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SANTA CRUZ

**OPENING UP THE NORTHWEST:  
REIMAGINING XI'AN AND THE MODERN CHINESE FRONTIER**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

HISTORY

by

**Jeremy Tai**

June 2015

The Dissertation of Jeremy Tai  
is approved:

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Professor Noriko Aso

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Tyrus Miller  
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## ABSTRACT

Opening Up the Northwest: Reimagining Xi'an and the Modern Chinese Frontier

Jeremy Tai

This study examines how different ideological regimes in modern China have all responded to crises, whether economic, territorial, or spiritual, by extending state power and accumulation strategies into the northwestern corner of the country. Histories of modern China have typically turned to eastern centers of state and colonial power, especially Beijing and Shanghai, for an index of economic development and modernity. Yet, Northwest China, a seemingly remote backwater, has figured prominently in political economy over the long twentieth century. The dissertation demonstrates how economic planning in China was born not in the People's Republic, but during the Great Depression when the Northwest became the first of a series of focal regions created to transfer capital and population from the coast. "Opening Up the Northwest" was followed by three campaigns launched in the name of correcting regional inequality in the People's Republic of China: the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), the Third Front (1964-1980), and, most recently, "Open Up the West" (2000-present). The dissertation contributes a cultural and historical perspective to conversations among geographers and political scientists about the growing importance of regional economies as subnational scales of territorial organization. Through a panorama of state campaigns in the Northwest representing fascist, communist, and neoliberal ideologies, this work shows how Chinese leaders

have garnered national support by constructing fantasies that speak to the cultural and environmental particularities of the region. State-builders have often inspired a nation to head to the Northwest by likening this region to “virgin land” in the American West or reminding their audiences of past glory along the ancient Silk Road. Beyond the gaze of state authorities, my work delves into complex experiences inflected by gender, class, and ethnicity in the regional center of Xi’an. A closer look at these historical moments reveals the realities of underdevelopment, the dispossession of ethnic minorities and agricultural communities, orphans forcibly recruited for settler colonialism, traditional virtues imposed on “Modern Girls,” the criminalization of refugees and migrants, and accelerated environmental degradation. This work contributes to the growing literature on everyday life in China, using the local histories of Xi’an and its environs to show how the material instantiations of modernity always fall short of the desires they engender no matter where they take place.



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First and foremost, I must express my deepest gratitude to my advisors Gail Hershatter and Emily Honig for their continuous support, dedication, and grace during my graduate school career. In 2008, Gail challenged me to “leave the frozen climes of [New York City]” and “take the Pacific leap.” After making the unthinkable cross-country move, I quickly became enchanted by the redwoods and beaches in Santa Cruz, and found a vibrant intellectual community working in cultural studies. I will forever be grateful to Gail and Emily, who I had long admired as gender historians, for training that made me attentive to sources and good writing. In particular, I will never forget Gail loading her research methods students into her Toyota Siena minivan to head to the Chinese collections at Stanford and Berkeley, not to mention the care she took each time she wielded her infamous red pen, which has now taken digital form. Through their examples, I also learned the important life lesson of how to be intellectually generous and, in the process, I found a world of teaching and learning opportunities.

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history, history from below, gender, race, colonialism, and capitalism outside of my field in their seminars. Alice Yang deserves special mention for her marvelous direction of our MA writing seminar, which allowed me to first start thinking about this project. Outside of the department, I also had the great fortune of taking courses on Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism, aesthetics, and urban studies with Gopal Balakrishnan, Angela Davis, Wlad Godzich, Donna Hunter, Daniela Sandler, Vanita Seth, Dick Terdiman, and Megan Thomas. I continue to be inspired by the intellectual audacity that I discovered in my readings and discussions with all of these professors.

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The many friends and colleagues that I met in Santa Cruz, Xi'an, and Taipei have provided an indispensable network of support. I have learned so much from

years of conversation with Nellie Chu, who has been my co-conspirator ever since I visited as a prospective student, as well as Ana Candela, Erin Gray, Amy Lee, and Dustin Wright – all of whom brilliantly mix their wisdom, knowledge, and political convictions with a sense of humor. Fang Yu Hu has been a constant source of cheer and encouragement ever since we started our program. I was also glad to have shared thought-provoking seminars, conferences, and writing groups with Cassie Ambutter, Melissa Brzycki, Christine Bunting, Shelly Chan, Stephanie Chan, Mario Diaz-Perez, Meg Eppel Gudgeirsson, Kelsi Evans, Keegan Finberg, Gao Xiaofei, Evan Grupsmith, Peter Leykam, Sarah Mak, Fritzie de Mata, Yajun Mo, Stephanie Montgomery, Elizabeth Mullins, Ben Pietrenka, Marty Rizzo, Brian Shott, Niki Severson, Amanda Shuman, Noel Smyth, Eric Stanley, Nishita Trisal, Colin Tyner, and Polly Zavadvivker.

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## Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, the Chinese Communist Party has channeled billions of dollars of state, private, and foreign investment from coastal cities to the northwestern corner of China, transforming the ancient Silk Road corridor into the crossroads of gas pipelines, rail lines, and engineering projects aiming to move mountains and redirect rivers. Through the “Open Up the West” (西部大開發 Xibu da kaifa) campaign, officials have sought not only to balance out regional disparities that have arisen within China in recent decades, but also quell rising ethnic tensions and make available much-needed energy resources. To garner popular support, the Chinese state has promised that global capitalism will remake this backwater in no less a dramatic fashion than nineteenth-century frontier expansion in the American West.

While its scale is unprecedented, the contemporary western development strategy is actually not the first time in the history of modern China that national attention and economic resources have been redirected to the hinterland. Over the long twentieth century, the Chinese state has set its sights on the Northwest whenever regional inequality has been identified as the central barrier to national well-being. Long before reform-era leaders set out to Open Up the West, economic and territorial crises in eastern regions during the 1930s forced the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) to refocus its energies on frontier development under the rubric “Opening Up the Northwest” (開發西北 Kaifa Xibei).

This study offers a critical account of how uneven development has been a common springboard for vastly different ideological regimes to extend state power and accumulation strategies into peripheries in times of crisis. Histories of modern China have typically turned to eastern centers of state and colonial power, especially Beijing and Shanghai, for an index of economic development and modernity. For adherents of modernization theory, these political and economic powerhouses are the vanguard of capitalist development while other regions catch up. Dependency and world-systems theorists have shown, however, that the modern metropolis is not a freestanding exemplar of capitalism but founded on frontiers and colonies that serve as vital sites of resource extraction.<sup>1</sup> While backwater regions are often left to underdevelopment,<sup>2</sup> geographers have also illustrated how modern states and capital flee to the margins whenever existing centers of accumulation become embroiled in crisis.<sup>3</sup> This study shows how Northwest China – a region long identified with poverty, backwardness, desolation, and inaccessibility – has figured prominently in political economy over the long twentieth century as a site of economic underdevelopment and a refuge for the nation in moments of territorial, economic, and spiritual crises.

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<sup>1</sup> Andre Gunder Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); Samir Amin, *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> For an account of underdevelopment in modern China, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984); David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York: Verso, 2006), Chapter Four.

In fact, economic planning in China was born not in the People's Republic, but during the Great Depression when the Northwest became the first of a series of focal regions created to transfer capital and population from the hard-hit coast. "Opening Up the Northwest" was followed by three campaigns that redistributed human and economic resources to correct geographical unevenness in the People's Republic of China: the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), the Third Front (1964-1980), and, most recently, Open Up the West (2000-present). A long historical lens makes it possible to compare how Chinese leaders and thinkers have conceptualized the Northwest within political economy during the Nationalist (1927-1949), Maoist (1949-1978), and reform (1978-present) eras.

This study examines state visions for the Northwest from the perspective of Xi'an, the regional center that has often been the centerpiece of development campaigns. The interior city offers a richly documented yet nearly unexplored perspective into the historical experience of development and underdevelopment in China's interior. Over the past few decades, historians have produced a significant body of scholarship in the subfield of urban China through the analytical prisms of labor, subaltern populations, the public sphere, mass media, city administration, consumption, nationalism, and urban identities.<sup>4</sup> However, the breadth of our

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<sup>4</sup> Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); Gail Hershatter, *The Workers of Tianjin, 1900-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986); David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Wang Di, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space,*

knowledge has remained limited, with most studies typically focusing on national capitals (e.g., Beijing, Nanjing) and semi-colonial port cities (e.g., Shanghai, Tianjin). Notable exceptions have helped scholars step outside of their comfort zone and explore the unevenness of historical change with other cities, but very little scholarship exists on the urban history of Xi'an or any of the other cities of Northwest China.<sup>5</sup>

This neglect by modern China historians can undoubtedly be attributed to the way any mention of Xi'an typically conjures up fantastic images of its predecessor Chang'an, the capital of thirteen dynasties – most notably, the Qin (221-206 BCE), Han (202 BCE-220 CE), Sui (581-617), and Tang (618-907). Outside of China, Xi'an is perhaps best known for being home to the First Emperor's Terracotta Army. Not surprisingly, most of the scholarly and popular literature on Xi'an has been confined to histories of early and medieval China. Yet, the modern city was the setting for

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*Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Madeleine Y. Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese urban reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000); Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Lu Hanchao, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Wen-Hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Joseph W. Esherick, ed., *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999); Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton: 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Peter Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity: Reconstructing Suzhou, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*; Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu*; Wang Di, *The teahouse: small business, everyday culture, and public politics in Chengdu, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity*; Eduard Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China: the central Shaanxi since 1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Pierre-Etienne Will, "Xi'an, 1900-1940: From Isolated Backwater to Resistance Center," in Billy K. L. So and Madeleine Zelin, eds. *New Narratives of Urban Space in Republican Chinese Cities: Emerging Social, Legal, and Governance Orders* (Boston: Brill, 2013),



important events of national significance, serving as a refuge for the imperial court during the Boxer Uprising in 1900, a major locus of anti-Manchu activity during the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, a crucial battleground between regional warlords and nationalist armies in 1926, and, most famously, the stage for the kidnapping of Chiang Kai-shek by his own generals in the Xi'an Incident of 1936. This dissertation aims to move beyond the romantic veneer of Chang'an by situating the modern history and cultural representations of Xi'an, the "Gateway to the Northwest," within the context of development campaigns in the region. It asks the following questions: How have state-led development campaigns in Northwest China been shaped by the crises of the long twentieth century? How has the Chinese state mobilized the national imagination for its development campaigns in Northwest China? What are the experiences in the city of Xi'an that cannot be captured by the fantasies of benevolent state-building?

### *The Origins of Economic Regions in Modern China*

The Northwest offers a prime example of region making. It was only identified, demarcated and then administered as a region within a modern nation-state in the twentieth century, with reverberations still felt today. Anthropologist G. William Skinner turned the China field's attention to regional scales three decades ago when he argued that the economic transactions of late imperial China were structured by eight physiographic macroregions rather than a single national market

system.<sup>6</sup> Geographer Carolyn Cartier has since warned against the uncritical and ahistorical application of Skinner's macroregions in regional studies as a simple locational device rather than an analytical tool.<sup>7</sup> A region, like the nation, is never a category that is already there, but rather is a product of state ideology and practices that is subject to historical change. Popular accounts typically consider Northwest China in light of its history as a locus of early empires, embodied in the ruins of the ancient capital Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), the Buddhist grottoes of Dunhuang, and other Silk Road relics. The "Western Regions" (*Xiyu*) eventually fell out of the Chinese cultural orbit, but Qing historians have recounted how geopolitical competition spurred the imperial court's eighteenth-century military conquest of Central Asia and its nineteenth century pacification of Muslim rebellions in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang.<sup>8</sup> Existing scholarship has explained how the territorial boundaries of the nation-state were established, but, aside from a few exceptions,<sup>9</sup> the production of other spatial scales that structure the country from within has received less scrutiny by historians. Yet, regions are important objects of historical study, especially as capitalist accumulation in our current age takes form in subnational

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<sup>6</sup> G. William Skinner, *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Cartier, *Globalizing South China* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, "The Great Policy Debate in China, 1874: Maritime Defense vs. Frontier Defense," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 25 (1964-1965): 212-228; James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Ho-dong Kim, *Holy War in China: the Muslim rebellion and state in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: the Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and their Provinces: the Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1964-1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

scales (e.g., special economic zones) and supranational scales (e.g., free trade agreements) rather than at the scale of the nation state.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese state began to divide the nation into economic regions in the 1930s when the Guomindang conceptualized the Northwest as an untapped frontier of vast lands and rich natural resources that could enable economic self-sufficiency. While borderlands studies have often treated the 1930s “Northwest Question” (*Xibei wenti*) as emblematic of territorial anxieties following the Mukden Incident in 1931,<sup>11</sup> it was also intertwined with the rise of state planning in China. Economic histories of this period have illustrated how the central government in Nanjing participated in a global shift from laissez-faire to state planning in the Depression era in order to stave off the effects of the world economic crisis.<sup>12</sup> Import substitution would have been unthinkable at this time without raw materials, especially cotton, of the Northwest to provide for coastal mills.

Crossing the 1949 divide, this study affirms that national crises in Maoist China too provided the occasion for state-builders to turn to Northwest China, but with an important difference in the ways that the relationship between “coastal” and “inland” regions – one of Mao Zedong’s “ten cardinal relations” – was envisaged.

For the Guomindang, an economic equilibrium in the country would be achieved

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<sup>10</sup> Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Justin Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan: The Politics of Northwestern Terrirory and Development in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Boston: Brill, 2005); Justin Tighe, “From Borderland to Heartland: The Discourse of the North-West in Early Republican China,” *Twentieth-Century China* Vol. 35, No. 1 (November 2009): 54-74; Lin, Hsiao-ting, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers: A Journey to the West* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Margherita Zanasi, *Saving the Nation: Economic Modernity in Republican China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Tomoko Shiroyama, *China during the Great Depression: Market, State, and the World Economy, 1929-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

through the exchange of “surplus” coastal populations for “surplus” raw materials in the Northwest. In contrast, Maoist redistributive policies aimed to spread industry evenly throughout the country, channeling state investment to industrial centers closer to sources of raw materials and fuel. As studies of the “Third Front” campaign to build military bases inland have illustrated,<sup>13</sup> skilled workers were resettled from large coastal enterprises when wars in neighboring nations made the concentration of industry in eastern areas vulnerable to military attack seem more irrational.

In the reform era, any notion of self-sufficiency has been stripped away as China opens up to foreign capital. Officials conceive of private and foreign investment as a vehicle for social stability in the Northwest. In contrast to wartime migration and Maoist redistribution, the relocation of foreign manufacturing plants to western China has now been driven by cheaper labor costs, proximity to new consumer markets, and economic incentives offered by provincial governments competing against one another.

### *Fantasies of Cultural Revival and Conquering Nature*

Through a panorama of state campaigns in the Northwest representing fascist, communist, and neoliberal ideologies, Chinese leaders have garnered national support by constructing fantasies that speak to the cultural and environmental particularities of the region. Recent reassessments of the Guomindang have firmly situated its anti-

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<sup>13</sup> Barry Naughton, “The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior,” *China Quarterly* No. 115 (September 1988), 351-386; Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Judd C. Kinzley, “Crisis and the Development of China's Southwestern Periphery: The Transformation of Panzihua, 1936-1969,” *Modern China* Vol. 38, No. 5 (September 2012): 559-584.

Communist sentiment, call for national self-sufficiency, restoration of traditional virtues, and rationalization of everyday life as part of a global fascist current.<sup>14</sup> This study argues that the Northwest Question and the right-wing desire for a national revival (*minzu fuxing*) shaped one another. After Sun Yat-sen popularized the notion that the Northwest was “virgin land” akin to the American West because of its vast and unpopulated lands, right-wing ideologues in the 1930s called for settler colonialism in this locus of ancient empire-building. In their view, mass migration to the Northwest would allow a nation that had been led astray by capitalist and communist forces to get back to its agricultural and civilizational roots.

Chinese leaders did not model economic development in Northwest China after industrialized cities in the east, but looked to transnational paradigms and means of value production other than industrialization. Taking the unruly growth and squalid conditions of Shanghai as a foil, Guomindang planners in Xi’an turned to Ebenezer Howard’s idea of the garden city, a rationally planned community that combined the benefits of both the village and the metropolis. To contain the effects of industrialization on the city’s outward appearance, right-wing officials stressed the creation of green space to alleviate the already harsh environment of the Northwest and implemented historic preservation to showcase national treasures for bourgeois tourists.

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<sup>14</sup> Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*; Margaret Clinton, *Fascism, Cultural Revolution, and National Sovereignty in 1930s China*. Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University (Ann Arbor: Proquest/UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2009); Brian Tsui, *China’s Forgotten Revolution: Radical Conservatism in Action, 1927-1949*. Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013).

Later, Communist authorities would mobilize historical artifacts and natural charm in the service of industrialization. In accordance with Soviet urban planning, the Maoist regime aspired to turn factories into gardens by surrounding massive factories with afforested areas. The Communist Party was no less enthusiastic about archaeological discoveries in the Northwest, such as the discovery of the Neolithic Banpo village in 1953 and the First Emperor's Terracotta Army in 1974, though it would juxtapose these sites against factories to inscribe national progress onto the built environment for socialist subjects in the region.

The culture and environment of the Northwest have since been resituated on the world stage, with Silk Road relics now symbolizing a shared history between the West and China. Local people are often invested in economies built around historic sites and nature reserves that attract domestic and international tourists. The politicization of nature and culture is not new to China, but has long been used by the modern state in its attempt to reorder built environments and social life in the Northwest – whether spiritual, socialist, or cosmopolitan.

### *Everyday Life*

This study moves beyond the gaze of state authorities to delve into complex experiences inflected by gender, class, and ethnicity in the regional center of Xi'an. Modernization efforts such as urban planning, infrastructural improvements, and industrialization during the Nationalist, Maoist, and reform periods have certainly left their mark on urban space in Xi'an. Yet the state is an inadequate lens for fully

understanding how the inhabitants of Xi'an experienced the shifting orders of power and value structuring the redevelopment of their social environment. Numerous scholars have argued that modernization is never fully realized no matter where it takes place, pointing to everyday life as the site where these contradictions become apparent.<sup>15</sup> A closer look at state campaigns in the Northwest reveals the realities of underdevelopment, the dispossession of ethnic minorities and agricultural communities, orphans forcibly recruited for settler colonialism, traditional virtues imposed on "Modern Girls," the criminalization of refugees and migrants, and environmental degradation. These contradictions illustrate the inadequacy of official accounts, which often project a one-dimensional image of backwardness onto this region, in capturing the uneven effects of these development campaigns in the Northwest.

### *Outline of Dissertation Chapters*

Chapter One, "The Origins of the Northwest Question in China," considers arguments made during the Great Depression by the nation's leading right-wing ideologue Dai Jitao, former secretary to Sun Yat-sen and head of the Examination Yuan overseeing civil servants. Dai Jitao responded to a massive trade deficit and perceived civilizational decline by calling on the nation to migrate en masse from the

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<sup>15</sup> Harry D. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*; Madeleine Y. Dong and Joshua L. Goldstein, *Everyday Modernity in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); Peter G. Zarrow, ed. *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

coast – a bastion of decadence, foreign influence, and radical politics – to its “old home” in the Northwest. Commentators compared Dai Jitao’s desire for a national revival in this locus of ancient empires to Mussolini’s attempt to revive the Roman Empire. The idea of a homecoming in the Northwest attracted the attention of the celebrated aviatrix Lin Pengxia, who called on overseas Chinese communities facing discrimination in the Americas and Southeast Asia to apply pioneering skills honed abroad to their own country’s frontiers.

Chapter Two, “The Geography of National Defense,” shows how the production of geographical knowledge in the 1930s led technocrats, such as the eminent geologist Weng Wenhao, to cast doubts on colonization schemes for the Northwest. The Northwest had long been an object of scientific study, but American soil scientists working in China at this time warned against the expansion of agriculture on semi-arid lands, pointing to the Dust Bowl unfolding in their own country. Moreover, faced with the prospect of industrial warfare with Japan, technocrats rejected the idea of agriculture as the basis of national well-being. Nationalist aspirations for Northwest China were only challenged further when the region became home to a major Chinese Communist base area and Uyghur independence movements in the 1930s. In preparation for full-scale war with Japan, the central government focused on the building of irrigation systems and transportation networks to stabilize this drought-prone region and create, not a center of cultural rebirth, but a backwater supplier of cotton and fuel.



Chapter Three, “Everyday Life in 1930s Xi’an,” examines mass culture and modern life in this former imperial stronghold just as the Guomindang were taking control of the city in the early 1930s. Years of political instability and famine made Xi’an famous for wretched poverty, so outsiders were shocked to find a vibrant commercial center furnished with movie theaters featuring Charlie Chaplin films, opera houses, teahouses, department stores, and brothels. This chapter challenges the narrative of linear progress found in existing histories of Xi’an that focus on modernization initiatives, particularly the arrival of the Longhai Railroad in 1934. Drawing from descriptions of Xi’an society found in a local newspaper, this chapter illustrates how Nationalist officials, in keeping with the romantic images of “Opening Up the Northwest,” attempted to reform modern girls and dandies into honest, simple, frugal, and diligent citizens in the lead-up to war.

Chapter Four, “The Garden City and the Eyesores of Xi’an,” explores how the transformation of local space into the Guomindang’s “Western Capital” (Xijing) in the 1930s and 1940s was guided by conservatives’ desire to fend off the overcrowding, poverty, crime, filth, and moral degeneracy found in industrial cities like Shanghai. Inspired by the garden city idea, they sought to create a lush cityscape dotted with symbols of high culture that would alleviate the harsh natural environment and counter the detrimental effects of industrialization, thereby transforming dispirited locals into honest and upright citizens. Once the Second Sino-Japanese War began in 1937, however, the problem of unruly growth that officials had sought to circumvent through urban planning materialized in the continuous

influx of refugees from neighboring Henan province, who gathered in shantytowns outside of the railroad station. In the 1940s, officials responded to the perpetual housing crisis by weeding out less educated and less financially stable groups of refugees, dispersing them to agricultural colonies in Shaanxi and Xinjiang or deporting them back to their villages.

