poetic but remote homeland for the Manchu rulers in Beijing and for banner people in China Proper. It analyzes the discrepancies and tensions between the rulers’ rhetoric of preserving Manchuria as their sacred home place and the de facto marginalization—if not maladministration or neglect—of the region in the late Qing. Chapter 2 begins with a study of the differences in the experiences of banner people in Manchuria and in China Proper with the 1911 Revolution. It then studies changes in the late-Qing and post-empire territoriality of Manchuria interacted with state population recategorization and the consequent identity confusion to which the Manchus and other banner people were subjected during the years of state succession.

Part II, titled “Contested Borderland, Redefined Identity,” deals with the Manchus’ dilemma amid the contestation between the Japanese colonial empire, the Chinese nationalist regime, and the Communist regime. Chapter 3 examines how Manchu ethnohistory and Manchuria’s historical relations with China Proper were mobilized by the Japanese to legitimize the statehood of Manchoukuo, and by the
Chinese to delegitimize the same regime. Chapter 4 studies the status of the Manchus in the formation, dissemination, and reception of the “ethnic harmony” rhetoric in Manchoukuo in comparison to similar ethnic rhetoric in the ROC during the Sino-Japanese fight over Manchuria. Chapters 5 and 6 study how the ROC and PRC governments and their scholars have worked collaboratively to recategorize the Manchus as a subnational community and redefine Manzu communal membership, as reflected in Chinese ethnological and borderland studies.

While the previous chapters focus on the interaction between territoriality and identity as defined by the state, as well as the top-down impact of these forces upon an ethnic community, Part III, titled “Experiencing Borderlands, Re-understanding Homelands,” treats ethnicity as practiced and history as experienced. Chapter 7 foregrounds individuals’ experiences with community reconstruction and identity redefinition amid the borderland contestation over Manchuria. It examines how Aisin Gioro Xianyu, a Manchu princess who tried to obtain Japanese support for the restoration of the Manchu regime, failed to negotiate her ethnic and national identities at her trial for treason after the Japanese empire collapsed. Xianyu’s trial reveals the political consequences for individuals of the deterritorialization of Manchuria and the ethnification of the Manchus. Chapter 8 is based on memoirs, autobiographies, and local gazetteers collected from Manchuria from the late Qing to the PRC, as well as on interviews with Manzu people. It analyzes the initiatives taken by individuals and local elites in rewriting their ethnohistory in general and in revising their narratives about the Qing empire and Manchoukuo in particular.

In the conclusion, observations and questions about the recent development of the Manzu community in Northeast China are presented with historical reflections upon the experiences of the Manzu’s ancestors and expressions of their homeland in the years of state succession during the tumultuous twentieth century.