Chapter Five, “Xi’an as a Producer City,” examines the new social spaces that Maoist redistributive policies introduced to Xi’an. During the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), Xi’an was home to 18 out of the 156 large industrial projects developed nationally in cooperation with the Soviet Union. The city received many of the work units that were split off from major coastal enterprises, including Jiaotong University and cotton mills that formed the city’s “Spinning and Weaving Town” (*Fangzhicheng*). Later, the Third Front campaign assigned hundreds of national defense projects to Xi’an, bringing another wave of industrial relocation and growth to the city. Scholars have noted the Communist attempt to transform “consumer cities” into “producer cities” in order to discourage a parasitic relationship with the countryside. The Maoist push for local production was especially relevant for Xi’an, which had been notoriously underdeveloped in the Nationalist period through the exchange of raw cotton for textiles from the coast, but it came at the cost of the surrounding countryside.

The epilogue uses recent developments in Xi’an to illustrate overall findings on regional development and its contradictions over the course of these three regimes. In 2005, Xi’an passed a plan to “revive the imperial capital,” which has since taken

form in the multi-billion-dollar Daming Palace National Heritage Park. Officials hope it will become yet another of the city's UNESCO world heritage sites, and they advise attendees about the importance of historic preservation to the local economy. Moreover, state-led environmentalism was made visible locally in the 2011 International Horticultural Exposition. Through a newly built ecological district covering over one thousand acres, officials introduced visitors to eco-capitalism that would usher in a greener future for the Northwest. Regional development continues to operate through the idiom of culture and nature, albeit with “internationalization” (*guojihua*) and the flows of global capitalism in mind.

Overall, these chapters demonstrate how the Chinese state's contemporary designs for the Northwest are only the latest of a series of development campaigns launched in the region since the 1930s. The Chinese state has responded to crises over the long twentieth century by identifying new economic frontiers to open up in western China and projecting fantasies that often obscure the uneven effects of its intervention in this region. A long historical lens also reveals, in spite of these commonalities, that the Guomindang, Maoist, and reform-era regimes articulated very different visions for the Northwest, illustrating how it is important to bear in mind what ideology is wielding the frontier concept.

## Chapter One

### The Origins of the Northwest Question in China

In 1934, Chinese official Zhang Jingyu (張靜愚) asked his compatriots to imagine relocating from the country's prosperous treaty ports to its long-forsaken interior. "What if you were to say in passing that you were heading to the Northwest? 'Friend, could it be that Western-style buildings have gotten so stuffy and Western-style food has gotten so tiresome that you want to head off to the Northwest to dwell in caves [*yaodong* 窯洞] and eat grass roots [*caogen* 草根]? Otherwise, what kind of madness has overtaken you?'"<sup>1</sup> For Zhang, such an unheard-of act would have only provoked severe ridicule by cosmopolitans living in Shanghai or Tianjin. His distinction between signs of colonial modernity and primitive subsistence illustrated how the prospect of venturing to the Northwest transgressed common-sense notions of progress that had become inscribed onto the national landscape. In the national imagination, a journey to the Northwest became synonymous with traveling back in time.

In Zhang's view, however, the desolation of the Northwest in modern times arose largely from the draw that big cities had on public desire. Luring the well-off with the promise of indulgence and the destitute with the possibility of living off the scraps of others, coastal cities had become disproportionately prosperous while the

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<sup>1</sup> Zhang Jingyu, "Henansheng Jiansheting Zhang Tingzhang xuwen (Preface by Chief Zhang of Henan Provincial Department of Public Works)," in Zhang Renjian, *Kaifa Xibei Shiye Jihua* (Industrial Plan for Opening Up the Northwest) (Beiping: Self-published, 1934).

countryside and the interior increasingly wavered on the brink of collapse. From the perspective of overall national well-being, Zhang disparaged individuals acting in pursuit of personal gain by asking who ultimately benefitted from uneven development. “All in all, everything directly or indirectly flows into the hands of international capital and imperialism. Yet the average citizen still wants to make headway in industry and commerce in these emergent cities shrouded in the economic influence of international imperialism. How is this not tantamount to idiotic nonsense?” According to Zhang, the Japanese military invasion of Manchuria on September 18, 1931 sounded “a death knell that woke up compatriots from their pipe dreams.” Soon afterwards, cannon fire from the month-long war that broke out in Shanghai on January 28, 1932 “shook the hearts of each person.” With their country’s Northeast and Southeast regions embattled, Chinese nationals at last decided to embark on a sensible road to national salvation, calling on each other to head to the villages and to the Northwest. The abundant resources in the Northwest that had lain untouched would support the work of long-term resistance against further imperialist encroachment and enable a national revival.<sup>2</sup> At the time, Zhang was serving as the head of public works in Henan province, located in the Central Plains, so he was undoubtedly invested in the development of interior China. But his was only one in a chorus of voices calling for the development of the Northwest as a means to regaining national sovereignty.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The common search for relief from national and global historical crises led quite a few intellectuals in Nationalist China (1927-1949), like Zhang, to turn away from the industrialized cities that many of them called home, and to look toward Northwest China – a frontier plagued by bandits, natural disasters, and inaccessibility – for a “way out” (*chulu* 出路). Existing scholarship has taken the proliferation of books, journals, study societies, travel diaries, and government inspection tours dedicated to “Opening Up the Northwest” (*Kaifa Xibei* 開發西北) in the 1930s as simply emblematic of a nationalist desire to retain control over the “Northwest” after the loss of the “Northeast.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter moves beyond the conventional focus on territorial anxiety in borderland studies to consider how this discourse also spoke to the concurrent crisis of capitalism. I demonstrate how the so-called “Northwest Question” (西北問題 *Xibei wenti*) was an intellectual reorientation intertwined with the pursuit of a command economy and the articulation of Chinese fascism.

The historical and political underpinnings of the Northwest Question are clearly expressed in texts produced before the Japanese military occupation of Manchuria by two intellectual progenitors: Sun Yat-sen, the revolutionary who founded the Republic of China in 1912 and the Guomindang in 1919, and Dai Jitao, a leading conservative ideologue in the government that Sun’s followers established in 1927. Even though the two were at one time close comrades, nearly a decade of historical changes between their writings on the Northwest led them to articulate

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan*, 92; Tighe, “From Borderland to Heartland”; Lin, *Modern China's Ethnic Frontiers*, Chapter Three.

vastly different visions. Sun attempted to lure foreign investors after the First World War with a proposal for economic development in China, showcasing a planned extensive nationwide railroad system modeled after the North American transcontinental lines that would function to open up “virgin land” in Northwest China. Sun’s proposal ultimately failed to attract investment, but Dai brought the idea of Northwest development back to national attention again as the Great Depression began to unfold. Dai believed that opening up the vast lands and rich resources of the Northwest should serve as a means of sheltering the nation from foreign influence by consolidating power over the weakly held borderlands, balancing out the lopsided development skewed toward treaty ports, reviving China’s agrarian base, and reducing imports.

Economic histories of the Depression era in China have illustrated how the central government in Nanjing participated in a global shift from laissez-faire to state planning.<sup>4</sup> Dai’s writings suggest that the call for a self-supporting national economy (*minzu jingji* 民族經濟) would have been unthinkable without the Northwest. But Dai went further to also consider the region in light of its history as a locus of early Chinese empires, calling on patriotic Chinese from the decadent Southeast, which he suspected as a bastion of Communism, to return to their long-forsaken ancestral homeland in the Northwest and rediscover the innate spirit of Chinese civilization. This conceptualization of the Northwest as a frontier latent in spiritual and material

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<sup>4</sup> Zanas, *Saving the Nation*; Shiroyama, *China during the Great Depression*.

richness was crucial to Dai's articulation of fascist concepts that he shared with global right-wing movements.

What Sun and Dai held in common was the conceptual practice of region-making in their pursuit of a developed China and an ethnic renaissance (*minzu fuxing* 民族復興). Discussions of the Northwest Question demonstrate that economic regions in China did not simply exist by virtue of their geography, but were conceived as units of political economy, with existing divisions and future needs in mind. The simultaneous production of regional and national scales evinced in Sun and Dai's work is frequently lost in borderland studies and economic histories. The intellectual ramifications of the Northwest Question have received little attention in existing scholarship, almost certainly because it appears in print as a succession of grandiose schemes often criticized by its own contemporaries for producing no more than "empty talk." Government archives show that the vast majority of plans for regional development, like much Nationalist economic planning at the time, went no further than initial surveying because of limited state resources. And yet, discussions of the Northwest Question had profound and unexpected effects on broader intellectual discourses in Nationalist China. Overseas Chinese were included in discussions of frontier development to suggest that the self-supporting national economy had a transnational dimension. The travel account of Lin Pengxia, a female pilot who returned from Singapore and self-financed an inspection tour to the Northwest, demonstrates how Sun's and Dai's efforts to imagine region-making



converged in the figure of the overseas Chinese pioneer who would help develop the national homeland by applying expertise gained in the frontiers of foreign countries.

*Sun Yat-sen: World History as a Frontier Story*

Sun Yat-sen's *The International Development of China* (1920) was the *locus classicus* for proponents of frontier development in 1930s China, providing an unmatched source of both inspiration and authority. This English-language text was written in the wake of the First World War in an effort to attract foreign investment to China.<sup>5</sup> At the time of publication, the country was divided territorially among warring military cliques that exercised power independent of the weak central government in Beijing – a period of decentralization that is conventionally referred to as the warlord era (1916-1928). Sun established a government in Guangzhou with southern militarists to rival Beijing, but soon lost power and withdrew into political retirement in the French Concession in Shanghai.<sup>6</sup> Intellectuals in Beijing, such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi, were engaged in critiques of Confucian virtues, traditional ways of life, and classical Chinese language as part of the New Culture Movement.

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<sup>5</sup> Its ideas were first introduced in *The Far Eastern Review* (Shanghai) and later translated into Chinese as *Industrial Development Plan* (*Kaizhan Shiye Jihua*). The Chinese version was later known in short as *Industrial Plan* (*Shiye Jihua*). It was also called *Material Reconstruction* (*Wuzhi Jianshe*), part of a trilogy of texts by Sun Yat-sen called *Plan for National Reconstruction* (*Jianguo Fanglüe*) that also included *The Doctrine of Sun Yat-sen* (*Sun Wen Xueshuo*), or *Psychological Reconstruction* (*Xinli Jianshe*), and *The First Step Towards Democracy* (*Minquan Chubu*), or *Social Reconstruction* (*Shehui Jianshe*). Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, Ltd., 1920); Sun Wen, “*Jianguo Fanglüe zhi yi Kaizhan Shiye Jihua* (One Plan for National Reconstruction: Industrial Development Plan),” *Jianshe (Reconstruction)* Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 1919):1-23; Vol. 1, No. 3 (October 1919): 39-48; Vol. 2, No. 2 (March 1920): 95-103; Vol. 2, No. 3 (April 1920):105-110; Vol. 3, No. 1 (December 1920): 143-166; Sun Yat-sen, “The International Development of China: A Project to Assist the Readjustment of Post-Bellum Industries,” *The Far Eastern Republic* Vol 1, No. 5 (February 1920): 5-11.

<sup>6</sup> Marie-Claire Bergere, *Sun Yat-sen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 277.

The student demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts that comprised the May Fourth Movement expressed dismay at Western liberalism and outrage at the warlord-controlled Beijing government for its complicity in the outcome of the Treaty of Versailles, which transferred German privileges in Shandong province to Japan in 1919. While he shared the widespread disappointment with the failure of the Republic, Sun had a different understanding of the root cause of China's problems. His focus on poverty as a problem that could only be solved through economic development set him apart from canonical Beijing thinkers. In his willingness to grant a role to foreign capitalists in the nation's economic affairs, he was further estranged from the anti-imperialist sentiment of the time. Even though *The International Development of China* deviated from prevailing intellectual currents, the significance of Sun's text was that it was the "first attempt to design the integrated economic development of a unified China" – a forerunner of both Nationalist and Communist practices of economic planning.<sup>7</sup> In addition to laying a foundation for future state planning, *The International Development of China* provided one important narrative tool that later Chinese writers would utilize to consider the Northwest: a frontier story.

Sun Yat-sen anticipated that military warfare among the Great Powers would give way to trade warfare, with China as its battleground. The future of China could

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<sup>7</sup> William C. Kirby, "The Nationalist Regime and the Chinese Party-State," in Merle Goldman and Andrew Gordon, eds., *Historical Perspectives on Contemporary East Asia*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 216-217; William C. Kirby, "Engineering China: The Origins of the Chinese Developmental State," in Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 138.

pose “a greater bone of contention than the Balkan Peninsula.”<sup>8</sup> After the war, Sun believed the Great Powers would have to shift production from the manufacture of war supplies back to supplying comforts and luxuries. In Sun’s formulation, however, these countries’ domestic markets could never provide a sufficient outlet for production driven by millions of demobilized soldiers rejoining the workforce. The need to find a dumping ground for the overproduction of commodities would only be greater given the historical trend towards the unification and nationalization of industries – a “second Industrial Revolution” that increased productivity much more than the previous replacement of manual labor by machinery.<sup>9</sup> For Sun, China seemed to be the only outlet able to accommodate imports of such scale.<sup>10</sup> His sentiments were echoed a year later by U.S. Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer of St. Louis, who introduced the China Trade Act (1922) and argued for the re-establishment of the Open Door Policy during the Washington Conference (1921-22). Dyer wrote, “China

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<sup>8</sup> Sun was not alone in comparing China to the Balkans. See, for example, James D. Bush, “The Pacific Conference,” *China Review* Vol. 1, No. 2 (August 1921): 60-63. “The Pacific has been, in fact, the storm center of international troubles for the past half century or more. The Armageddon of 1914 had its source of trouble not in the Balkans of Europe but in the greater Balkans of China and its adjoining territories.”

<sup>9</sup> According to Sun, the burgeoning trusts in America demonstrated that modern economies tended toward concentration rather than competition. Trusts eliminated waste and cut down expenses so they could provide the public with cheaper products than individual producers, who were eventually driven out of the markets. Sun admitted, however, that so long as a trust remained in private hands, it could easily raise the price of its articles as high as possible once competitors were eliminated. Therefore, it was necessary to nationalize them for the public good. In contrast, Lenin characterized the nationalization of monopolies as characteristic of imperialism, “the highest stage of capitalism,” which would intensify the struggle for colonies and spheres of influence. Rather than world peace, Lenin found that state-monopoly capitalism led to “an unprecedented growth in its bureaucratic and military apparatus in connection with the intensification of repressive measures against the proletariat both in the monarchical and in the freest, republican countries.” Vladimir I. Lenin, *State and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1932); Vladimir I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism: a popular outline* (New York: International Publishers, 1939). Richard Louis Edmonds has pointed out the contradiction in Sun’s writing between the nationalization of industries and the role he assigns to foreign investment. Richard Louis Edmonds, “The Legacy of Sun Yat-sen’s Railway Plans,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 111 (Sept. 1987): 421-443.

<sup>10</sup> Sun, *The International Development of China*, i-ii.

now constitutes about the only free territory which exists in the world for the development of the overseas commerce of the United States.”<sup>11</sup>

Rather than becoming a dumping ground, Sun proposed that China instead serve as an “economic ocean for absorbing surplus capital.” He suggested that whatever surpluses remained from the war industries be directed towards the much-needed development of this “stagnant” country that had not even entered the first stage of the Industrial Revolution. Machinery and technical experts should be used for development programs in northern, eastern, and southern China. In each of these three regions, great ports with the capacity of New York Harbor and an extensive railroad system would be built to open up hinterlands rich in resources to the world. Sun modeled his economic development program directly after the nineteenth-century frontier expansion in the American West. In fact, he even suggested to foreign audiences that China be understood instead as “another New World in the economic sense.”<sup>12</sup>

For Sun, previous frontier expansion in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Argentina did not serve as a mere analogy for opening up the backward economy of China, but had an actual existing counterpart in the “virgin lands” of northwestern China. Like Fredrick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, Sun envisioned the settlement of pioneers in space devoid of indigenous peoples. A Chinese transcontinental railroad would enable ten million laborers without work in congested provinces along

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<sup>11</sup> L. C. Dyer, “Secure ‘Open Door’ Before Disarmament,” *China Review* Vol. 1, No. 6 (December 1921): 369-370.

<sup>12</sup> Sun, *The International Development of China*, iv-v.

the southeastern coast and in the Yangzi river valley to apply their otherwise wasted energies toward the colonization efforts in Mongolia and Xinjiang. He also responded to contemporary calls for troop demobilization by suggesting that millions of soldiers, who would otherwise starve or turn to banditry, could also be resettled into agricultural colonies in the borderlands.<sup>13</sup> Read in another light, Sun's railway schema would enable proletarianization: populations identified as surplus could now be introduced into wage work for capitalist operations on the frontier.<sup>14</sup>

Sun's preoccupation with making China commensurable in a world history of frontier opportunism was the founding moment for the "Northwest" (*Xibei* 西北) as a unit of capitalist development in China. Historians of Qing China have demonstrated how the northwest steppe had long been a borderland, where competing empires would adapt institutions and mobilize resources for war, trade, and diplomacy. C. Patterson Giersch draws from the work of Richard White to characterize the Qing frontiers as middle grounds, "places of fluid cultural and economic exchange where acculturation and the creation of hybrid political institutions were contingent on local conditions."<sup>15</sup> It is precisely the ambiguity of middle grounds that the Qing conquest of Zungharia in the eighteenth century sought to eliminate and replace with a clearly defined border and subjects in the northwest. The stabilization of this frontier zone,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 10-11, 87, 116-126.

<sup>14</sup> Quoting Foucault, Mark Driscoll argues in the case of Manchuria that "railroads answered the question of population with the fixed capital to 'attach workers firmly to the production apparatus, to settle them or move them where it needs them to be – in short, to constitute them as a labor force.'" Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895-1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 26.

<sup>15</sup> C. Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3-4.

however, was never permanent, exemplified later in the nineteenth-century rivalry between the British and Russian empires for influence over Central Asia, otherwise known as the Great Game.<sup>16</sup> If the “Western Territories” (*Xiyu*) had previously been treated as a territorial limit available for geopolitical competition and conquest, scholars have demonstrated that the Qing state incorporated the peoples of Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet on very different terms than their subjects in China proper. Justin Tighe has argued that when “North-West” (*Xibei*) appeared earlier in Qing documents, the term typically referred to “outer dependencies” (*waifan* 外藩) in the North and West, as distinct from “inner territory” (*neidi* 內地) subject to direct administrative rule.<sup>17</sup> In Sun’s text, the Northwest was still understood in opposition to China Proper, but this corner of the country was now identified as an untouched region that would accommodate the excesses of capitalism (i.e., unemployment) and facilitate further expansion of markets. The prevailing image of the Northwest that Sun left his followers thus reflected the homogenizing impulse of capitalism. Without any clear-cut geographical definition of the Northwest by Sun, who was primarily interested in identifying transportation lines, the region would confound writers struggling to reach a consensus over its boundaries in the 1930s and 1940s.

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<sup>16</sup> For accounts of the Qing logistical network that laid the basis of unprecedented territorial expansion and administration in the outer provinces, see Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces*; Peter Perdue, “The Qing State and the Gansu Grain Market, 1739-1864,” in Thomas G. Rawski and Lillian M. Li, eds., *Chinese History in Economic Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Millward, *Beyond the Pass*; Perdue, *China Marches West*; Giersch, *Asian Borderlands*.

<sup>17</sup> Tighe, “From Borderland to Heartland,” 58.



Map 1. Locating the Northwest. Writers in the 1930s and 1940s usually included Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang – the five provinces that officially became the Northwest Administrative Region under the People’s Republic of China. However, there was also frequent mention of Shanxi, Suiyuan, Chahar, Xikang, Outer Mongolia and Tibet.

Sun’s enthusiasm for the transformative power of railroads stemmed from his experience as director-general of railway planning during the early years of the Republic. He even claimed to have discovered a new law in railway economics, based largely on the principle of comparative advantage. Later writers often noted Sun’s observation that “a railway between a densely populated country and a sparsely settled country [would] pay far better than one that [ran] from end to end in a densely

populated land.”<sup>18</sup> If the terminal points of the railway had similar settlements and economic conditions, supply and demand would be mostly undermined by local self-sufficiency. Traffic would be limited to a few luxury goods and well-off passengers. The opening of frontiers by railroads, however, would facilitate the exchange of foodstuffs and raw materials from newly settled lands for manufactures produced in developed areas. Like the North American transcontinentals, the railroad in this case too would precede and then create demand.<sup>19</sup> In order to present an image of unspoiled borderlands to Western investors, Sun disregarded significant historical precedents, namely, the Qing conquest of Central Asia and railways that already had been built as concessions to imperialist powers, such as the South Manchurian Railway and the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>20</sup>

In Sun’s account, opening up Chinese land and markets would historically be a repetition of past frontier expansions overseas but, at the same time, it would also be an exception in the history of capitalism. To assuage any fears of unfair competition by foreign industries, Sun argued that the new markets created in China would be big enough for both domestic and foreign products.<sup>21</sup> The class war between labor and capital evinced in other counties was also not possible in China, given its

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<sup>18</sup> Sun, *The International Development of China*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of railroad concessions, see Y. Tak Matsusaka, “Japan’s South Manchuria Railway Company in Northeast China, 1906-34,” in Bruce A. Elleman and Stephen Kotkin, eds., *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2010). If the borderlands did have an unspoiled appearance, historian Jonathan Schlesinger has argued that this pristine nature resulted from conservation measures taken by an activist Qing court to preserve ethnic homelands in Manchuria and Mongolia. Jonathan Schlesinger, *The Qing Invention of Nature: Environment and Identity in Northeast China and Mongolia, 1750-1850*, Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Sun, *The International Development of China*, iii-iv.



backwardness. He writes, “Our laboring class, commonly known as coolies, are living from hand to mouth and will therefore only be too glad to welcome any capitalist who would even put up a sweat shop to exploit them.”<sup>22</sup> A climate of international cooperation could thus be secured not only in the realm of diplomacy with Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations but also economically through Sun Yat-sen’s proposal that would effectively end commercial and class wars. Not only had economists rejected Adam Smith’s belief in competition as a basis of an economic system, a notion they considered wasteful and ruinous, but post-Darwinian philosophers had shown that human evolution was driven by cooperation, not struggle and fighting.<sup>23</sup> Sun ultimately left aside the questions of productive forces unleashed by the war and post-bellum labor in Europe. In spite of having pointed to wasted labor and land, he also failed to explain how regions came to be underdeveloped. In his eagerness to present a blank canvas for investment, Sun simply pointed to non-development as the source of want and starvation.<sup>24</sup> Calling on China as a latecomer to “[follow] the direction already charted by western pioneers,”<sup>25</sup> Sun’s vision leaves no room for redemption in indigenous culture or abstention from development.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>26</sup> For a less optimistic account of development at this time, see Bertrand Russell’s discussion of the industrialization of China at the Chinese Social and Political Science Association (*Zhongguo Shehui Zhengzhi Xuehui*) in December 1920. Russell admits that the case against industrialism in China is very strong. “As one travels up the Yangtse, it is not too much to say that the only ugly objects one sees are those due to industrialism, from factories and oil-tanks down to sardine-tins.” Industrialism “forces men, women, and children to live a life against instinct, unnatural, unspontaneous, artificial” and, in response, the resulting “listless and trivial” populations seek delight in murder and war. Considering the threat of foreign domination, there is no option to remain nonindustrial. Like Sun, Russell appeals to internationalism but in the form of a strong international authority for the control

Sun was responding to an immediate challenge: a four-power consortium established after the war to curtail international competition for preferential rights in China (i.e., spheres of influence) and coordinate all foreign lending for Chinese public enterprises, including railroad construction.<sup>27</sup> At the peace talks in Paris, the U.S. delegation, led by the financial advisor Thomas Lamont of Morgan and Company, initiated negotiations concerning this “little league of nations” with bankers from France, England, and Japan. Americans sought to prevent Japan from unilaterally seizing financial control in China while Japanese representatives proposed exemptions for Manchuria, Mongolia and Shandong to maintain exclusive rights.<sup>28</sup> In spite of his fame overseas, Sun was in no position to negotiate on behalf of the country. Moreover, the American legation in Beijing and William Redfield, Secretary of Commerce, raised doubts about funding a program of such scale when Europe was in need of rehabilitation and China was unlikely to be able to repay interest charges.<sup>29</sup>

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and distribution of raw materials. Despite their fierce expressions of nationalism, he believes Communist states would be far more likely than capitalist states to realize this goal because of the theory of internationalism. The best path for China to avoid foreign oppression and evils of capitalism would seem to be a communist one. Yet, China is no position to avoid dependency on Russia. China is also not as isolated in the world as Russia, so it can look to the U.S. and Great Britain for assistance and then pursue the gradual acquisition of Chinese industry by Chinese. Bertrand Russell, “Industry in Undeveloped Countries,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 1921, 787-795. For the Chinese translation, see Bertrand Russell, “Wei Kaifa Guo zhi gongye (Industry in Undeveloped Countries),” *Dongfang zazhi (Eastern Miscellany)*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1921): 7-18.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Hodges, “The Financing of So-Called Backward Countries of the East,” *China Review* Vol. 1, No. 6 (December 1921): 354-360.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Metzler, *Lever of Empire: The International Gold Standard and The Crisis of Liberalism in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 125-129; also, see “The China Consortium,” *The Nation* Vol. 111, No. 2886 (October 27, 1920): 464.

<sup>29</sup> Sun, *The International Development of China*, Appendices II and III.

In the end, the new consortium that excluded Chinese participation in meetings was never officially recognized in China. Its goals, however international in spirit, were roundly rejected as a threat to Chinese independence. According to the American journalist William Hard, “No known political group in China is willing to be financed as a government by the Consortium. The four great foreign governments – American, British, Japanese and French – have put the Consortium at the door of China. The Consortium holds the door. It cannot open it because the Chinese do not like its method of opening it. What we have is the Consortium as door-keeper and the door fast shut.”<sup>30</sup> Chinese intellectuals would debate the borrowing of foreign capital to open up rich resources for years to come. For example, one of the opponents of Sun’s approach was Dong Shijin, a Cornell-trained expert in agricultural economics who headed the rural improvement department of the China International Famine Relief Commission.<sup>31</sup> He warned that Sino-foreign cooperation was merely a euphemism masking unequal power relations, not unlike the so-called cooperation between England and India or that between Japan and Korea. Dong called into question the comparison that supporters of foreign lending, like Sun, drew between nineteenth-century American history and present-day China. He reminded readers that the wealth, power, organization, social order, and international standing of the U.S. far surpassed that of China. Those who were impatient and unwilling to conserve the rich resources inherited from the nation’s ancestors for future generations

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<sup>30</sup> William Hard, “Urges Americans to Leave Consortium to Develop Trade with Chinese.” *China Review* Vol. 1, No. 6 (December 1921): 395.

<sup>31</sup> Paul B. Trescott, *Jingji Xue: The History of the Introduction of Western Economic Ideas into China, 1850-1950* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 2007).

underestimated the risks involved in foreigners financing Chinese development. Dong cautioned that all would be forfeit once these loans, which were doomed from the start, failed. For Dong, it was not because of unscrupulous practices that China should refrain from foreign loans, but rather because of the serious threats they ultimately posed to national sovereignty – in his words, it is not a matter of “starving oneself after having choked” (*yin ye er fei shi* 因噎而廢食), but rather of “enduring thirst so as to avoid poisoned wine” (*ren ke er bi zhen* 忍渴而避鳩).<sup>32</sup> No loans would ever be granted by the group of financiers in spite of pressures from their governments – though the Beijing government would independently receive loans from Japanese bankers in violation of the consortium’s agreements.<sup>33</sup> While Morgan and Company found a much more promising borrower in Japan, Sun found his patron in the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Enthusiasm for the *International Development of China* waned until it was codified as part of official ideology under the new Nationalist government which drew legitimacy from their late leader by interring his body in Nanjing, reproducing his image in official publications, and pursuing the implementation of his ideas.

*Dai Jitao: The Leaky Goblet and the Logic of Chinese Fascism*

Even as intellectuals paid homage to Sun Yat-sen, it was his former secretary Dai Jitao who largely determined the conservative political conceptualization of the

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<sup>32</sup> For example, see Dong Shijin, “Lun Zhongguo buyi yi waizi kaifa fuyuan (Why China Should Not Use Foreign Capital to Open Up Rich Resources),” *Dongfang zazhi* (*Eastern Miscellany*) Vol. 21, No. 10 (May 25, 1924): 135-136.

<sup>33</sup> “Where is the Consortium?” *China Review* Vol. 1, No. 2 (August 1921): 56.

<sup>34</sup> Metzler, *Lever of Empire*, 127, 168-171.

Northwest Question in Nationalist China. After Sun's death in 1925, Dai Jitao became recognized as the most prominent critic of the Communist bloc within the Guomindang. He had been one of the first Chinese intellectuals to attempt a Marxist analysis of Chinese history but, like Sun, found class struggle unsuitable for China. Overall material scarcity, in his assessment, made any attempt at the redistribution of wealth nonsensical.<sup>35</sup> In the summer of 1925, Dai published two controversial pamphlets. *The Philosophical Basis of Sun Wenism* [Sun Yat-senism] pitted the foreignness of historical materialism against Sun's "The Three Principles" which, in Dai's interpretation, were grounded in traditional Chinese ethics. Particularly, class conflict ran contrary to the principle of "mutual social responsibility" (*shehui liandai zhuyi* 社會連帶主義). Likewise, *The National Revolution and the Guomindang* rejected the idea of class struggle as harmful to a revolution premised on interclass solidarity. Dai went further to accuse Communist members in the Guomindang of being parasitic, disloyal, disruptive, and factious.<sup>36</sup> The alliance became increasingly strained as Communists organized radical peasant associations and labor unions rivaling Nationalist organizations, finally culminating in the coup on April 12, 1927 and the "White Terror" that drove Communists underground and into the countryside.

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<sup>35</sup> Dai Jitao, "Cong jingji shang guancha Zhongguo de luanyuan (The Causes of Unrest in China from an Economic Point of View)," *Jianshe (Reconstruction)* Vol. 1, No. 2 (September 1919): 1-19. According to historian Arif Dirlik, Nationalist writers "stood Marx on his head... in arguing that class consciousness and organization were the means not to class conflict but to class reconciliation. They viewed socialism, accordingly, as a preventative against revolution." Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 126.

<sup>36</sup> Dai Jitao, *Sunwen zhuyi zhi zhaxue de jichu (The Philosophical Basis of Sun Wenism)* (Guangzhou: Minzhi shuju, 1925); Dai Jitao, *Guomin geming yu Zhongguo Guomindang (The National Revolution and the Guomindang)* (Shanghai: Jitao banshichu, 1925); Herman Mast III and William G. Saywell, "Revolution Out of Tradition: The Political Ideology of Tai Chi-t'ao," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 34, No. 1 (November 1974): 73-98.

The right-wing effort to eliminate the Communists from mass politics was the foundational moment of what historian Brian Tsui has recently termed a “conservative revolution.”<sup>37</sup>

The occasion for Dai’s attention to Northwest China was the outbreak of war between Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and the militarist Feng Yuxiang in October 1929. The Guomintang had brought the divisive warlord era to a close a year earlier by reunifying China under a single central government based in Nanjing. Yet behind the illusion of unity lay political relationships fraught with tension and subject to frequent negotiation. Not only was the Guomintang deeply divided internally between left- and right-wing factions, but alliances with regional warlords controlling areas outside of its eastern base of power also started to break down that year. Feng commanded the Guominjun, a powerful modern army that was popularly known as the “Northwest Army,” which dominated the provinces of Chahar, Suiyuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu. Hostilities between rival military and political factions soon escalated into the Central Plains War of 1930. In response to Feng’s mutiny, Dai gave a series of talks that put the Northwest Question at the forefront of the Nationalist agenda for national reconstruction (*jianguo* 建國). At the time, Dai was serving as the head of the Examination Yuan, the governmental organ responsible for the selection and supervision of civil servants. In 1930, he founded the journal *New Asia*, dedicated to pan-Asian unity against Western imperialism, which featured articles on the Chinese

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<sup>37</sup> Tsui, *China’s Forgotten Revolution*.

borderlands.<sup>38</sup> His speeches and essays on the Northwest were published in the government bulletin *Central Party Affairs Monthly, New Asia*, and the oft-cited edited volume *The Northwest* (1932).<sup>39</sup> In them, Dai explained the need for the central government to continue the work of the Northern Expedition by stamping out yet another instance of warlord factionalism in order to deliver on a republic not just in name but in reality (*ming fu qi shi* 名符其實).<sup>40</sup> He accused Feng Yuxiang and other “barbaric counterrevolutionaries,” including the Chinese Communists who attempted to capture the city of Changsha in July 1930, of obstructing national unification, economic reconstruction, and cultural revival.

Dai attempted to raise public concern about the Northwest by urging his audience to look beyond what they already knew -- that the region was the poorest, harshest, most backward, and most oppressed place in China. In recent years, the Northwest had suffered the most from natural and man-made disasters.<sup>41</sup> By 1929, severe famine had been devastating most of the provinces in northern and northwestern China for two years. Conditions in the hardest hit provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Suiyuan were classified by the Nanjing government as grade A, which meant that two thirds of the counties in those provinces had been ravaged by drought, floods, insects, hailstorms, military, and banditry over successive years.<sup>42</sup> In

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 5 in Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Dai Jitao, ed. *Xibei (The Northwest)* (Shanghai: Xin Yaxiya Xuehui (New Asia Study Society), 1931).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Lillian M. Li, *Fighting Famine in North China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s-1990s* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007), 304

Gansu, missionaries had estimated that half of its population of 7.5 million people was doomed.<sup>43</sup> Common burial pits in Xi'an and other places in Shaanxi, each with a capacity of ten thousand bodies, had already been filled, and new ones had to be dug.<sup>44</sup> Inspection teams to Shaanxi reported disaster victims roaming throughout the countryside, abandoning their homes and fields. Survival tactics included selling off building materials and the consumption of chaff and tree bark, but most shocking was the reported sale of wives by husbands and sons by fathers.<sup>45</sup> Yet, Dai shared a widely held conviction that the misery that had arisen in these faraway places over the years had less to do with nature and more to do with the abuses enacted by corrupt officials, warlord troops and bandits. After all, the golden age of Chinese civilization had taken place precisely in the Northwest region thousands of years earlier. Dai blamed Feng Yuxiang for contributing to the region's decline into barbarism by pocketing relief funds that the central government had solicited domestically and overseas and further obstructing aid by cutting off transportation lines to hamper foes.<sup>46</sup>

While the principle that famines resulted from negligent rulers rather than natural circumstances had a long history in China, Dai was actually reiterating contemporary criticisms by foreigners of misgovernment by warlords, particularly

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<sup>43</sup> "Chinese Provinces Tell of Starvation," *The New York Times*, July 21, 1929, 52.

<sup>44</sup> "Bicknell Report Stirs Nanking to Famine Aid: Conditions in Shensi Province Described as Horrible – 100 Die Daily," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1929, E7.

<sup>45</sup> Liang Jingchun, "Jiangnan minshi yu Xibei zaihuang (Food in Jiangnan and Famine in the Northwest)," *Shishi yuebao (Current Affairs Monthly)* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1929): 87-102.

<sup>46</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 7, 16, 30-31.



Feng Yuxiang.<sup>47</sup> In *China: Land of Famine* (1926), Walter Mallory identified political causes of starvation in Republican China, including abolition of the Qing dynasty's public granaries, misappropriation of relief funds, decay of conservancy works, exorbitant taxes, marauding bandits, bloated militaries, as well as the failure to forcibly move excess population.<sup>48</sup> As the devastation from famine continued to unfold in 1929, excerpts of Mallory's report were translated into the long-standing journal *Eastern Miscellany* and a book review was published in the newly established *Journal of Sociology* (*Shehui Xuekan* 社會學刊).<sup>49</sup> Hallet Abend, a special correspondent of the *New York Times*, reported in April 1929 that twenty million people in the most seriously affected areas were suffering from a "political famine... a dangerous food shortage brought about by official extortion, bad government, looting due to civil war or by wholesale banditry due to the breakdown of government." Abend specifically pointed to Feng Yuxiang as contributing to the political famine by levying a 100 per cent railway freight tax on all goods entering or leaving Henan and Shaanxi a year earlier, making it impossible for cotton growers in the two provinces to exchange crops for imported foodstuffs to stave off hunger. To pay taxes that were being collected years in advance, farmers planted poppies instead of cotton and wheat on arable land. Even if relief grain were delivered to the designated starving towns and villages, he predicted that soldiers would likely sell off

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<sup>47</sup> For a *longue duree* examination of the Chinese state's efforts at famine prevention, see Li, *Fighting Famine in North China*.

<sup>48</sup> Walter H. Mallory, *China: Land of Famine* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1926). Chapter Three.

<sup>49</sup> W. H. Mallory, "Zhongguo zaihuang zhi yuanyin (The Causes of Famine in China)," *Dongfang zazhi* (*Eastern Miscellany*) Vol. 26, No. 5 (March 10, 1929): 58-60; Wu Jingchao, "China: Land of Famine (Walter H. Mallory)," *Shehui xuekan* (*Journal of Sociology*) Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1928): 3-6.

some portion of it for pocket money and then bandits would swoop down and take what was left.<sup>50</sup>

But the foreign account that touched a nerve with Dai was *The Report of the American Red Cross Commission to China* (October 1929). Following a request from President Herbert Hoover, the American Red Cross appointed a special commission in May 1929 to survey famine conditions in order to determine whether or not the organization would participate in relief work. After traveling through Henan, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Suiyuan for one month, the commissioners believed that failure of food supply in these hard-hit provinces did not result primarily from “natural causes,” such as severe drought, crop failures, and the pressures of overpopulation. In fact, they found that enough food existed to have prevented starvation. Instead, the commission put the blame on so-called “artificial or unnatural causes,” namely, the chronic disorder from civil war, the crushing exactions of warlord armies, banditry, confiscatory taxes, and disruptions in the transport of relief supplies.<sup>51</sup> The need for an effective government to purchase and distribute relief grain was illustrated through a comparison of Shaanxi and Shanxi, neighboring provinces that suffered from similar conditions. Yan Xishan, who had served as governor of Shanxi for over twenty years, was able to meet the needs of famine areas with little outside assistance by taking advantage of the hundreds of miles of roads constructed under his administration. In politically unstable Shaanxi, by contrast, “villages are frequently

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<sup>50</sup> Hallet Abend, “Politics has Part in Chinese Famine,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1929, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *The Report of the American Red Cross Commission to China* (Washington, D.C.: The American National Red Cross, 1929), 15-19, 52-54.

deserted, banditry is prevalent, and many communities are required to feed large bodies of troops.”<sup>52</sup> The central committee of the Red Cross denied aid to China on September 27<sup>th</sup> after enough rain had fallen to improve conditions in famine areas. Faulting Chinese leaders for not doing enough, the Red Cross believed that they would only assume full responsibility for their own country’s salvation once foreign agencies did not shoulder most of the burden of relief. What China needed the most was a strong government to command local existing resources; progress in the realms of transportation, reclamation, taxation, education, industry and agriculture; unification of the country; and establishment of the rule of law.<sup>53</sup>

While others raised objections to the Red Cross’s withdrawal of support, citing unprecedented relief efforts by Chinese officials and American aid in other nations lacking stable governments, Dai used the report to support intervention by the Nanjing government into the Northwest.<sup>54</sup> He reminded his audience repeatedly that the American delegation had found that there were really no natural disasters (*tianzai* 天災) in Northwest China, only man-made ones (*renhuo* 人禍). He quoted the commission’s report as saying, “Relief may be granted for natural disasters, but [a country] has only itself to blame for its man-made calamities and unworthiness to receive aid from others.”<sup>55</sup> At stake in the warlord challenge to central government sovereignty in Northwest China was not simply the fledgling state’s shaky monopoly

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 18, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>54</sup> “Chinese Relief Defended: Official Declares Object of Work is to Save Starving People,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1929, 19; “Famine Commission Criticizes Red Cross: Report Sees Need for Continuing Relief Work in China and Asks for Funds,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 1929, E7.

<sup>55</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 7, 9, 18.

on violence. Man-made famine threw into question the most basic operations of the Chinese political economy, particularly the ability of the Guomindang to manage life and death through power over circulation, the basis of national reconstruction. In his lectures on biopolitics, Michel Foucault described how sovereign power ensures the vitality of governed populations, the basis of state wealth and power, by maximizing good circulation and diminishing bad forms to reach a desired state of equilibrium.<sup>56</sup> Dai's thoughts on the Northwest, in the same way, reveals that he considered the loss of life to be a symptom of imbalance in a country divided by the extremes of decadence in coastal cities and destitution in the hinterland (See Image 1). In the face of warlord military tactics and imperialist accumulation strategies, a strong central government would have to reorganize circulation in the country to achieve "equalization" (*tiaoji* 調劑) out of regional unevenness that was threatening lives in the Northwest and the life of the body-politic with material and spiritual crises. To explain the need for equalization, Dai would, not surprisingly, draw inspiration from Sun Yat-sen's earlier discussion of transcontinental railroads that acted as guarantors of comparative advantage by redistributing resources between regions. For Dai, however, the goal was to resuscitate the nation under a hermetic seal.

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<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 11 in Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1975-76* (New York: Picador, 2003); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977-1978* (New York: Picador/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).



Image 1. Comparing the Southeast and the Northwest  
Source: Liang Jingchun, “Jiangnan minshi yu Xibei zaihuang (Jiangnan people’s food and Northwest famine),” *Shishi Yuebao (Current Events)* Vol. 1, No. 2 (December 1929), 91.

In Dai’s view, not only would pacification of the Northwest solve the problem of relief for people suffering from famine, but the consolidation of land and resources in the deep interior would also serve as a stepping stone to achieving a self-sufficient national economy. He stated, “Our most important work at present is to go open up Mongolia, Xinjiang, and other wastelands in the Northwest and search for petroleum fields and coal mines in order to prepare for a future of self-reliance (*ziji ziyong* 自給

自用).”<sup>57</sup> This position stood in stark contrast to that of liberal economists who had previously criticized the concept of self-sufficiency in Chinese economic thought, believing it suppressed initiative and led to the inability to compete with other countries in an age of free competition.<sup>58</sup> Pointing to annual imports of grain, valued at over two hundred million taels annually, Dai asked how China could still call itself a great agricultural country. Similarly, most Chinese now relied on imported raw materials for clothing. Dai noted that China was the country where silk had originated but that it had completely lost its standing to the improved Japanese and French varieties. Because the nation lacked a sufficient number of spindles to produce textiles, imports of cotton manufactures were valued at over one billion taels in 1927.<sup>59</sup> Dai shared in Sun Yat-sen’s concern over material scarcity, but he was much less sanguine about any benefits China might gain from participation in a world economy dominated by imperialist powers.

To relieve this crisis in food and clothing, the agrarian economy had to be revived to relieve shortages and prevent the perceived loss of economy sovereignty, popularly expressed through the metaphor of a “leaky goblet” (*louzhi* 漏卮).<sup>60</sup>

Economists saw the country becoming the very dumping ground for foreign products

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<sup>57</sup> Dai Jitao, “Guoji xingshi xia zhi Zhongguo de bianjiang wenti (Opening Up China’s Borderlands under the Current International Circumstances),” *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 2, No. 3 (June 1, 1931): 1-9.

<sup>58</sup> He Tingyuan and Zhang Zhongliang, “Zhongguo jingji sixiang zhi gaizao Tang Qingzeng Jiaoshou yanjiang (The Transformation of Chinese Economic Thought: A Lecture by Professor Tang Qingzeng),” *Shangxue Qikan (Business Studies Monthly)* No. 4 (1929): 1-6.

<sup>59</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 9-11, 26.

<sup>60</sup> See Seung-joon Lee, *Gourmets in the Land of Famine: The Culture and Politics of Rice in Modern Canton* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011); Also, Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

that Sun Yat-sen believed international cooperation could avoid.<sup>61</sup> Without a revival in agriculture as its motive force, industrial expansion would only mean increased imports of primary goods. Dai presented a cautionary tale of the late Qing officials Li Hongzhang, Zhang Zhidong, and Sheng Xuanhuai, all of whom had sought to propel China into a new industrial age during the Self-Strengthening Movement. Without a steady foundation for the national economy in agricultural production, Dai opined, their collective efforts only made the country poorer and poorer.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, even as Dai Jitao restated multiple times Sun Yat-sen's principle that railroads are most beneficial when they connect a poor area with one that is well off, he also warned that more roads, cars, and planes in the absence of a strong agricultural foundation would simply assist in the circulation of foreign imports – “more leaking” (*louzhi yu duo* 漏卮愈多).<sup>63</sup>

Dai's anxieties over detrimental economic flows only heightened as the price of silver fell with the unfolding of the Great Depression over these same years. He pointed to the drain of silver from villages to towns, from towns to provincial capitals, eventually making its way to treaty ports such as Shanghai. In his words, the interior had become “anemic” (*pinxuebing* 貧血病) from the outflow of silver while Shanghai

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<sup>61</sup> For example, see Ma Yinchu, “Zhongguo linian ruchao zhi jieshi ji qi weixian (An Explanation of China's Trade Deficit in Past Years and Its Dangers),” *Dongfang zazhi* (*Eastern Miscellany*) Vol. 23, No. 8 (April 25, 1926): 5-10; Hu Shanheng, “Zai Hua zhi waiguo jingji shili wenti (The Problem of Foreign Economic Domination in China),” *Dongfang zazhi* (*Eastern Miscellany*) Vol. 24, No. 7 (April 10, 1927): 18-27.

<sup>62</sup> Dai Jitao, “Zhongguo jingji caizheng jianshe de genben wenti (The Basic Problem with Chinese Economic and Financial Reconstruction),” *Xin Yaxiya* (*New Asia*) Vol. 8, No. 1 (July 1, 1934): 7-12. p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 11-12, 37.

suffered from “indigestion” (*tingshibing* 停食病/ *weichangbing* 胃腸病). Dai drew further on somatic metaphors, comparing the flow of capital within the nation to healthy circulatory and respiratory systems in order to criticize the concentration of silver in Shanghai. Without reinvestment, silver ceased to serve as industrial capital. Rather than using the surplus of cash in Shanghai to revitalize the interior, Chinese had instead resigned themselves to depositing money into foreign banks, which essentially amounted to funding the colonial operations of imperialist nations.<sup>64</sup> Dai Jitao was no less inclined than Sun Yat-sen to take account of the world economy, but he drew on the global historical moment to explain underdevelopment within China.

For Dai, the problem of silver was only one example of “lopsided phenomena” (*jixing de xianxiang* 畸形的現象) in China violating the principle of equalization. In theory, surplus population should move from densely to sparsely populated places, while surplus goods should be transported from sparsely to densely populated places. For instance, people living in the crowded Yangzi River region should move to northern provinces, with their vast territories and abundant resources. Yet, the previous ten years had witnessed warlord armies trampling all over the south. Moreover, there was no evidence of further industrial and commercial growth in the treaty ports, and yet villagers were enchanted with the extravagance and excitement of the big city. The city was without doubt prosperous on the surface, but these

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<sup>64</sup> Dai Jitao, “Muqian Zhongguo de xin shenglu (A New Way Out for China Today),” *Zhongyang Dangwu Yuekan* (*Central Party Affairs Monthly*) No. 23 (June 1930): 161-165; Dai Jitao, “Yinjia diluo wenti yu Zhongguo yingqu zhi fangce (The Falling Price of Silver and the Tactic that China Should Adopt),” *Zhongyang Dangwu Yuekan* (*Central Party Affairs Monthly*) No. 23 (June 1930): 165-170.



villagers did not know that the riches contained in the countryside were in fact ten times greater.<sup>65</sup>

Opening up the vast and empty lands of the Northwest, Dai argued, would strengthen the agricultural foundation of the nation and provide an outlet for surplus capital and population. According to Dai, “Capital should not flow outwards but be poured inwards.”<sup>66</sup> He reassured his audience that although there were some doubts that wasteland in the Northwest could be cultivated, geologists had confirmed that irrigation could turn loess in the Yellow River basin into fertile soil for farming.<sup>67</sup> With transportation unobstructed, the plains of Shaanxi and Gansu could become the world’s cotton field.<sup>68</sup> Shaanxi cotton was below market value, selling for three times less than the price in Shanghai set by the world market. Poor infrastructure combined with the dire political situation, however, meant that shipping costs were exorbitant. If it were not for arbitrary fees imposed by warlords and bandits, Shaanxi cotton and wheat could be shipped to Shanghai cheaply and its profits could make the province one of the country’s richest regions.<sup>69</sup>

Dai believed that circulation between these different regions within an integrated national economy would fundamentally solve the problem of natural and

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<sup>65</sup> Dai Jitao, “Guomin jingji jianshe de diyibu (The First Step in Building a National Economy),” *Xinsheng (New Voice)* No. 5 (March 1, 1930): 1-14; Dai Jitao, “Minsheng de wuzhi jianshe zhi chubu (First Steps in the Material Reconstruction of People’s Livelihood),” *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1931): 25-32.

<sup>66</sup> Dai Jitao, “Zhongguo jingji caizheng jianshe de genben wenti,” 12.

<sup>67</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 11; Also Dai Jitao, “Kaifa Xibei de zhongyao yu qi xiashou (The Significance of Opening Up the Northwest and Its Start),” *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 2, No. 4 (July 1, 1931): 1-3. p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 17; Dai Jitao, “Dongbei Xibei Xinan san ge wenti de zong jie jue (The Overall Solution to the Three Problems of the Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest),” *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 1, 1931): 1-4.

man-made disasters in the Northwest. In the past, the central government merely had distributed aid to victims, which was no better than providing “a cup of water for a burning cart of firewood” (*beishui chexin* 杯水車薪). Once a reliable system of exchange was in place, rational adjustments could be made through each region supplying what the other needed (*youwu xiangtong* 有無相通). As a channel for circulation, the Longhai Railway running westward from the east coast would be able to solve the problem of unemployment that had arisen in the crowded Southeast provinces and provide, not relief, but profits to the people of the Northwest. Thus, they would no longer be in a state of dependency – a permanent solution to relief.<sup>70</sup> He transformed a political crisis into an opportunity to reconfigure economic forces, using the concepts of comparative advantage and equalization to turn regional disparities into regional specialization in “surpluses” (*shengyu* 剩餘). Against warlords criticized for ruling through heavy taxation, Dai gave the harmonious circulation of surplus resources and populations a central place in the art of government. Where Sun saw international cooperation as a driving force of opening up the Northwest, Dai believed Northwest development would enable cooperation within the national economy.

Dai Jitao was only one of many Depression-era intellectuals and officials calling for more effective state planning, particularly on behalf of the struggling agrarian sector. By the 1930s, economists found that past opposition to government intervention was no longer appropriate for achieving the greatest happiness for the

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<sup>70</sup> Dai, “Minsheng de wuzhi jianshe zhi chubu,” 25-32.

whole of society.<sup>71</sup> Liu Zhenhua, another contributor to the volume *The Northwest*, observed the worldwide shift in economic policies from laissez-faire (*ziyou fangren zhuyi* 自由放任主義) to state planning (*guojia sheji* 國家設計). Comprehensive planning could prevent the occurrence of harmful situations, such as surpluses or shortfalls in production, financial stagnation or panic, and workforce shortages or unemployment. In a vast country such as China, with its diverse climate, resources, and terrain, regions must be delineated and their potential contributions assessed for a well-structured national economy. Liu pointed to Sun's *The International Development of China*, which posited northern, eastern, and southern regions for development, as one example. There was no consensus yet on which lands constituted the Northwest. Commentaries would often begin with a definition of the scope of the region at hand, typically including Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. Some also included Shanxi, Suiyuan, Chahar, and even Tibet. Liu suggested that any planning take into consideration current and future transportation lines running from rich and populous areas of China proper (*neidi* 內地) as the basis for operations in the borderlands.<sup>72</sup>

Historian Margherita Zanasi has discussed how the National Economic Council established in 1931 was preoccupied with creating a unified and centralized economic unit, encouraging coastal factories to stop looking to the international market and turn to the rural hinterland for both raw materials and markets for finished

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<sup>71</sup> For example, see Ma Yinchu, "Jingji sixiang sui shehui huanjing bianqian zhi zhixu (The Order of Changes in Economic Thought From Social Environment)," *Dongfang zazhi* (*Eastern Miscellany*) Vol. 34, No. 1 (1937): 55-63.

<sup>72</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 261-262.

goods. Its leaders, Wang Jingwei and Chen Gongbo, pursued autarkic policies modeled after Italian fascists in order to realize a national economy (*minzu jingji* 民族經濟) consisting exclusively of ethnic Chinese economic forces.<sup>73</sup> Wang and Chen presided over the left wing of the Guomindang that had by then formed a coalition government with the Party's right wing headed by Chiang Kai-shek and Dai Jitao. In spite of their political differences, Dai's discussion of the Northwest Question raised comparable demands to mitigate the effects of the worldwide depression. That said, Dai sought to return the nation to its roots in agriculture, whereas Wang and Chen pursued rural reforms in the hinterland as a means to further coastal industrialization. While Zanasi does not address the Northwest Question, the region was not only essential for these conceptualizations of nation-building through self-reliance, but was also the actual focus of programs that were later run by the National Economic Council. These included famine relief efforts, the distribution of improved cotton seed variations, and the construction of the Jinghui dike to control irrigation in central Shaanxi. If previous scholarship focusing on the Great Depression has illuminated how the Guomindang were pursuing a self-sufficient national economy in the 1930s, then the Northwest Question demonstrates how the concept of the economic region emerged alongside those efforts. Regional and national economies were mutually constituted in Depression-era China. Region-making in the case of the Northwest Questions was always more than identifying an object for relief. Its goal was never self-sufficiency at the local level, which was criticized for being an impediment to

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<sup>73</sup> Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*.

circulation that would strengthen the nation. Intellectuals would time and again point out “goods abandoned on the ground” (*huo qi yu di* 貨棄於地) in the Northwest as a solution to the leaky goblet.<sup>74</sup>

Zanasi’s study draws attention to direct links and parallels in fascist economic policies around the world, but also notes the different motivations behind what at first glance appear to be similar state actions.<sup>75</sup> She writes, “While in some countries, such as Germany and Japan, autarky became the justification for the aggressive building of self-sufficient empires, in others, such as China, it became a weapon for resisting foreign imperialism and economic dependency.”<sup>76</sup> The Northwest Question calls into question the distinction drawn between imperialist and nationalist fascists. Autarky in China would have been based on Han colonization of the borderlands populated by non-Han peoples. In her study of the Blue Shirts, an influential right-wing faction aligned with Chiang Kai-shek, historian Margaret Clinton demonstrates how Chinese fascists may have identified with other victims of colonial aggression, such as Abyssinia following invasion by Italy, but they stopped short of showing solidarity, believing that imperialist expansion was an inexorable process that weak

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<sup>74</sup> The expression “goods abandoned on the ground” (*huo qi yu di*) was taken from a passage in the Book of Rites (*Li Ji*) describing the Great Unity (*Datong*). James Legge’s translation is as follows: “Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. (They accumulated) articles (of value), disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground [*huo wu qi qi yu di ye* 貨惡其棄於地也], but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. (They laboured) with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted, but not exerting it (only) with a view to their own advantage.” James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part III The Li Ki, I-X* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 365.

<sup>75</sup> For a Chinese discussion of fascist economics from this period, see Sun Huaisu, “Faxisidi zhi jingji sixiang (Fascist Economic Thought),” *Jingjixue yuekan (The Economics Monthly)* Vol. 1, No. 1 (December 1933): 115-124.

<sup>76</sup> Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*, 14.

nations had to confront and manage on their own.<sup>77</sup> The Northwest Question, in fact, rehearsed the same Malthusian theories of overpopulation that other empires were deploying for overseas expansion. For instance, interwar Japanese bureaucrats justified the emigration of farmers to Manchuria as a means of relieving the Depression-era agrarian crisis caused by excess population on limited land resources.<sup>78</sup> The destitution left by the famine meant that the Han-dominated provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu, which were considered part of the 18 provinces of China proper, were even imagined as part of the Northwest for an extractive national economy set on the colonization of peripheries.

Emblematic of the rise of fascism in the interwar period, the emergence of the Northwest Question should also be considered a reaction against not only laissez-faire liberalism but also communism, which supposedly threatened national unity and reconstruction. Anti-communism particularly distinguished Dai from earlier traditionalism that rejected Western liberalism, materialism, and individualism. In autumn 1929, armed conflict broke out with the Soviet Union over control of the China Eastern Railway in Manchuria at a time when the Nanjing government was already being attacked on multiple fronts domestically. In his talks, Dai lumped together “red imperialism,” the Communist “bandits” and “traitors” working on its behalf, and Feng Yuxiang, who had previously been a beneficiary of Soviet support.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Clinton, *Fascism, Cultural Revolution, and National Sovereignty in 1930s China*.

<sup>78</sup> Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>79</sup> The Reorganization Group (*gaizupai* 改組派) comprising members of the left-wing Guomindang that had denounced the Nanjing government was not spared from Dai's criticisms either, labeled “tools of the Communist Party, warlords, and Russia.” Dai Jitao, “Duiyu muqian shiju de fenxi (An Analysis

According to Dai, history attested to the wild ambitions (*yexin* 野心) of the Russian people. The Soviet Union was encouraging separatist, communist, and rebel uprisings in China, which were being funded through its railroad operations, such as the Central Eastern Railway in Manchuria and the Turkestan-Siberian Railway encircling Xinjiang. Present-day schemes were merely extensions of earlier Romanov encroachment. Under the sway of the Soviet Union, Outer Mongolia had declared independence from China in 1924 and Mongolian youth were being encouraged to study Communism – “mob education” (*baomin jiaoyu* 暴民教育), rather than Great Learning of the Orient (*Dongfang de Daxue* 東方的大學).<sup>80</sup> Dai’s anti-Communism led him to downplay other examples of foreign encroachment in the headlines, namely, the British in Tibet and the Japanese in Manchuria. Contemporaries likened imperialist influence in all these areas beyond the control of the Nanjing government to “a guest upstaging the host” (*xuan bin duo zhu* 喧賓奪主) – even though most of these areas themselves were populated by non-Han peoples and were only nominally part of China. According to Dai, both Northeast and Northwest China were situated on the Sino-Soviet border, but the migration of over ten million Han Chinese from Hebei and Shandong to Manchuria had secured a strong foothold for the nation there. Without a doubt, the backing of Zhang Xueliang, the warlord ruling the region, must have also made Dai confident in the Nanjing government’s connection to the Northeast. The Northwest, by contrast, had fallen even further into desolation and

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of the Current Political Situation),” *Zhongyang dangwu yuekan* (*Central Party Affairs Monthly*) No. 25 (1930): 144-146.

<sup>80</sup> Dai Jitao, “Guoji xingshi xia zhi Zhongguo de bianjiang wenti,” 1-9.

despair after years of famine and rule by Feng. How could this empty void (*kongxu* 空虛), a place of cultural decline, rotting materials, and extremely scattered populations, possibly confront a great enemy like the Soviet Union?<sup>81</sup>

Dai repudiated Chinese Communism for explicitly encouraging individuals to struggle for their personal benefit rather than committing themselves to reconstruction for the sake of the nation. In his view, socialism of any variety typically stood against individualism, but Chinese Communists held dear the most repugnant aspects of liberalism and utilitarianism. Communists were especially prone to mobilizing the impertinence and destructive instincts of youth, turning schools into grounds for struggle. For Dai, nothing could be more antithetical to the project of reconstruction. Brian Tsui has observed that the conservative Nationalist leadership, unlike communist and other fascist parties, did not identify strongly with politicized youth and instead sought to tame mass enthusiasm.<sup>82</sup> In Dai's view, the Communist movement originated in the corruption, degeneration, indigence, and brutality of Chinese society, which was especially visible within the city.<sup>83</sup> Long before the agrarian crisis, in one of his earliest essays, Dai had been critical of the modern Chinese city as a bastion of moral decay, illustrating its decadence, crime, and disease.<sup>84</sup> Against this symbol of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, Dai turned to

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<sup>81</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 36-37; Dai, "Dongbei Xibei Xinan san ge wenti de zong jie jue," 1-4; Dai Jitao, "Zhongguo zhi tongyi yu fuxing (China's Unity and Revival)," *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 2, No. 6 (September 1931): 1-10; Also Dai Jitao, "Kaifa Xibei de zhongyao yu qi xiashou," 1-3.

<sup>82</sup> Tsui, *China's Forgotten Revolution*, 82.

<sup>83</sup> Dai Jitao, "Jianshe Diyi (Reconstruction First)," *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 4, No. 1 (May 1, 1932): 1-7.

<sup>84</sup> See Dai Jitao, "Dushi zui'e lun (On the Evils of the City)," in Dai Jitao, *Tianchou wen ji (The Collected Works of Tianchou)* (Beijing: Beijing guotu shudian, 2010).



the practice of planting forests as an appropriate symbol for the civilizing process and nation building. Earlier generations had cultivated species that took a long time to mature, such as pine and cypress, because they were willing to eat bitterness for the benefit of future generations. Similarly, “reconstruction” (*jianshe* 建設) was not a momentary “transformation” (*gaizao* 改造) but an everlasting process that required a spirit of sacrifice.<sup>85</sup>

Dai took issue with mass movements that had only taken the initial step in awakening the people to contemporary problems, but done nothing further to satisfy their basic needs. Subsequently, he noted, the masses only became disappointed and fell back into a dark dreamland. Of Sun Yat-sen’s *Three Principles*, Dai noted that the nation building would have to begin with the people’s livelihood (*minsheng* 民生). Every one of the ancient sages had emphasized material well-being. As the early Chinese philosopher Guanzi commented, “Only when the granaries are full will the people know propriety. Only when there is ample food and clothing will the people know honor” [*canglin shi er zhi lijie, yishi zu er zhi rongru* 倉廩實而知禮節, 衣食足而知榮辱]. Likewise, before national independence and the spread of democracy could be possible, a proper economic foundation that guaranteed food, clothing, housing, and transportation (*shi yi zhu xing* 食衣住行) was needed.<sup>86</sup> In effect, Dai wanted to channel the energies of the discontented masses into reconstruction projects, such as Northwest development, and away from Communism. According to another

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<sup>85</sup> Dai explains why he and Sun translated the Chinese word *jianshe* into English as reconstruction rather than transformation. Dai, “Jianshe diyi,” 1-7.

<sup>86</sup> Dai, “Guomin jingji jianshe de diyibu,” 1-14; Dai, “Minsheng de wuzhi jianshe zhi chubu” 25-32.

contributor to *The Northwest*, the migration of excess people from the crowded Southeast would offer a measure of relief from poverty, the bankrupt village economy, and unemployment, all of which fostered the spread of Communism. Opening up the Northwest could serve as a fundamental method of eradicating Communism.<sup>87</sup>

Beyond the sheer material benefits to region, party, and nation, Dai believed that a rediscovery of the Northwest would lead to a revival in national spirit. He was keen on reminding his audience that the Northwest was its ethnic place of origin (*minzu ceyuandi* 民族策源地). For Dai, the longue-durée movement of Han Chinese civilization away from its “old home” (*laojia* 老家) in the Northwest to the Southeast had been detrimental to its inherent character. Four thousand years earlier, ancient Chinese had migrated from the Northwest plateaus into the Yellow River valley, seeking habitats with waterways and pastures. Most genealogies in China traced back to the cradles of civilization in this region – namely, the Central Plain in Henan and the Guanzhong Plain in Shaanxi – where imperial China had experienced its golden age. For Dai, it was meaningless to differentiate between northern and southern Chinese. Later, he said, one thousand years of oppression and encroachment by the Mongols, the Tujue, and the Manchus forced Han Chinese southward, extending the nation into the Yangzi and Pearl River valleys where it entered into the industrial age. Northern culture became barbaric while southern culture was characterized by a depressed stupor. The Soviet Union was apparently the latest manifestation of the threatening northern barbarians of the past. Dai lamented the loss of national spirit

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<sup>87</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 42-43.

and fall into destitution that coincided with this *longue-durée* movement. The present-day backwardness of the Northwest was taken as a testament to cultural degradation. In the very locale where the nation had achieved the brilliance and splendor of its golden age, one's eyes were now filled with wretched poverty, tragedy, desolation, and isolation. All vestiges of a glorious past seemed to have been lost as life reverted to prehistoric times, with people living in caves in the wild (*xue ju ye chu* 穴居野處). During the famine, there were even reports of cannibalism. What was embarrassing about the modern-day state of China, for Dai, was not that it was worse off than the scientific civilization of the West, but that it could not even compare to its own past. The goal of the revolutionary movement founded in the Pearl River Delta was to reverse the spatial trajectory of the Han Chinese people by going to the Northwest and reviving the might and glory of the past.<sup>88</sup> Another Nationalist official, Zhang Puquan, noted that seeking out an innate national spirit within the relics and tombs of the Northwest would be like the collective desire in Italy to restore the Roman empire after Mussolini took control of the government. Within just a few years' time, Italy had become a strong power. If China reestablished its national spirit, it would be able to discard the yoke of foreign superficial civilization (*waiguo pimaowenming* 外國皮毛文明) and become truly independent.<sup>89</sup>

In Dai's narrative, the epic migration of Chinese civilization served as an allegory for capitalist development. Specifically, his complaint of silver and farmers

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<sup>88</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 3, 14, 21-22, 32-33.

<sup>89</sup> Zhang Puquan, "Famine and Transportation in the Northwest," *Xin Yaxiya (New Asia)* Vol. 4, No. 5 (September 1, 1932): 5-7.

draining out of the hinterland into the cosmopolitan treaty ports was translated through the lens of spiritual nationalism into the displacement of an agrarian people from its ancestral home. The solution to lopsidedness in both instances was for the nation to reclaim the Northwest. For Dai, a state of equilibrium between the Southeast and the Northwest – namely, the exchange of surplus population for surplus natural resources as well as the revolutionary ideals for the pure and uncorrupted spirit of the ancient homeland – would facilitate the co-production of a national economy as well as an ethnic renaissance. For this critic of cosmopolitanism, the civilizing process would ironically mirror the deterritorializing and reterritorializing rhythms of capitalism.

*Lin Pengxia and Overseas Chinese Pioneers in the Northwest*

The Mukden Incident of 1931 proved that Dai Jitao's confidence in the Nanjing government's hold on the Northeast provinces was misplaced, and made palpable a crisis of territoriality in China. Interpreting the loss of Manchuria as a harbinger of what was sure to come in a more weakly controlled borderland, proponents of Northwest development declared that if Han Chinese did not open up this rich territory themselves, then imperialists who had long coveted its resources would be happy to do it. When intellectuals argued for ethnic Chinese economic forces to consolidate control over the Northwest, their visions extended beyond the borders of China to include the participation of overseas Chinese. Economic historians have already noted how remittances sent by overseas Chinese countered the

effects of the trade deficit at this time.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Xie Fuchu (謝復初) of the Beiping Overseas Chinese Industrial Association (北平華僑實業協進總會) attempted to solicit investment for Northwest development from Chinese merchants living in Southeast Asia and organize inspection tours.<sup>91</sup> But the pioneering spirit and experiences of overseas Chinese were also believed by some intellectuals to make them best qualified for the work of opening up “virgin land” (*chunidi* 處女地) in China’s frontiers. In the analysis of these writers, social instability at home in previous decades had sent Chinese labor fleeing to distant lands where they opened up landscapes as desolate as the Northwest. Overseas Chinese had built the transcontinental railroads in the United States and Canada and “tamed the thick bushes and dense jungles” of Southeast Asia, but they had little other than exploitation by the Great Powers to show for their efforts. Furthermore, the recent downturn in the world economy meant that Chinese were elbowed out of labor markets in foreign countries and returned to China unemployed. Intellectuals mimicked Sun Yat-sen’s earlier appeal to foreign investors by presenting the Northwest to overseas Chinese as the great gold mountain (*dajinshan* 大金山) of the future, comparable with mining sites of the past such as San Francisco (“Old Gold

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<sup>90</sup> Shiroyama, *China during the Great Depression*.

<sup>91</sup> Xingzhengyuan mishuchu (Executive Yuan Secretariat), “Guanyu tuiguang jinrong fazhan Xibei shiye jihua zhi Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui choubeichu jianhao gao (On Expanding Finances for the Northwest Industrial Plan, Draft Commentary Delivered to the National Economic Council) (August 1933),” in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Modern History Institute and Second Historical Archives of China, eds. *Kangzhan shiqi Xibei kaifa dang’an shiliao xuanbian (Selections from Wartime Northwest Development Archives)*, (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2009), 59-63.

Mountain” *Jiujinshan* 舊金山) and Melbourne (“New Gold Mountain” *Xinjinshan* 新金山).<sup>92</sup>

The most prominent spokesperson for overseas Chinese participation in Northwest development was Lin Pengxia, one of China’s first female pilots, whose tour of Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia in the winter of 1932-1933 was featured in *Shenbao*, *Women’s Monthly*, *Linglong*, *Women’s Voice*, *Arts and Life*, *Northwest Question*, and *Borderlands Semimonthly*.<sup>93</sup> Born to a merchant family from Fujian province, Lin was educated in Shanghai and Tianjin before moving abroad to study political economy in the United States and then train at the Royal Flying School in England. When the Shanghai War broke out between China and Japan at the start of 1932, Lin had been managing her father’s rubber plantations in Singapore. Her mother sent a telegram from China urging her to return to contribute her skills as an aviatrix on the battlefield. By the time she arrived in Shanghai, a treaty had already been signed and a disappointed Lin sought comfort by her mother’s side in their

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<sup>92</sup> Wang Zhiyuan, “Kaiken huangdi yu jiuji nanqiao (Reclaiming Wasteland and Relief for Distressed Overseas Chinese),” *Qiaowu yuebao* (*Overseas Chinese Affairs Monthly*) (April 30, 1934): 9-15; Chen Shuren, “Xibei yu huaqiao (The Northwest and Overseas Chinese),” *Xibei Wenti* (*Northwest Question*) Vol. 1, No. 1 (September 15, 1934): 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> Lin Pengxia, “Xibei zaiqing yu Lanzhou funü (The Northwest Disaster Situation and Lanzhou Women),” *Nüzi Yuekan* (*Women’s Monthly*) Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 22, 1933): 79-82; “Nü feixingjia Lin Pengxia yanjiang hangkong (Aviatrix Lin Pengxia Lectures on Aviation),” *Nüzi Yuekan* (*Women’s Monthly*) Vol. 1, No. 1 (February 22, 1933): 102-105; Lin Pengxia, “Xibei kaocha de yi feng xin (A Letter on Northwest Inspection),” *Nüzi Yuekan* (*Women’s Monthly*) Vol. 1, No. 5 (July 15, 1933): 667-668; Lin Pengxia, “Xibei funü de xianzhuang (The Current State of Northwest Women),” *Linglong* Vol. 3, No. 20 (1933): 951-953; Huang Jingwan, “Nü feixingjia Lin Pengxia Nüshi (Aviatrix Miss Lin Pengxia),” *Nüsheng* (*Women’s Voice*) Vol. 1, No. 8 (1933): 13; “Nü feixingjia Lin Pengxia di Lan (Aviatrix Lin Pengxia Arrives in Lanzhou),” *Xibei Wenti* (*Northwest Question*) Vol. 1, No. 3 (1933): 3-4; Lin Pengxia, “Wei kaifa Xibei jinggao haiwai qiaobao (Respectfully informing overseas compatriots about Opening Up the Northwest)” *Meishu shenghuo* (*Arts and Life*) No. 5 (1935): 27; Lin Pengxia, “Jiajin minzu tuanjie baowei Da Xibei (Speed Up National Unification and Safeguard the Great Northwest),” *Bianjiang banyuekan* (*Borderlands Semimonthly*) Vol. 3, Nos. 10-12 (April 30, 1938): 1-2.

native place of Putian. Later that year, while escaping the summer heat at a mountain villa near Fuzhou, they met a female missionary returning from the Northwest, who tearfully recounted the severe famine conditions and the miserable state of women's lives. The clamor in the national press for Opening Up the Northwest at that time further raised their awareness of this faraway region that Lin Pengxia had once heard Westerners describe as a treasure trove. Lin's mother soon became convinced of the importance of the Northwest to national defense and an ethnic renaissance, but lamented that its harsh climate and incomplete transportation network discouraged their compatriots from embarking on a seemingly perilous undertaking. If her fearless, determined, and selfless daughter could complete an inspection tour of the Northwest as a single woman, then it would destroy any illusion of difficulty. Moreover, experiencing the region firsthand would allow Lin to also fulfill her Christian duty to practice compassion toward the poor and unfortunate. Lin enthusiastically accepted the opportunity her mother presented her to apply both her nationalism and faith.<sup>94</sup> During the following winter, she was sent off in well-publicized ceremonies by Huang Jingwan of the Commercial Press as well as the National Aviation Association (See Image 2).<sup>95</sup> Lin's representation and self-presentation in the press as both filial

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<sup>94</sup> Lin Pengxia, *Xibei Xing (Northwest Travels)* (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2005), 1-4.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, "Zhongguo diyi nü feixingjia Lin Pengxia nüshi fu Xibei kaocha (China's first aviatrix Miss Lin Pengxia heads off to the Northwest for an inspection tour)," *Shenbao*, November 21, 1932, 9; "Nü feixingjia Lin Pengxia di Hu hou zhi chouying (Aviatrix Lin Pengxia's Social Engagements after Arriving in Shanghai)," *Shenbao*, November 23, 1932, 13; "Lin Pengxia zuo yanjiang hangkong (Yesterday's lecture by Lin Pengxia on aviation)," *Shenbao*, November 24, 1932, 11; "Lin Pengxia zuo qicheng beishang (Lin Pengxia set off for the North yesterday)," *Shenbao*, November 25, 1932, 9.

and nationalist paragon certainly made her travels as an overseas Chinese to the nation's "old home" seem all the more fitting.



Image 2. "Sending off Feng Yong and Lin Pengxia to the Northwest"  
Source: *Cihang Huabao*, No. 23 (December 6, 1933), 3.

But far from being a purveyor of rose-colored government propaganda, Lin Pengxia presented a six-month record of personal trials and local devastation in her travel diary, published as *Northwest Travels* in 1936. When Lin set off on her adventure, the Longhai Railroad planned from the coastal town of Haizhou, Jiangsu to Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province, was only half built. The only option left to her after reaching its terminus at Tongguan, Shaanxi was to crowd onto cargo trucks that these provinces inherited from the coast and repurposed for passenger travel. A far cry from the efficiency and comfort of rail and air transport she enjoyed in the West, these second-hand vehicles frequently got stuck or broke down on shabby roads left in disrepair. Lin often explained these inconveniences in terms of her self-described impatient nature. But if the introduction of railroad travel affected



perception by overcoming regional differences through the “annihilation of space and time,”<sup>96</sup> traveling on second-hand and unreliable means of transportation only made Lin ever more conscious of the differences she perceived between the Southeast and the Northwest – a constant reminder of vast, not shrinking, space and uneven, not homogeneous, temporality. Like Dai, Lin put the blame for the lack of convenient transportation on exactions by local warlords and corrupt bureaucrats in this corner of the country, the collapse of the village economy, the planting of opium instead of grain, and the driving of poor youth to banditry.<sup>97</sup> Bandits were a steady source of disruption, swooping down on nearby areas and forcing Lin to wait until the danger subsided or take roundabout paths to the next destination. Local notables such as General Sun Weiru, Governor Shao Lizi, and the powerful Ma family arranged for her to accompany local troops of their maneuvers so as to safeguard her from these attacks. Without these high level connections, Lin firmly believed her plans would have simply served as another example of “empty talk.”<sup>98</sup> Even so, her diary entries enumerate constant challenges to her senses, including simple beds made of wooden planks that would leave her back sore the next day, cave dwellings (*yaodong*) that were as dark and dank as a coffin, the nauseating smell of horse and cow dung burned to heat platform beds (*kang*), unhygienic practices and the lack of running water,

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<sup>96</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>97</sup> Lin, *Xibei xing*, 12-13, 40.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

opium smoking, having to go without food while on the road, and the unsightly nakedness of disaster victims.<sup>99</sup>

What was perhaps most upsetting for Lin was the response that she, as a woman traveling alone, received from locals in the Northwest. Family and friends in Shanghai might have expressed disbelief that “the daughter of a well-off family would travel by herself ten thousand leagues to the frozen edges of the world.”<sup>100</sup> When casting aside the comforts of coastal China to embrace the nation’s homeland, however, she did not predict feeling singled out as an oddity. Lin’s accent, men’s clothing, bobbed hair, and natural feet often led locals to misrecognize her as a bureaucrat’s wife or beggars to mistake her for a relief worker.<sup>101</sup> Locals wondered if she was searching for love in this region, if she was acting out after complications in a love affair, or if she was just plain crazy – all of which led her to declare, “I have one love and that is our ancestral land.”<sup>102</sup> She was left particularly humiliated and upset outside the station in Pingliang, Gansu, when she was surrounded and bombarded with questions by a crowd curious to know what exactly she was hoping to accomplish by taking such risks.<sup>103</sup> Her conspicuousness even led her at one point to buy local clothing to disguise herself.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 8, 39, 54-55, 57-58, 61.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 37-38, 53, 75, 95.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 40.



Image 3. Lin Pengxia

Source: “Lin Pengxia and Wu Zhiqiang,” *Ertong Shijie* Vol. 41, No. 4 (1938), 2.

Lin presented her resilience in spite of these difficulties as proof of her ability to bear witness to the true conditions of the Northwest. Even as locals, including her government contacts, encouraged Lin to turn back because of the dangers ahead, Lin declared that her body might die but her spirit would not waver and sought solace in Psalms 23:4, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”<sup>105</sup> Being “short of power but full of heart,” Lin forged ahead but regretted being able to do little more than shed tears of sympathy for the poor and unfortunate compatriots she encountered on her tour.<sup>106</sup> Between Tongguan and Xi’an, villagers swarmed the trucks at each stop to beg for alms.<sup>107</sup> The capital of early kingdoms and empires, Xi’an was being prepared as the Nationalist government’s secondary capital since the Shanghai War of 1932. Still, Lin

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 35, 42-43.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

encountered a continuous stream of gaunt and scantily clad beggars filling the streets within the imperial walls.<sup>108</sup> Disaster conditions worsened as she traveled further west, where the willows planted by the Qing general Zuo Zongtang during his army's pacification of rebellion in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang had been stripped bare by starving refugees during years of famine.<sup>109</sup> As a witness to dire poverty, Lin could not but suffer the agony of a guilty conscience when lavish banquets were thrown on her behalf by well-off officials.<sup>110</sup> She was particularly affected by a mother and her two daughters that she discovered in an abandoned village, their unclothed, emaciated, and filthy bodies huddled next to some ashes. Until her encounter with this "ghost-like" family, she did not take seriously people who said that it was not uncommon in the Northwest for a few family members to share one piece of clothing and for a few families to share a wok. Because women's spinning and weaving was one of the foundations of household respectability in China, these haunting figures were symbols of a material and moral economy in shambles. For Lin, if Korea had become a colony when several families shared a knife,<sup>111</sup> then the extent of destitution in the Northwest was surely an omen that China was on the brink of national extinction.<sup>112</sup> Historian Tong Lam has observed in his study of social surveys conducted in early twentieth century China that records of personal suffering and hardship by social

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 13-14

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 35, 83-84.

<sup>111</sup> This was a popular trope used to describe the Japanese colonization of Korea. See, for example, Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2010), 158. One interviewee is quoted as saying, "One show that impressed me a lot was about how Korea was turned into a Japanese colony and the Korean people were turned into slaves to the Japanese. It made me think about the fate of China. It was said in the play that after Korea became a colony of Japan, ten families had to share one chopping knife."

<sup>112</sup> Lin, *Xibei xing*, 58-59.

scientists, many of whom went to remote frontiers, were considered a precondition for the production of credible knowledge.<sup>113</sup> Lin's attempt to temper her spirit was not simply a reflection of her Christian faith but also represented the cultivation of a moral self which Lam identifies as central to the collection of first-hand knowledge of the nation. Christianity did not have a monopoly on Lin's conscience. When the China Inland Mission protested her inspection of Borden Memorial Hospital in Lanzhou without permits or authorization, she criticized her fellow Christians for acting like "powerful guests upstaging the host."<sup>114</sup>

Lin often used her observations of the Northwest to criticize the state of China Proper or Han Chinese attitudes towards women and other ethnicities. She, like Dai, took the Northwest to be the bearer of Chinese essence, pointing to its plain, honest, hardworking, and filial people as models of national character (*minxing* 民性) for decadent southerners.<sup>115</sup> Lin did find, however, that lack of education meant that popular intelligence (*minzhi* 民智) was inferior to the south, particularly among women, whom she considered "the most backward of the backward."<sup>116</sup> After meeting with local Han women, including a group of prostitutes, she was left convinced that the major obstacle to gender equality in the Northwest was women's lack of economic independence. They were often treated by their families instead like

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<sup>113</sup> See Chapter 4 in Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>114</sup> Lin, *Xibei xing*, 92, 96-97.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 14, 48, 54.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

commodities, sold as child brides (*tongyangxi* 童養媳) or as sex workers.<sup>117</sup> Against footbound and opium-addicted Han women, Lin presented the “natural” example of the Northwest’s strong, tall, and sturdy Mongol women, who, besides excelling at riding horses and archery, were responsible for manual labor and the household finances while their men idled away their time in yurts, “smoking tobacco, inhaling snuff, chatting, tailoring, caring for children and other trifling matters.” In her analysis, these nomads served as a primitive ideal type in which men and women supposedly held equal standing before social evolution relegated women to the household. According to Lin, if nomadic women were provided with additional education, they would better the women of China Proper with half the effort.<sup>118</sup>

Traveling alongside Hui Muslim leaders and soldiers, Lin also discovered that one of the greatest obstacles to Opening Up the Northwest was the strained relationship between Hui and Han in the Northwest. Contrary to Han characterizations of Hui as prone to rebellion because they were suspicious and jealous by nature, Lin found her companions on the road to be gallant, upright, and prone to helping others in distress. As proof of their propriety, Lin described how two Hui gentlemen once saved her from the prospect of sharing a mixed gender communal *kang* in a fully-occupied inn by giving up their room.<sup>119</sup> Local Hui officials affirmed how Hui and Han together formed a Republic of Five Races and shared a long history marked by assimilation. They characterized tensions between

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 25, 53, 93-94, 101.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 162-165.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

Hui and Han as a problem of government (政治問題), rather than a problem of nation (民族問題), explaining that Hui rebellions only responded to bureaucratic oppression, regardless of who was in power.<sup>120</sup> Lin feared that further estrangement would mean that the Hui could fall prey to imperialists raising the banner of self-determination – as the British had done in Tibet and Soviets in Mongolia. Hopes for Opening Up the Northwest depended on national unity.<sup>121</sup>

Lin was keen on describing the stark contrast between rich and poor that she constantly witnessed during her travels. Famine conditions meant that Lin often used food as an idiom for discussing inequality, describing how “well-to-do families partake in thick wheat noodles and millet; middling ones partake in highland barley and sweet potatoes; and the lowliest only have tree bark and grass roots.”<sup>122</sup> One day, when invited by refugees to share a thin porridge of millet and bitter weeds, she even noted disparities among them, with the fortunate having wooden articles to sell and thatched huts to live in while others had nothing but the tattered unlined garments on their backs.<sup>123</sup> Despite her attention to unevenness at the local level, Lin was no advocate of radical politics. Like Dai, she took issue with student demonstrators who, in her experience, often acted shamelessly in pursuit of personal gain.<sup>124</sup> She instead praised hard-working locals who rejected ostentation for self-restraint, Chinese national products (*guohuo* 國貨), and simple clothing and food (*buyi cushi* 布衣粗食)

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 259-261.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 26.

– what she called “commonization” (*pingminhua* 平民化).<sup>125</sup> In the case of the poor, she believed that relief would most effectively be provided through development, specifically in the form of improved transport, increased agricultural production, tree planting to help regulate the climate, and irrigation with new canals and wells.

Furthermore, writing after the Mukden Incident, Lin Pengxia advocated Opening Up the Northwest primarily in terms of its potential contribution to national defense. Besides its strategic location, the Northwest was crucial to China’s energy security. *Northwest Travels* did invoke Dai’s appeal for equalization between the Southeast and the Northwest as a way out of the trade war engendering the coexistence of a “leaky goblet” and “goods abandoned on the ground.”<sup>126</sup> Lin was not as invested, however, in the idea of land reclamation in the Northwest for agricultural production. For her, Chinese had to give up the superstitious belief in depending on nature, and rationally “use accumulation in the ground to make up for shortcomings on the surface,” that is, the minerals of the Northwest should provide for times of famine through exchange for surplus agriculture from the Southeast.<sup>127</sup> What piqued Lin’s interest were fossil fuels, which she considered the lifeline of national defense. Region-making is exhibited in her attention to oil fields dotting the Northwest, an area stretching from Kashgar, Xinjiang in the west, southward through the Gobi to the borders of Gansu and Qinghai and, in the north, past the Tian Shan mountains

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 71, 89.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 76, 80, 103.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 21, 34.



through Gansu and Shaanxi all the way to Shanxi.<sup>128</sup> Lin achieved fame as national defense planning became increasingly dependent on aviation and oil resources.<sup>129</sup>

Lin Pengxia offered this account of her six-month journey, including her hardships, as a testimonial for other overseas Chinese who might have been wary of participating in Opening Up the Northwest. Before experiencing the Northwest for herself, Lin too dared not believe that a vast and thinly settled territory with extremely rich deposits lay in the western corner of her own country. After seeing the landscape and people with her own eyes, she was able to attest to the rich opportunities in farming, forestry, and mining – ten times what she had heard about in the past. She also reassured compatriots born and raised in the tropics that Qinghai could be just as warm as Jiangsu and Zhejiang. By sojourning overseas, Chinese migrants had risked death in the tens of thousands, painstakingly battling fierce beasts, poisonous serpents, misty mountains, and miasma, only to be denied citizenship or equal rights by the Great Powers that “glare at, bully and deport” them. Instead of being at the beck and call of other nations, Lin called for overseas Chinese to return to their ancestral place, where they could be pioneers in their own nation’s neglected region. According to Lin, the Northwest was “a great base for an ethnic renaissance and an unsurpassable paradise for overseas compatriots returning to China.”<sup>130</sup>

Historian Chen Zhihong has observed that intellectuals, particularly geographers, in the Republican era claimed that Han Chinese were endowed with an

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 18, 30.

<sup>129</sup> Zhang Puquan observed that the new era with airplanes had led to disputes over oil fields in Mexico and Mesopotamia. Zhang Puquan, “Xibei jihuanguang yu jiaotong,” 5-7.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 353-355.

unusually strong ability to adapt to new places.<sup>131</sup> The Northwest Question was undoubtedly able to bring overseas Chinese and frontier expansion into the same discussion through the idea that Han Chinese were skilled pioneers, and yet it also rested on the fascist desire to restore the past glory of a dispirited nation through the communion of Han Chinese in their ethnic place of origin. In the end, the figure of the overseas Chinese pioneer whose homecoming would restore national wholeness and facilitate a future of national self-reliance, however grand, was a logical outgrowth of both Sun Yat-sen's and Dai Jitao's discussions of the Northwest.

### *Conclusion*

The Northwest was far from a stable category in the early twentieth century. It emerged as a product of region-making by prominent Guomindang thinkers in search of a solution to perceived crises. Sun Yat-sen first introduced the Northwest in the wake of World War I as a Chinese counterpart to previous frontier expansions that could provide enough to stave off a trade war. Sun's fascination with opening up frontiers with railroads was later revisited by Dai Jitao, who responded to civil war and famine in the northwestern provinces by seeking to reconfigure China's political economy. For Dai, circulation between the Southeast and the Northwest would not only save disaster victims in the Northwest but also restore balance and unity to a nation torn apart by dangerous economic and civilizational flows. The vast lands and

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<sup>131</sup> Zhihong Chen, "'Climate's Moral Economy': Geography, Race, and the Han in Early Republican China, in *Critical Han Studies*," in Thomas Mullaney, James Leibold, Stéphane Gros and Eric Vanden Bussche, eds., *Critical Han Studies : the History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

rich resources of the Northwest could be used to wean the nation from imported products and revive its agricultural foundation. At the same time, the pure and uncorrupted spirit of the nation's ancestral homeland could ward off the threat of Communism and set Han Chinese on the pathway to reviving past glory. The Northwest Question was Dai's point of departure for articulating fascist notions of autarky, anti-Communism, and an ethnic renaissance. Lin Pengxia offered a more nuanced account of the Northwest than Nationalist officials, attending to gender, ethnicity, and class within this region while explaining her personal trials. Her travel diary, however, also reinforced Sun's and Dai's ideas of the Northwest by bringing them together in an plea to overseas compatriots, as part of a self-supporting ethnic Chinese economy, to repeat their performances in frontiers overseas in their neglected homeland.

## Chapter Two

### The Geography of National Defense

Guomindang leaders struggling with weak territorial control, natural disasters, and material scarcity were dealt a heavy blow with the Kwantung Army's takeover of Manchuria following the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931. With the absence of industrial bases and rich farmland in Northeast China, opening up the Northwest abruptly became a matter of national survival. Officials felt that effective state planning was urgently needed to prepare the nation for further territorial losses. In the face of ongoing encroachment in northeastern and northern China, state planners envisioned a network of economic centers in the deep interior, far from the reach of the Japanese military.

But Guomindang officials hoped for more than a safe haven. Nationalist China, like other modern states, exhibited the twin logics of capitalism and territorialism.<sup>1</sup> State investment into the building of industrial bases in previously marginalized regions would facilitate the further accumulation of capital. Guomindang leaders hoped that stronger state capacity would eventually allow them to recover territory lost to the Chinese Communists and the Japanese military. Two central planning agencies, the National Economic Council (*Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui* 全國經濟委員會) and the Natural Resources Commission (*Ziyuan*

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<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (New York: Verso, 1994).

*weiyuanhui* 資源委員會), mobilized scientific knowledge and technocratic expertise to extend control over peripheries and extract resources. According to Guomindang officials, opening up the far western reaches of China to compensate for losses in the east would be to “lose at sunrise but gain at sunset” (*shi zhi dongyu shou zhi sangyu* 失之東隅收之桑榆).<sup>2</sup>

As the central government initiated regional development strategies in the 1930s, the press and filmmakers further instilled within patriots a sense of duty to the Northwest outside of the realms of officialdom and right-wing intellectual circles. Through their travel accounts, journalists for major newspapers, such as the Tianjin-based *L’Impartial* (*Dagongbao* 大公報) and the Shanghai daily *Shenbao* (申報), introduced a reading public to their compatriots in the Northwest. Their accounts drew on the popular association of the Northwest with famine and misrule, presenting tales of suffering and cruelty that seemed to far exceed the destitution readers encountered on the streets of treaty ports. Panoramas of barren earth and solitary relics in pictorials such as *Ling Long* (玲瓏) and *Wen Hua* (文華) were crucial in defining the Northwest as a vast wasteland, emptied of all inhabitants from either death by famine or historical neglect (See Image 4). When photographs were populated, models of Chinese patriotism stood in the foregrounds (See Image 5). Explorers posed in front of cultural treasures and laborers toiled away on the region’s distinctive loess (See Image 6). In 1934, Chinese moviegoers watched the main

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see Shao Lizi, “Jiuji ji Kaifa Xibei Wenti (Relief and Opening Up the Northwest),” *Yinhang zhoubao* (*Banking Weekly*) Vol. 17, No. 13 (1933): 5-8; Weng Wenhao, “Preface,” in Zhang Renjian, ed. *Industrial Plan for Opening Up the Northwest* by (Beiping: Self-published, 1934).

characters of Sun Yu's *Big Road* (*Dalu* 大路) and Chen Bugao's *Head to the Northwest* (*Dao Xibei Qu* 到西北去) perform the well-publicized work of building highways and irrigation canals in the deep interior to prepare for war. Through the representations provided by these cultural media, coastal Chinese and their overseas kin came to understand themselves as the agents of national salvation, and the central government gained popular support for its projects in political frontiers.



Image 4. “Elm trees in Shaanxi stripped bare by disaster victims to allay their hunger”  
Source: “Shangxin Canmu (A heartbreaking sight),” *Wenhua* No. 7 (February 20, 1930), 33.



Image 5. “Soldiers building dikes to prevent the recurrent floods threatening Tienshui, Kansu”

Source: Liang Youming, “Dao Xibei qu (The Virgin Northwest)” *Wenhua* No. 51 (1934), 23.

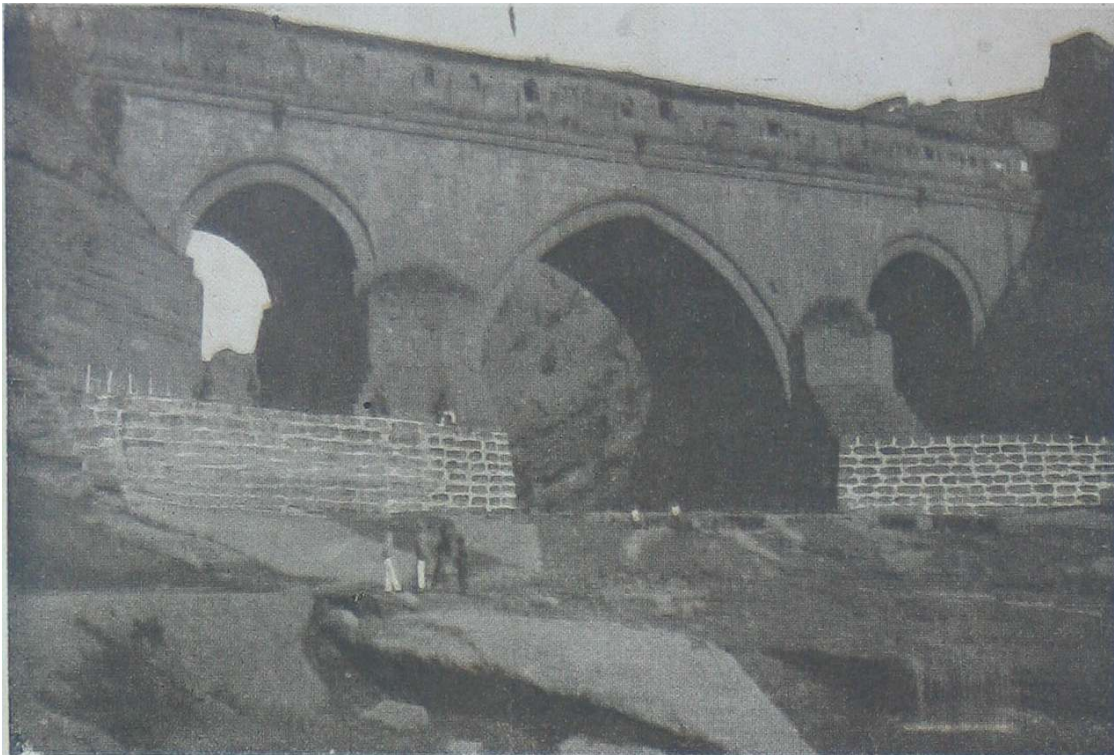


Image 6. San Yuan Bridge

Source: Liang Youming, “Dao Xibei qu (The Virgin Northwest)” *Wenhua* No. 51 (1934), 23.

Just as quickly as interest in the Northwest grew, however, critics emerged to qualify regional development with a number of caveats or dismiss it altogether. In September 1934, *Shenbao* featured two letters to its editor disparaging young people for parroting the catchphrase “head to the Northwest” (*dao Xibei qu* 到西北去). One contributor, Zhou Weizhi, agreed that the migration to the Northwest seemed to be one of the best solutions to mass unemployment in the Depression era, but he feared that its proponents in Shanghai understood neither the root causes of the economic crisis or the opportunities actually available in the Northwest. In the absence of an organized colonization apparatus or self-financing, those who somehow found their way to the Northwest would simply join the ranks of the unemployed in the Northwest. It would be too late for regrets once they were left stranded and disappointed.<sup>3</sup> Li Jun, who responded to Zhou a few days later, went further to compare the act of heading northwest to discovering one’s room on fire and scrambling towards the wall rather than extinguishing the fire. Escapism was no substitute for a fundamental solution to the economic crisis in China proper, which would undoubtedly spread to the periphery.<sup>4</sup> These reservations were even articulated within the central government by a new class of technocrats who largely ruled out the Northwest as a possible site of refuge for the embattled nation.

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<sup>3</sup> Zhou Weizhi, “*Dao Xibei qu de xianjue wenti* (Prerequisites for Heading to the Northwest),” *Shenbao*, September 18, 1934, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Li Jun, “*Dao Xibei qu de ling yi yijian* (Other Thoughts on Heading to the Northwest),” *Shenbao*, September 27, 1934, 23.



This chapter highlights uneven support for “Opening Up the Northwest” within the central government to explain why, in spite of official and popular enthusiasm, the region was eventually overshadowed by a focus on the Southwest during the Guomindang’s wartime retreat to the interior. In hindsight, the Southwest might seem like the logical choice for the Guomindang considering the host of political challenges it faced in the Northwest during the 1930s. Scholars of modern China have long documented how the Northwest became home to Chinese Communist and Uyghur independence movements. With the exception of Guanzhong, the central region of Shaanxi, the Nanjing government continued to have little effective control over local affairs in the Northwest. Even Guanzhong, where the National Economic Council focused its efforts in regional development, became a stage for mutiny when Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng, Guomindang generals responsible for suppressing the Communist movement, arrested Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi’an Incident of 1936. And yet, there was no shortage of conflict between the central government and local military leaders in the weakly held provinces of the Southwest either.<sup>5</sup> This chapter attempts to explain the foreclosure of the Northwest Question by turning from the writings of conservative ideologues discussed in Chapter One to their rivals in the central government, the equally prolific scientists who shaped the contours of economic policy. Through their direction of the national economy and scientific research, technocrats transformed the Northwest in the

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<sup>5</sup> Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

national imagination from the center of cultural rebirth into a backwater supplier of raw materials for industry.

A central figure behind this conceptual shift was Weng Wenhao, the most important state planner at this time. From 1932 to 1948, he served in the highest government bodies as secretary-general of the National Defense Planning Commission (1932-1935), chair of its successor the National Resource Commission (1935-1947), Minister of Economic Affairs (1938-1947), and finally President of the Executive Yuan (1948).<sup>6</sup> A national leader in the world of science and technology, Weng approached the Northwest Question with scientific skepticism. He believed that much of what was said about the developmental potential of the Northwest, in spite of its capacity to stir up national feeling, overlooked the region's natural limitations. Troubled by a lack of scientific knowledge, he dispatched scientists, including American soil scientists, on inspection tours to piece together the realities of the Northwest. Scientific literature these scientists produced on the Northwest only underscored the ecological fragility of a region long known for drought and famine. Irrigation works in disrepair and the absence of convenient transportation meant that there were few mechanisms in place to guard against natural disaster. Guided by the production of scientific knowledge, central government efforts in the Northwest during the 1930s were focused on taming the unpredictability of nature and politics, prerequisites for the region to contribute in any substantial way to the national economy.

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<sup>6</sup> Li Xuotong, *Weng Wenhao nianpu (The Chronicle of Weng Wenhao)* (Jinan: Shandong Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2005).

Ultimately, the Northwest did not save the nation, nor did the nation save the Northwest. With the outbreak of full-scale war in 1937, the central government relocated to Chongqing and state investment was overwhelmingly focused on the surrounding provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. By 1942, the Northwest was home to only 21 out of 639 coastal factories that had migrated to the rear and only 73 out of over 1300 newly established factories, mostly located in Shaanxi province.<sup>7</sup> The Northwest remained a peripheral site of underdevelopment. Not only did efforts by a weak state proceed in fits and starts, but the central government often viewed the Northwest in the same colonial terms as the imperialists they criticized. Officials, including Weng, saw the Northwest as a site for extracting resources necessary for industrial development elsewhere. In Nationalist China, the Northwest was continuously relegated to a site of backwardness needing to be “opened up” (*kaiifa* 開發) to support the “reconstruction” (*jianshe* 建設) underway in China proper until 1937 and subsequently in the Southwest.

Weng Wenhao (1889-1971) was the most prominent member of a new cohort of technocrats who emerged as part of the reorganization of the central government after the Mukden Incident. At the end of 1931, Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei, rival leaders of the Guomindang, united to establish a coalition government. Both sides agreed that the Guomindang needed to defeat the Communist movement and further develop the national economy before it would be ready to confront Japanese

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<sup>7</sup> “Jianshe Xibei wenti (The Question of Reconstructing the Northwest),” *Jianshe Yanjiu* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1942): 5-6.

imperialism. During the National Emergency Conference in April 1932, the Wang-Chiang cabinet settled on the principle of pacifying internal enemies while temporarily appeasing external ones (*an'nei rangwai* 安內攘外).<sup>8</sup> The new administration faced not only a crisis of sovereignty but also a crisis of accumulation resulting from the Great Depression, the destructive Yangzi and Huai river floods of 1931, and the Japanese occupation. The decline in domestic production combined with the loss of markets in Manchuria and overseas from protectionist policies triggered a steady drain of silver from the nation. Officials were especially worried about the growing trade deficit from imports of rice, cotton, and wheat.<sup>9</sup> As the central government took steps toward a command economy to lift the country out of economic depression, it replaced classically trained officials with foreign-trained specialists, who could apply their scientific expertise to political economy. It was widely believed following the seizure of Manchuria that “science would save the nation” (*kexue jiuguo* 科學救國).<sup>10</sup> The eminent geologist Ding Wenjiang, an advisor to national defense, argued the extension of science from the academy into government administration would solve shortfalls in national production.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Margherita Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> T'ang Leang-li, *The New Social Order in China* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1936), 253;

<sup>10</sup> He Qingyun, “Kexue jiuguo de yiyi yu fangfa (The Significance and Means of Using Science to Save the Nation),” *Shidai Gonglun* Vol. 3, No. 42 (1934): 23-25.

<sup>11</sup> Ding wrote, “What is called ‘scientific’ or ‘unscientific’ is a question of method and not a question of subject matter.” Officials, like scientists, could use logical methods to systematically classify their objects of rule, deduce inherent relationships, arrive at a common principle, and predict future consequences. Ding Wenjiang, “Kexuehua de jianshe (Scientitized Reconstruction),” *Duli pinglun* (*Independent Review*) No. 151 (1935): 9-13; Charlotte Furth, *Ting Wen-chiang: Science and China's New Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 203. For another example of the conflation of science and production, see Gu Yuxiu, “Women xuyao zenyang de kexue (What Kind of Science Do We Need?),” *Duli pinglun* (*Independent Review*) No. 33 (1933): 12-15.

Government agencies recruited an unprecedented number of engineers to participate in water conservancy projects undertaken in cooperation with the League of Nations.<sup>12</sup> According to Weng, who had been a *xiuca* (graduate of county-level examinations) under the Qing before going overseas for training, engineers were particularly suited to bridging the gap between knowledge and practice that was supposedly fostered under the Chinese intellectual tradition.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, in the mobilization of state and society for war with an enemy backed by superior tanks and heavy artillery, the emergent technocratic elite were entrusted with the urgent task of translating the principles of scientific management from the Fordist assembly line into political economy. Their goals were to effect machinelike efficiency and organization in the hopes of maximizing domestic production.<sup>14</sup> Scientific knowledge of resources distributed within the national

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<sup>12</sup> To maximize the number of skilled personnel, the central government encouraged the study of the sciences and engineering in higher education by limiting enrollment in the humanities and social sciences and sending college graduates overseas for internships. William C. Kirby, "Engineering China," 147; Morris Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China: The Dynamics of Institutional Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 92-100.

<sup>13</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Gongchengshi de renwu (The Duties of Engineers)" *Duli Pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 82 (1933): 6-8. By contrast, historian Benjamin Elman has since argued against using modern epistemology derived from the West as an ahistorical and universal standard to dismiss the effectiveness of late imperial civil examinations. Elman comments, "There were no a priori reasons that the members of the gentry-official managerial elite reproduced by the examination regime before 1850 were by definition inefficient as political and social 'managers' in a pre-industrial society" (Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*, 126).

<sup>14</sup> Frederick Winslow Taylor summarized the concepts underlying his theory of scientific management as follows: "science, not rule of thumb; harmony, not discord; cooperation, not individualism; maximum output, in place of restricted output; the development of each man to his greatest efficiency and prosperity." Frederick Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1913). Historians of China have demonstrated an unquestioned belief in economic productivity as key to national strength in the early twentieth century. For instance, Janet Chen has argued that citizenship was defined by productive labor in twentieth century China, without bestowing political, civil, and social rights. Janet Chen, *Guilty of Indigence: the Urban Poor in China, 1900-1953* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Taylorism became an underlying principle of the Guomindang's attempt to regulate behavioral norms. The leaders of the New Life Movement sought to produce an efficient citizenry that could serve industrial development and military

territory was essential to the coordination of economic flows. Under scientific management, official policy on “reconstruction” (*jianshe* 建設), based on the material, psychological, and social dimensions articulated by Sun Yat -sen, was gradually stripped down and conflated with sheer “production” (*shengchan* 生產).<sup>15</sup>

Chiang Kai-shek handpicked Weng Wenhao to lead the new National Defense Planning Commission (*Guofang Sheji Weiyuanhui* 國防設計委員會) based on his first-hand knowledge as a geologist of the possibilities and limitations for national resource exploitation in China. Weng made his reputation as the first Chinese to earn a doctoral degree in geology from the University of Louvain, Belgium, becoming a leading figure in the Geological Survey of China.<sup>16</sup> First-generation geologists, such as Weng and his colleagues Ding Wenjiang, Zhu Jiahua, and Xie Jiarong, were widely regarded as the vanguard of the modern age. Their reconnaissance surveys fostered the rational utilization of natural wealth by identifying and classifying resources both above and below the earth’s surface (e.g., raw materials, fuel, soil,

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mobilization. Margaret Clinton, *Fascism, Cultural Revolution, and National Sovereignty in 1930s China*, 199-200. For background on the militarization of society, see also, Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, Chapter Six.

<sup>15</sup> The fixation on industrial output meant that national crisis was now quantifiable in China. Timothy Mitchell has argued that the idea of ‘the economy’ as a “self-contained structure or totality of relations of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services within a given geographical space” emerged alongside large-scale, technoscientific governmental practices in the 1930s. The national economy, a new object of representation, was measured as aggregates and averages, later elaborated as gross national product. According to Mitchell, “the economy was distinguished by the fact that it stood for the material sphere of life,” distinct from the social, the cultural, and other spheres. Conservative ideologues conceived of modern life as a totality encompassing both material and spiritual manifestations. Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>16</sup> Li Xuetong, *Weng Wenhao nianpu*.

underground water, and fertilizer) for industry and agriculture.<sup>17</sup> By the time of Weng's appointment, the state of geological surveys had already become a metaphor in China for national progress.<sup>18</sup> According to Xie Jiarong, cultural backwardness in China could be gleaned from the fact that geology was the latest of the sciences to develop.<sup>19</sup> By the 1930s, geologists were all the more crucial to the development of military industries. As part of the pursuit of a "national defense economy" (*guofang jingji* 國防經濟), they addressed the growing demand for fossil fuels in China as part of the global rise of oil consumption to power machines, especially motor vehicles and aircraft necessary for industrial warfare.<sup>20</sup>

From his fieldwork for the Geological Survey in the 1910s and 1920s, Weng produced key estimates of natural resources that challenged the popular notion of inexhaustible mineral riches in China. The origin of this myth was often traced back to the work of Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905), the German geographer who toured China between 1868 and 1872. Widely regarded as the founder of Chinese geology, Richthofen famously concluded that the coal of Shanxi province could supply the world for thousands of years.<sup>21</sup> Later geologists acknowledged how Richthofen's groundbreaking work fueled Qing and foreign imperialist interest in

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<sup>17</sup> Xie Jiarong, "Dizhixue yu xiandai wenhua (Geology and Modern Culture)," *Guofeng* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1933): 22-25.

<sup>18</sup> Shellen Wu, "The Search for Coal in the Age of Empires: Ferdinand von Richthofen's Odyssey in China, 1860-1920," *American Historical Review* (April 2014): 339-363.

<sup>19</sup> Xie, "Geology and Modern Culture," 25.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Richthofen's research was the point of departure for Qing mining ventures as well as the German occupation of Jiaozhou Bay in Shandong province. Grace Yen Shen, *Unearthing the Nation: Modern Geology and Nationalism in Republican China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 33-34; Weng Wenhao, "Richthofen and Geological Work in China," *Bulletin of the Geological Society of China* Vol. 12, No. 1-2 (March 1933): 311-314.

developing Chinese mines, but their research often proved his observations to be gross exaggerations. In a 1921 report, Weng Wenhao and Ding Wenjiang confirmed that China was home to one of the greatest coal reserves in the world, not to mention the leading producer of antimony and tungsten. Yet, if the nation consumed coal at the same rate as the United States and Great Britain, that is, six tons per capita annually, then the estimated 45 billion tons of coal in existing mines would last little more than 15 years.<sup>22</sup> Their report and subsequent addenda by the Geological Survey were presented at the World Power Conference and widely cited in articles published by Chinese scholars as well as foreign non-governmental organizations inspired by Wilsonian internationalism, such as the Council of Foreign Relations and Institute of Pacific Affairs.<sup>23</sup> Even without extensive exploration, these initial estimates led scholars to conclude that China was generally deficient in mineral wealth, particularly the iron ore and petroleum needed for industrial development.<sup>24</sup>

Early on in his career, Weng believed that the Northwest could potentially offer China proper some respite as a source of natural wealth. He became acquainted

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<sup>22</sup> Ding Wenjiang and Weng Wenhao, *Zhongguo kuangye jiyao (A General Statement on the Mining Industry in China)* (Beiping: Geological Survey of China, 1921); see also Xu Shizhuang, "Shijie yuandongli de gongji wenti (The Question of the World Power Supplies)," *Kuangye (Mining and Metallurgy)* Vol. 3, No. 12 (May 1930), 25-32. According to Xu, average annual per capita consumption in the world was 0.65 tons per year, whereas that of the U.S. was 5.5 tons (8.5 times greater). If everyone in the world consumed to the same degree as Americans, then there would only be about 500 years instead of 4480 years of production possible with current reserve estimates. There would only be enough for one hundred years if Chinese consumed at the same level as Americans.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, H. Foster Bain, *Ores and Industry in the Far East* (1927); H. Foster Bain, "China's Coal Reserves," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 6, No. 3 (April 1928): 498-500. According to Bain, who was secretary of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers, the United States consumed about 600 million tons of coal annually compared to China's 20-25 million tons. Average per capita consumption in China from a sample of 42 cities was 0.32 tons, with the highest rate at 1.3 tons. In the United States, the average per capita consumption was 5.5 tons, with the highest rate at 7 tons in New England.

<sup>24</sup> See C.K. Leith, "The Mineral Resources of the Far East," *Foreign Affairs* (April 1926); H. Foster Bain, *Ores and Industry in the Far East* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1927), 182-183.



with the Northwest through his investigation in the aftermath of the Gansu earthquake of 1920, the basis of major publications on seismology,<sup>25</sup> as well as the reports of scientists he dispatched to the region as director of the Geological Survey of China.<sup>26</sup> In 1924, he published a plan for opening up the gold, petroleum, and coal deposits in the region. Estimates for provinces in western China remained unavailable, but it was already apparent that the oil fields of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang were the richest source of petroleum in China.<sup>27</sup> He warned, however, that whatever resources were found in the Northwest would go to waste (*li qi yu di* 利棄於地) without a connection to the Longhai railroad.<sup>28</sup> The problem of inaccessibility meant these provinces could not contribute to national output until transportation was improved to overcome formidable geographical barriers.

Close to a decade later, however, when the Northwest was thrown into the national spotlight, the region typically appeared in Weng Wenhao's essays and speeches as the wrong choice for economic development in a country that was "in need of the greatest results in the shortest amount of time." In particular, he considered grandiose schemes to colonize the Northwest as the most egregious examples of amateurish planning within the government. Economic planning during the years 1928-1931, before Weng's tenure in the central government, had been

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<sup>25</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Gansu dizhen kao (An Examination of the Gansu Earthquake)," *Kexue (Science)* Vol. 6, No. 11 (1921): 1079-1094.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, he appointed Chu Minyi and Yang Zhongjian to be members of the Sino-French Scientific Inspection Tour to Xinjiang in 1931. Yang Zhongjian, *Xibei de poumian (Profile of the Northwest)* (1932).

<sup>27</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Kaifa Xibei kuangye jihua (Mining Plan for Opening Up the Northwest)," in Weng Wenhao, *Weng Wenhao lun jingji jianshe (Weng Wenhao on Economic Reconstruction)* (Beijing: Tuanjie Chubanshe, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Mining Plan for Opening Up the Northwest."

guided by the National Reconstruction Commission (*Jianshe weiyuanhui* 建設委員會) founded by Hu Hanmin, a venerated elder of the Guomindang who became estranged from the Nanjing government during the Wang-Chiang coalition.<sup>29</sup> Other than its work building the national capital in Nanjing, the National Reconstruction Commission often failed to produce results.<sup>30</sup> When the Mukden Incident and Shanghai War of 1932 exposed the weakness of the central government, Weng and his fellow academics in Beijing founded the journal *Independent Review* (*Duli Pinglun* 獨立評論), a well-known forum for criticism of a weak, corrupt, and irrational bureaucracy.<sup>31</sup> In his earliest essays, written just as he was entering into government service, Weng lamented that there was little to show for the widespread clamor for reconstruction by Nanjing officials. According to Weng, disillusioned citizens had begun to refer to their officials' empty talk as the "reconstruction of a lost nation" (*jianshe wangguo* 建設亡國) and "governing by doing nothing" (*wuwei er zhi* 無為而治).<sup>32</sup>

Existing government plans, including those for the Northwest, left him extremely troubled by their wildly inaccurate geographical information. Weng was deeply invested in gathering accurate information about China's different regions,

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<sup>29</sup> Hu lost considerable influence during the years of compromise between Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek, having left the capital for southern China where he allied with local militarists. See Lloyd Eastman, "Nationalist China during the Nanking decade." Also, Sui-sheng Zhao, *Power by Design*, 134-136.

<sup>30</sup> David Allen Pietz, *Engineering and the State: the Huai River and reconstruction in Nationalist China, 1927-1937* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*.

<sup>31</sup> Furth, *Ting Wen-chiang*, 197-199.

<sup>32</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Jingji jianshe zhong jige zhongyao wenti (A Few Important Questions with Economic Reconstruction)," *Duli pinglun* (*Independent Review*) No. 69 (1933), 2-5.

first as a geologist by training and later as the leader of national defense planning.<sup>33</sup> No stranger to the Northwest, he was astounded that government agencies responsible for economic development would claim that Gansu had 14.78 million *qing* of cultivable land – two and a half times larger than the entire surface area of the province. Weng asked how, without even a handle on general knowledge, any plans could have come to fruition.<sup>34</sup> Even if he did not explicitly name the guilty party, it is clear his criticisms were aimed at the National Reconstruction Commission's "Opening Up the Northwest Plan" (*Kaifa Xibei Jihua* 開發西北計劃) of 1931.<sup>35</sup>

For Weng, arguments for colonizing uncultivated borderlands represented no more than an outpouring of unsubstantiated ideas that stoked a false sense of hope after the devastating loss of Manchuria. Weng ridiculed the planning commission for suggesting that ninety million people could migrate to the wastelands of Shaanxi, Gansu, Suiyuan, Xinjiang, Ningxia, and Qinghai, a plan based on the low population density in interior provinces. He wrote, "They say Gansu is more than four times larger than Zhejiang, so Gansu can accommodate four times as many people as Zhejiang, that is, 88 million people, a fifteen-fold increase of the current population

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<sup>33</sup> Weng soon exhibited this commitment in the *New Atlas of the Republic of China* (1934) he compiled with Ding Wenjiang and Zeng Shiyong.

<sup>34</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Zhongguo renkou fenbu yu tudi liyong (The Distribution of Population and Land Utilization in China)," *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 3 (1932): 9-12; No. 4 (1932): 10-13.

<sup>35</sup> Reproduced in Gu Baoheng, "Yimin kenzhi chuyi (My Humble Opinion on Migration and Reclamation)," *Yunnan jianshe gongbao (Yunnan Reconstruction Bulletin)* No. 11 (1931), B39; National Reconstruction Commission, "Kaifa Xibei jihua (Opening Up the Northwest Plan)" in Xi'an Municipal Archives, ed. *Minguo Kaifa Xibei (Opening Up the Northwest in Republican-era China)* (Xi'an: Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology Press, 2003), 138-166.

of Gansu.”<sup>36</sup> From his point of view, the voluntarist desire to “conquer nature” by migrating en masse to an already famine-ridden place was nonsensical: “In areas where each person has more acreage, it is because the land is not good. It does not mean that the people are richer.”<sup>37</sup>

As a geologist, Weng corrected the widespread misconception that the supposedly empty lands and vast surface area of the Northwest could all be cultivated, as had been in the case in Manchuria in previous decades. The Northwest, he pointed out, was home to formidable mountain ranges (e.g., Qinling, Tianshan, Kunlun, Qilian/Richthofen), plateaus (i.e., loess, Mongolian, Tibetan), and the Gobi desert, leaving farmland in short supply for “pitifully naïve” colonization plans. Scattered throughout the Northwest were indeed a handful of alluvial plains, but they were already heavily settled. Even with good irrigation to combat scant rainfall, this region could only accommodate a maximum of ten million additional people. The combined surface area of cultivable lands in the Wei river valley, Suiyuan, the Great Bend of the Yellow River, Ningxia, Western Gansu, and Xinjiang was 47,000 square *li*, not even half of the much more fertile Songliao plain in the Northeast. Weng did not dispute claims that Han Chinese were an agricultural nation adept at turning wasteland into farms, but he opposed misplaced hopes and false comparisons made without consulting scientific experts. Fearing that his compatriots would lose the resolve to recover Manchuria, he repeatedly explained that it was the Northeast, not

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<sup>36</sup> Weng Wenhao, “Zenyang jianshe neidi (How to Reconstruct the Interior),” *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 124 (1934): 2-4.

<sup>37</sup> Weng Wenhao, “The Distribution of Population and Land Utilization in China.”

the Northwest, that was one of the few virgin lands left in the world.<sup>38</sup> Other geographers only underscored the incommensurability of Manchuria and the Northwest.<sup>39</sup>

Mistaken ideas about the Northwest represented one example of what many natural scientists at the time regarded as the sorry state of geographical knowledge in China, a serious impediment to state-building efforts. Scientists often lamented that foreign powers seemed to be more knowledgeable about China's geography than its own citizens. According to the demographer Hu Huanyong, of the 2000 high-school graduates that sat for the admission exams at National Central University in Nanjing, less than 100 were able to correctly identify all the provinces on a map of China.<sup>40</sup> Under the leadership of Weng Wenhao, the Geographical Society of China (founded in 1934) spurred field research and educational initiatives in geography to remedy this gap. Its membership included geologists, geographers, demographers, meteorologists, soil scientists, and agricultural economists. Reflecting a regional turn in the academic discipline of geography, their research was largely driven by the impulse to divide

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Zhang Qiyun took note of the geographical and climactic differences between the Northeast and the Northwest. The small-scale plains in the drought-prone Northwest historically relied on manmade irrigation, such as the Jinghui canal constructed by the Qin, to provide for their populations. Since these hydraulic projects had fallen into disrepair, drought and famine often left the "simple and ignorant" people in the region with nowhere to turn aside from banditry. The precarious nature of the Northwest served as a warning sign for those who proposed a national revival in the region. By contrast, in spite of earlier migration from northern China, the Northeast could accommodate another twenty million people. Known for his environmental determinism, Zhang noted how differences in regional surroundings produced crude simpletons in the Northwest versus steadfast pioneers in the Northeast. During the great famine of 1920, the three eastern provinces had had a bumper harvest and supplied relief to disaster victims in the rest of the country. The recovery of lost territory in the Northeast, for Zhang, was not just a matter of sentimentality but one of national survival. Zhang Qiyun, "Zhonghua minzu zhi dili fenbu (The Geographical Distribution of the Chinese Nation)," *Dili xuebao (Journal of the Geographical Society of China)* Vol. 2, No. 1 (March 1935): 21-52. For an account of Zhang's environmental determinism, see Chen, "Climate's Moral Economy."

<sup>40</sup> Hu Huanyong, "'Guonan yu dili jiaoyu,'" *Dili jiaoyu* Vol.1, No. 3 (June 1, 1936): 2.

China into natural regions based on climate, topography, soil, vegetation, and mineral resources.<sup>41</sup> Zhang Qiyun, the foremost economic geographer at the time, argued that the identification of the country's natural divisions and distribution of resources would assist the state in its pursuit of autarky. In his view, national survival depended on the ability of the state to gather resources and labor power.<sup>42</sup>

Weng Wenhao's knowledge of the natural limits of the Northwest drew heavily on soil reconnaissance that the Geological Survey under his leadership had been conducting in cooperation with American soil scientists.<sup>43</sup> Pedology first emerged as a modern discipline in late nineteenth century Russia when Vasily Dokuchaev devised the first soil classification system. Eugene Hilgard and Curtis Marbut later adapted the study of soil to the United States. By the time they began to apply their experience in "the land of famine," American soil scientists had already mapped more than half of all arable lands within the United States.<sup>44</sup> From 1928-1933, the Institute of Pacific Affairs in cooperation with the Department of Agricultural Economics at Jinling University conducted a study of land utilization in twenty-two provinces, directed by John Lossing Buck. The purpose of this study, which was partially funded by the National Economic Council, was to train Chinese students in soil research, inform national agricultural policies, and gather general information

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<sup>41</sup> Zhang Qiyun, "Zhongguo dili xuehui gaikuang yu qi xiwang (The state of China's Geographical Society and its Prospects)," *Kexue* (Science) Vol. 20, No. 10 (October 1936): 831-839.

<sup>42</sup> Zhang Qiyun, "Zhongguo jingji dili shang jige qieyao de wenti (A Question of Vital Importance for Chinese Economic Geography)," *Dili jiaoyu* Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1, 1936): 7, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Preface," *Soil Bulletin* No. 1 (1931): 1

<sup>44</sup> James Thorp, "Soil Profile Studies as an Aid to Understanding Recent Geology," *Bulletin of the Geological Society of China* Vol. 14, No. 3 (September 1935): 359-392; Also, see Benno Peter Warkentin, ed., *Footprints in the Soil: People and Ideas in Soil History* (Boston, MA; Elsevier, 2006).

about land utilization, food, and population in China for a global audience.<sup>45</sup> The contributions of Charles Shaw, Professor of Soil Technology at University of California, Berkeley, to the project in 1930 laid the foundation for soil research by the Geological Survey. Responding to the economic crisis in rural China, Weng secured funding from the China Foundation for Education and Culture to set up a Soils Division, appointing Robert Pendleton from the College of Agriculture in the Philippines and then James Thorp from the United States Department of Agriculture as chief soil technicians.<sup>46</sup> Their results were published in the bilingual *Soil Bulletin* (*Turang Zhuanbao* 土壤專報), which featured special issues on Salachi in Suiyuan (May 1932), the Wei River Valley in Shaanxi (April 1935), soils of northern and northwestern China (July 1935), and northwestern Gansu (April 1938).<sup>47</sup>

As foreign scientists introduced soil classification systems to China, they diagnosed the problems of the Northwest using the categories of natural science. They found that little rainfall in this semi-arid and arid region led to the accumulation of lime in soils known as pedocals. By contrast, pedalfers occur in humid climates where heavy rainfall leaches away free lime and organic acids are generated by the

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<sup>45</sup> John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1937), vii-viii.

<sup>46</sup> Zitong Gong, Jeremy L. Darilek, Zhigang Wang, Biao Huang, and Ganlin Zhang, "American Soil Scientists' Contributions to Chinese Pedology in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," *Soil Survey Horizons* (Spring 2010): 3-9.

<sup>47</sup> Pan Dedun, Chang Longqing, Chen Wei, Hou Guangjiong, eds., *Suiyuan Salaqi qu turang baogao* [Special Issue], *Turang zhuanbao* No. 4 (May 1932); Zhou Changyi, Zhang Naifeng, Chen Wei, eds., *Weihe liuyu turang diaocha baogao* [Special Issue], *Turang zhuanbao* No. 9 (April 1935); Suo Po, Hou Guangjiong, Xiong Yizhai, eds., *Zhongguo beibu ji xibei bu zhi turang* [Special Issue], *Turang zhuanbao* Vol. 12 (July 1935); Ma Rongzhi, ed., *Gansu xibei bu zhi turang* [Special Issue], *Turang zhuanbao* No. 19 (April 1938).

decay of forest debris.<sup>48</sup> Of the calcium soils, the Northwest is perhaps best known for its loess, a blanket of fine wind-blown silt from the Gobi desert that settled on the ancient topography of Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Henan over thousands of years. Scientists found loess to be naturally fertile with mineral nutrients. Richthofen first observed that the high porosity of loess lent itself to capillary action, allowing minerals buried in the soil to rise during rainfall.<sup>49</sup> A long dry season and the lack of organic matter, however, meant that proper irrigation and fertilizer were both needed to increase yields of wheat and millet. Loess was also easily susceptible to water and wind erosion in spite of the efforts of farmers to build terraces as a measure of soil control. Chief among the many dangers of erosion was the increased likelihood and severity of flooding because of obstructed waterways.<sup>50</sup>

Weng Wenhao was a pioneer in calculating soil erosion along the Yellow River. He estimated that there were 326,000,000 cubic meters (473,000,000 tons) of silt being transported downstream annually, 90% of which was loess. Drawing on his earlier work on seismic activity, he also suggested that landslides resulting from major earthquakes had historically facilitated the erosion of 750,000,000 cubic meters of loess over the preceding millennium.<sup>51</sup> Richtofen had once speculated that the layer of loess could be as thick as 1500 feet in certain sections, but the Beiping

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<sup>48</sup> James Thorp, "Geographic Distribution of the Important Soils of China," *Bulletin of the Geological Society of China* Vol. 14, No. 2 (June 1935): 119-160; James Thorp, "Soil Profile Studies as an Aid to Understanding Recent Geology," 359-392.

<sup>49</sup> Ch'ao-ting Chi, *Key Economic Areas in Chinese History*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Buck, *Land Utilization in China*, 140, 191.

<sup>51</sup> Weng Wenhao, "A Quantitative Study of the Phenomena of Erosion and Deposition in North China," *Bulletin of the Geological Society of China* Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1931): 247-272.



Geological Survey discovered that it was no more than 50-60 feet.<sup>52</sup> Because of extensive soil erosion stripping the land of fertile loess and leaving only the underlying gravel behind, there was actually less cultivable land in Shaanxi and Gansu than in ancient times.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, soil conservationist Walter Clay Lowdermilk concluded after his expeditions in Northwest China during the 1920s that deforestation and the erosion of at least twelve inches of topsoil was the cause of depopulation, famine, and aridity in the “cradle of Chinese civilization.”<sup>54</sup>

Like Weng Wenhao, American soil scientists questioned the prospect of expanding agricultural cultivation in the Northwest. John Lossing Buck rejected O.E. Baker’s earlier estimate of 700 million acres of arable land in China, which gave credence to the fantasy of colonizing vast areas in the Northwest. He believed that people who “have been [to the Northwest] and have seen with a discerning eye” knew that Chinese farmers had long ago settled the good land in this region, along with a good deal of sub-marginal land that was a better fit for pastures or forests.<sup>55</sup> James Thorp even found Weng’s estimate of ten million new settlers in the Northwest

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<sup>52</sup> Ren Mei’e, “Zhongguo beibu zhi huangtu yu rensheng,” *Zhongguo jianshe* Vol. 12, No. 4 (October 1935): 92.

<sup>53</sup> Weng, “Zhongguo de turang yu qi xiangguan de rensheng wenti (The Question of Soil and Its Relation to Life in China),” *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 125 (1935): 7-12.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Clay Lowdermilk, “Man-Made Deserts,” *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 1935): 409-419. Lowdermilk was, in effect, Ellsworth Huntington’s thesis of the desiccation of Northwest China over the past 2000 years. After visiting ruins in Xinjiang, Huntington believed that the abandonment of settlements resulted from a decrease in rainfall. According to Lowdermilk, “loss of vegetation in North China is not due to increasing aridity; but increasing desiccation has followed the loss of soils, and resulting lack of conservation of moisture” (p. 416). Ding Wenjiang expressed doubts that the loess of Northwest China was ever covered with forest, pointing to a low water-table underground and the lack of plant remains. V. K. Ting, “Notes on the Records of Droughts and Floods in Shensi and the Supposed Desiccation of N.W. China,” *Geografiska Annaler* Vol. 17 (1935): 453-462.

<sup>55</sup> Buck, *Land Utilization in China*.

to be extremely generous, considering that “all of [them] would be living under conditions of poverty and low standards, with the specter of famine just around the corner.”<sup>56</sup> He warned against upsetting the delicate balance of nature in the region. The introduction of irrigation water to desert soils could lead to salt concentrations on the surface that were detrimental to crops or adversely react with lime in the soil to produce a common washing soda poisonous to plants. The settlement of “land-hungry colonists” in Chahar and Suiyuan would also destroy natural vegetation protecting these regions against shifting sand dunes.<sup>57</sup>

The need for conservation efforts was only made more apparent by the Dust Bowl unfolding in the United States. American scientists invoked natural disaster in their own country to debunk the widespread desire in China to repeat the experience of the American West. Lowdermilk criticized the United States for “same methods of suicidal use of lands” as in historical China. Photographic evidence of deforestation in China had earlier convinced Theodore Roosevelt to establish the U.S. Forest Service. By the 1930s, homesteaders in the U.S. had plowed up of millions of acres of prairie grazing lands. Continuous cropping eventually depleted the ability of the soil to bind. When Lowdermilk was writing at the end of 1935, five million acres of formerly good land had already been transformed into wastelands and sand dunes, with sixty million acres awaiting a similar fate.<sup>58</sup> Buck too criticized the practice of “breaking up perfecting good grass land to make poor agricultural land.” He wrote

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<sup>56</sup> James Thorp, “Colonization Possibilities of Northwest China and Inner Mongolia,” *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 1935): 447-453.

<sup>57</sup> James Thorp and Hou Guangjiong, *Soils of Northern and Northwestern China* (Peiping, China: National Geological Survey of China, 1935).

<sup>58</sup> Lowdermilk, “Man-Made Deserts,” 409-419.

“the same phenomenon is occurring and has taken place in China’s Northwest as has occurred in the dry marginal lands east of the Rocky Mountains in the United States, where four successive generations have moved on to the land and then moved away again because the years of good crops were not frequent enough to maintain even a meager standard of living.”<sup>59</sup> From his time living in Colorado, Thorp noted how soil erosion arose from the imprudent cultivation of grasslands better suited for raising cattle and sheep. Arid soils were transformed by poor practices into a sandy desert and then “abandoned to the destructive winds.”<sup>60</sup> As for Northwest China, he figured soil erosion along the Yellow River would result in either the deposit of sand onto good soil, as was observed in Kaifeng, or the transfer of fertile soil away from the Northwest.<sup>61</sup>

The soil scientists concluded that the population problem in China could not be solved by mass migration but would require the adoption of modern transportation, economic organization and technical improvements in agriculture.<sup>62</sup> In the case of Gansu and Shaanxi, the westward extension of the Longhai Railroad from Xi’an to Lanzhou was imperative for economic development. At the same time, Buck argued that unfavorable natural conditions that made this area the most severely affected by crop failure meant that it could not afford the extent of development of most other areas. Extensive investment would likely never pay off in returns.<sup>63</sup> The geologist George Cressey remarked, “The best that irrigation and scientific agriculture can do

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<sup>59</sup> Buck, *Land Utilization in China*.

<sup>60</sup> Thorp. “Colonization Possibilities of Northwest China and Inner Mongolia,” 452.

<sup>61</sup> Thorp and Hou, *Soils of Northern and Northwestern China*, 97-98.

<sup>62</sup> Buck *Land Utilization in China*, 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

can never touch more than a small fraction of the arid lands of Central Asia.

Engineering skill may eventually provide room for a few millions, but compared with the entire population of China such figures mean little. Most of the region must forever remain a desert.”<sup>64</sup>

Out of step with scientific knowledge, a national revival premised on the expansion of agricultural production in Northwest China also made little sense to Weng Wenhao because he, like others working in the Wang-Chiang cabinet, rejected the idea of agriculture as the basis of national well-being.<sup>65</sup> The Mukden Incident was only further proof that agricultural nations would only become the colonies of industrialized ones.<sup>66</sup> Chen Gongbo, a leader of the Wang group, went so far as to argue that the ideal of founding the country on agriculture (*yinong liguo* 以農立國) was not only outdated in the modern age, but had never actually been realized in the past. Far from being a central organizing principle, agriculture was only used to supply the country (*yinong gongguo* 以農供國). Imperial China left the problems of land tax, hydraulics, and pestilence unresolved in its lack of a systematic approach to agriculture. Moreover, farmers fared no better than workers and merchants, as they

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<sup>64</sup> George Cressey, *China's Geographic Foundations: A Survey of the Land and its People* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1934).

<sup>65</sup> To be sure, Margherita Zanasi has described that the Guomindang factions had different types of industrialization in mind. Each drew from a foreign source of inspiration to set forward a new vision for political economy. Modeling themselves after Italian fascists, the Wang Jingwei group focused on achieving import substitution by cooperating with business interests to develop raw material production in the hinterland for light industries, most notably Jiangnan cotton mills. In contrast, the Chiang group followed a German path that measured natural strength in terms of military forces and therefore emphasized state-owned heavy industries.

<sup>66</sup> See for example, Weng Wenhao, “Guoying zhonggongye de yiyi yu renshi tongren de zeren (The significance of state-run heavy industry and responsibilities of appointees),” *Ziyuan weiyuanhui gongbao* (*Bulletin of the National Resource Commission*) Vol. 3, No. 2 (August 16, 1942): 75-80.

were all oppressed by political and cultural elites. Chen did not deny the need to furnish relief supplies to bankrupt villages, but he believed a fundamental solution to the agrarian crisis was a drastic reduction of the farming population. Chinese agricultural products were already struggling on a world market dominated by foreign monopolies. Families crammed onto small plots of land, Chen felt, would be better off engaging in the modern industry that he identified with national power. The mechanization of agricultural production was stifled by an abundance of laborers willing to work cheaply. Without reevaluating its economic foundations, the nation would continue on the course to extinction.<sup>67</sup> Weng believed China had to progress from “using agriculture to found the country” to “using industry to reconstruct the country” (*yigong jianguo* 以工建國).<sup>68</sup> The emphasis on settler colonialism gradually waned in discussions of the Northwest in the 1930s because it was out of step with this desire for industrialization.

Because it was riddled with inaccuracies and outdated thinking, Weng deemed opening up the Northwest a symbol of waste in government operations, fostered by the application of inadequate lay knowledge in state-building.<sup>69</sup> The vast majority of plans for regional development, like much of economic planning at the time, went no

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<sup>67</sup> Chen Gongbo, “Wo duiyu yinong liguo de yijian (My View of Agriculture as the Basis of the Country),” *Zhongyang zhoubao* (*Central Party Affairs Weekly*) No. 369 (1935): 5-8; Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*, Chapter Two.

<sup>68</sup> Weng Wenhao, “Founding the Country on Agriculture, Reconstructing the Country on Industry,” *National Resources Commission Bulletin* Vol. 1, No. 4 (October 16, 1941): 92-93.

<sup>69</sup> Rather than his attention to efficiency and resourcefulness, Weng is popularly depicted for his supposed incorruptibility because he tried to shelter himself and organizations under his control from party politics. See Ding Wenjiang, “The Weng Wenhao that I Know”; Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, p. 95; Freda Utley, *China at War* (New York: John Day Co., 1939), 62; Grace Yen Shen, *Unearthing the Nation*. Lloyd Eastman has recounted, however, how Weng Wenhao was later accused of corruption during party struggles between ideologues and pragmatists during the 1940s Gexin Movement. (Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction*, Chapter Five.)

further than initial surveying. In contrast with politicians that faulted the shortage of public funds for the slow pace of development, Weng was preoccupied with mismanagement that inevitably squandered any money set aside for reconstruction.<sup>70</sup> For instance, he complained that officials preferred to spend one hundred thousand yuan on another round of inspection tours in the Northwest as if it were the South Pole rather than, say, fund drilling in Yanchang, a region rich with fossil fuels in northern Shaanxi, which would only cost ten thousand yuan. Without any purpose or organization, these surveys arose in a flurry of excitement and dispersed as quickly. Aside from the tourism benefitting local authorities, nothing practical was gained from these public expenditures.<sup>71</sup>

Yet another instance of waste, to Weng's efficient eye, was the Guomindang's decision after the Shanghai War of 1932 to create a secondary capital (*peidu* 陪都) in Xi'an. This ancient city (formerly known as Chang'an) had long served as the imperial capital of former dynasties – most notably, the Qin (221-206 BCE), Han (202 BCE-220 CE), Sui (581-617), and Tang (618-907) – and its inland location could, in theory, provide a strategic safe haven in case of further encroachment. Weng found the prospect of capital building in the Northwest fraught with uncertainty. Widened streets, multistoried buildings, museums and libraries would not “naturally” lead to an increase in population growth and economic development, he felt, but

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<sup>70</sup> Weng Wenhao, “Jingji jianshe yu jishu hezuo (Economic Reconstruction and Skilled Cooperation,” *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 63 (1933): 6-10.

<sup>71</sup> Weng Wenhao, “Ruhe kaifa Xibei (How to Open Up the Northwest),” *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No 40 (1933).

would only add to the burdens of a worn-down and strapped populace.<sup>72</sup> Conservative intellectuals, such as Zhang Puquan, head of the Xijing Preparatory Committee, painted romantic images of ancient empires in order to admonish the nation about present-day neglect of the Northwest, but geologists presented the region as an unchanging bastion of environmental disasters. According to Ding Wenjiang, “not even at the height of its glory [was] Shensi... free from famine or even self-supporting.”<sup>73</sup> Weng stressed that frequent crop failure in ancient Chang’an had to be relieved by the transport of grain over the Qinling Mountains, which separated the fertile Hanzhong plain in the south from ecologically fraught Guanzhong in the center.<sup>74</sup> In the 1930s, transportation between these areas was no less important to carry relief supplies and ward off famine.<sup>75</sup> For Weng, the building of modern cities would be better suited for already well-off areas in China, such as the Central Plains, the Yangzi River valley, the Southeastern coast, and the Sichuan Basin. Instead of “moving the Forbidden Palace Museum to Xi’an,” every bit of resources in the Northwest, he argued, should be used productively in disaster relief, bandit suppression, and modernizing infrastructure to bring about public order. Extravagant city planning could not be imposed on households with annual incomes of less than 100 yuan. Only when the local economy was stabilized could the region contribute in any significant way to the nation.<sup>76</sup> Others too urged the central government to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ting, “Notes on the Records of Droughts and Floods in Shensi and the Supposed Desiccation of N.W. China,” 453-462.

<sup>74</sup> Weng, “Zhongguo renkou fenbu yu tudi liyong,” 10-13.

<sup>75</sup> Weng, “How to Reconstruct the Interior.”

<sup>76</sup> Weng Wenhao, “How to Open Up the Northwest.”

indefinitely postpone the building of the “Western Capital” (Xijing 西京) in such harsh natural environments, especially in light of the fact that the building of Nanjing was not yet complete.<sup>77</sup>

Because of their attempts at Taylorist efficiency, the Soviet Union’s five-year plans appeared most frequently in Weng Wenhao’s writings as heroic examples of national economic planning. He admired GOSPLAN (the Soviet State Planning Commission) as a tightly integrated central authority that was capable of vast coordination between different sectors and regions. China, he felt, needed a similar organization of scientific and technical intelligentsia in order to gather, evaluate and prioritize plans before implementation.<sup>78</sup> While Guomindang theoreticians were typically staunch anti-Communists, Weng admired what appeared to be a commitment to scientific progress in the Soviet Union. His opinion seemed no different from that of Ding Wenjiang, who visited the country in 1933. According to Charlotte Furth, Ding found it easier to sympathize with Communist bureaucrats, whom he considered pioneers in applying scientific engineering to an undeveloped society, than with the armed Communist revolutionaries in China.<sup>79</sup>

To achieve a control economy, technocrats in China aspired to similarly combine scientific prowess and political power to bring together the country’s economic forces, which had splintered as a result of party divisions and provincial protectionism, into a coherent whole that maximized productivity and minimized

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<sup>77</sup> “Xijing jianshe yu Xijing daxue,” *Huanian* Vol. 1, No. 15 (1932): 282.

<sup>78</sup> Weng, “Reconstruction and Planning”; Weng, “A Few Important Questions with Economic Reconstruction.”

<sup>79</sup> Furth, *Ting Wen-chiang*, 204-214.



waste.<sup>80</sup> In the mid-1930s, the central government launched an administrative efficiency movement to reform the civil service. In 1934, the Executive Yuan established the Commission of Administrative Efficiency (行政院行政效率研究會) to conduct a systematic study of government departments and suggest improvements to make the existing system more efficient and economical.<sup>81</sup> During the war, Weng again took issue with waste within government operations when the bureaucracy became inflated from an increased number of tasks and hundreds of thousands of civil servants.<sup>82</sup>

Economic administration remained, however, an object of factional struggle in Nationalist China. Early on in his appointment, Weng took issue with disconnected and self-interested government agencies, such as the Bureaus of Industry, Railways, and Communications, all haphazardly planning without any regard for one another.<sup>83</sup> He found that political upheavals only led to further disorganization by reshuffling agencies and starting over incomplete projects so that any possible results cost twice as much.<sup>84</sup> Under the Wang-Chiang coalition, power sharing meant that two parallel economic planning agencies were established in 1931-1932. The Wang group headed the civilian National Economic Council. Chiang presided over its military affairs counterparts, the National Defense Planning Commission and its successor, the

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<sup>80</sup> Ding Wenjiang, "Shixing tongzhi jingji zhidu de tiaojian (Conditions for Realizing a Control Economy)," *Tuohuang* Vol. 2, No. 4-5 (1934): 103-106.

<sup>81</sup> T'ang, *The New Social Order in China*, 267.

<sup>82</sup> Hans van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China: 1925-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 280.

<sup>83</sup> Weng, "A Few Important Questions with Economic Reconstruction," 2-5.

<sup>84</sup> Weng Wenhao, "Jianshe yu jihua (Reconstruction and Planning)," *Duli pinglun (Independent Review)* No. 5 (1932): 9-13.

National Resources Commission, both under the direction of Weng Wenhao.<sup>85</sup>

Rivalries within the central government continued into the wartime period between the Ministry of the Economy led by Weng and the Ministry of Finance controlled by Kong Xiangxi.

In spite of their differences, these political factions all took the Northwest as a site of resource extraction in the 1930s. The Wang group's National Economic Council took the lead in developing transportation and irrigation mechanisms in Shaanxi, Gansu, and Suiyuan. The Wang group hoped that by warding off natural disasters in the region, the Northwest could serve as a national center of cotton production in the interior. It specifically allocated several million yuan annually (4.25 million yuan in 1934<sup>86</sup>) – a considerable portion of its tight budget of about 10 million yuan – to Northwest projects. With perhaps the exception of a highway network connecting seven provinces in eastern China (i.e., Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Henan), the council had no other comparable regional focus. Besides its Northwest Office in charge of surveying local conditions and resources, the Council established the Northwest State Highway Administration in Xi'an which, to make up for the shortage of railroads in the region, oversaw the building of trunk lines connecting Gansu, Shaanxi, and Sichuan, purchased passenger and cargo vehicles, encouraged the export of local products by discounting transport fees, and experimented with cottonseed oil and wood gas as fuel alternatives. Three major

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<sup>85</sup> Zanas, *Saving the Nation*.

<sup>86</sup> Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui (National Economic Council), "Xibei jianshe shiye gaikuang (State of Northwest Reconstruction Enterprises)," in Xi'an shi dang'an guan (Xi'an Municipal Archives), ed., *Minguo Kaifa Xibei* (Opening Up the Northwest in the Republican Period) (Xi'an: Xi'an jianzhu keji daxue yinshuachang, 2003).

roads—Xi’an-Lanzhou (750 km), Xi’an-Hanzhong (253 km), and Hanzhong-Ningqiang (140km)—began operations in 1935-1936.<sup>87</sup> The National Economic Council also ensured adequate water supplies for agriculture by funding the survey, building, and repair of major irrigation canals in Shaanxi, Suiyuan, Gansu, and Ningxia. The most prominent hydraulic projects were the Jinghui irrigating 730,000 mu (began in 1931, completed in 1935), the Luohui irrigating 500,000 mu (began in 1934, completed in 1947), and the Weihui irrigating 600,000 mu (began in 1935, completed in 1937) in Shaanxi.<sup>88</sup> In 1934, the National Economic Council then mobilized Jiangnan business interests to work with the Shaanxi Bureau of Public Works to spread cotton cultivation in local farm economies through the use of American seeds, improve quality, ban opium, and clamp down on the adulteration of yields with water. From 1933-1936, cotton fields in Shaanxi grew from 2.1 million mu to 4.25 million mu.<sup>89</sup> Overall, economic development under the National Economic Council was limited to creating a domestic source of raw materials for coastal industries.

Local leaders certainly appealed to the central government to create a modern industrial base in the Northwest, but their efforts to raise the economic profile of the region were unsuccessful. In November 1935, General Yang Hucheng, the pacification commissioner assigned to Shaanxi, presented a draft resolution on the construction of defense-related industries in the Northwest to the Fifth National

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Zhongguo di'er lishi danganguan (Second Historical Archives of China), ed., *Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui huiyilu (Minutes of National Economic Council Meetings)* (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui, “Xibei jianshe shiye gaikuang.”

Congress. Yang received the broad support of twenty- six officials for his plan that aimed to solve China's dependence on foreign production. Specifically, he called for new mining companies to increase the production of coal, petroleum, and iron, the building of steel, chemical and medicinal factories, and a railway extension between Xianyang and Hancheng. When auditing Yang's proposal, Weng Wenhao acknowledged the importance of its items to national defense but pointed to significant challenges: the distance between mining towns and markets, the threat posed by Communists in oil-producing regions, the need for more accurate surveys to determine the location of steel factories near deposits of iron ore and coal.<sup>90</sup>

Weng Wenhao rejected the position that industry needed to be spread evenly throughout all regions, especially loosely held non-Han areas, such as Mongolia and Tibet, in order to achieve ethnic reconciliation and full sovereignty. Instead, he believed the government should prioritize a "focal region" (*zhongxin quyu* 中心區域) to speed up the process of industrialization. Economic reconstruction would have to center on "culturally developed regions," defined as agriculturally developed areas with a Han population, temperate climate, and convenient transportation. According to Weng, "We cannot build factories in the desert... We must have a basic sense of

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<sup>90</sup> Guomin zhengfu junshi weiyuanhui ziyuan weiyuanhui (National Resources Commission under the Military Affairs Commission of the Nationalist Government), "Guanyu Yang Hucheng deng Xibei jingji jianshe anzhong meitan, shiyou, gangtie jihua bufen de shenhe yijian (Audit and Opinion on the Coal, Petroleum, and Steel Planning Sections of Yang Hucheng, et al, Proposal for Northwest Economic Reconstruction) in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Modern History Institute and Second Historical Archives of China, eds. *Kangzhan shiqi Xibei kaifa dang'an shiliao xuanji* (*Selections from Wartime Northwest Development Archives*) (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2009).

each region. Economic reconstruction cannot occur everywhere.”<sup>91</sup> Another essay stated, “As for plans for a steel factory in the Qinling Mountains, never mind that there are no reliable mineral sources, even if there were some, it could only be a joke.”

Even as Weng claimed no future in agricultural production, he relegated the Northwest to the past by reserving modern industry for other regions in China. The Northwest would, at best, be the grounds for local handicrafts and possibly light industrial production that could be sold to make up for shortages in the agricultural economy.<sup>92</sup> To be sure, Weng would later point to the concentration of industry along the coast and the backwardness of heavy industry as the greatest weaknesses of the prewar period.<sup>93</sup> He fully supported the strategic bases in the interior, citing the building of power plants and heavy industrial production in interior regions of the Soviet Union, such as the coal-rich Donets Basin and the Dnieprostroi dam in Ukraine as well as Kuznetsk in Siberia, to demonstrate to his Chinese audience that industry does not have to be concentrated on the coast.<sup>94</sup> It was necessary to create centers of production in the interior to prevent “being strong in appearance but weak in reality” (*waiqiang zhonggan* 外強中乾).<sup>95</sup> Instead of the Northwest, however, he focused the work of National Resource Commission on south-central provinces. The

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<sup>91</sup> Weng, “An Outline of Chinese Economic Reconstruction”; Weng, “A Few Important Questions with Economic Reconstruction”

<sup>92</sup> Weng, “How to Open Up the Northwest”

<sup>93</sup> Weng Wenhao, “Wartime Industrial Development under the Ministry of Economic Affairs,” *Bulletin of the National Resources Commission* Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 16, 1940): 91-94.

<sup>94</sup> Weng, “Reconstruction and Planning”; Weng, “A Few Important Questions with Economic Reconstruction.”

<sup>95</sup> Weng, “How to Reconstruct the Interior,” 2-4.

main items of its *Three Year Plan for Heavy Industrial Reconstruction* (1936) were the export of tungsten and antimony in Jiangxi, the construction of the Central Steel Works in Hunan, and mining coal and iron in central and southwest China.<sup>96</sup> With the Japanese military invasion, however, two years of work were soon lost as the Guomintang was forced to head to the Southwest.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, 206; Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China*, 52.

<sup>97</sup> Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China*; Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China*.

## Chapter Three

### Everyday Life in 1930s Xi'an

In December 1934, residents of the hinterland city of Xi'an welcomed a long-awaited connection to the Longhai Railroad. More than two decades earlier, in September 1912, officials of the newly established Republic of China had entered into a loan contract with a Franco-Belgian syndicate to fund the building of this 2000-kilometer trunk line running from the nation's eastern seaboard to its secluded northwestern frontier. The Beiyang government was eager to use the Longhai to extend its control over faraway provinces – regarding this as a precondition for providing aid to the poorest and most desolate region in the country.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, however, the laying of tracks had proceeded at a crawl, challenged by a shortage of funding arising from embezzlement in China and the First World War in Europe.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, Xi'an was caught between warring armies vying for political supremacy, epitomized in an eight-month siege of the city in 1926 that left streets strewn with the dead and markets reportedly with nothing to sell but human flesh.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterwards, the surrounding region was hit by a severe famine that lasted from

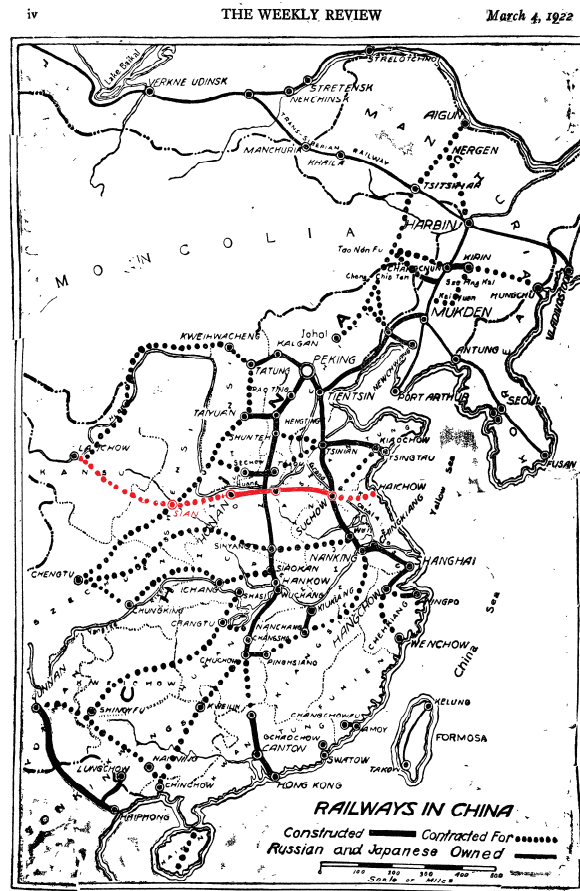
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<sup>1</sup> Mongton Chih Hsu, *Railway Problems in China* (New York: AMS Press, 1915/1968), 154-157; Guo Haicheng, *Longhai tielu yu jindai Guanzhong jingji shehui bianqian* (The Longhai Railroad and Modern Economic and Social Changes in Guanzhong) (Chengdu: Xinan jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2011), 45. The Longhai was actually an extension of the Bianluo (Kaifeng-Luoyang) Railway, began under the Qing dynasty in 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Chang Kia-ngau, *China's Struggle for Railroad Development* (New York: The John Day Company, 1943), 165-168.

<sup>3</sup> "China Siege Leads to Cannibalism," *New York Times*, December 10, 1926, 4.

1928 to 1931. The siege had already exhausted grain reserves in the city.<sup>4</sup> The mass starvation that followed filled burial pits to capacity with tens of thousands of corpses, and new mass graves had to be dug.<sup>5</sup>



Map 2. Railways in Republican China, with Longhai Railroad highlighted  
 Source: *The Weekly Review of the Far East*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (March 2, 1922), iv.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Bikuang, "Shaanxi nongcun jinrong kujie zhi zhenxiang ji qi jiuji fangfa (The facts behind the exhaustion of finances in Shaanxi villages and the means of relief)," *Xin Shaanxi* No. 1 (April 1, 1931), 12; Zhao Junfeng, "Shaanxi nongcun jingji pochan zhenxiang zhi huigu yu gaijin fangshi zhi tantao (A look back at the facts behind the bankrupt Shaanxi village economy and a discussion of its reform)," *Xibei Nongxue Shekan* Vol 3, No. 1 (May 1, 1936), 30.

<sup>5</sup> "Bicknell Report Stirs Nanking to Famine Aid: Conditions in Shensi Province Described as Horrible – 100 Die Daily," *The New York Times*, November 24, 1929, E7.



For Guomindang officials, these tragedies only underscored the urgency of extending the Longhai westward and providing a lifeline for Northwest China. In 1933, Chen Guangyao, a senior urban planning specialist, drew on the widespread image of helpless victims in the region (see Image 7) to urge the central government to hasten the building of transportation networks. Without them, he said, Xi'an would be “a dead place, closed off in all directions” (四面封鎖之死地 *simian fengsuo zhi sidi*).<sup>6</sup> When the Longhai finally reached Xi'an the following year, the big event even garnered the attention of the foreign press, which also depicted the railroad connection as a matter of life or death. A *New York Times* article entitled “Trains Amaze Populace” stated that “... new life flowed through Sian, ancient seat of China's northwestern empire, giving promise of restoring some measure of the glory that was hers in centuries long past.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Chen Guangyao, *Xijing zhi xiankuang (Contemporary Conditions in Xijing)* (Shanghai: Xijing Preparatory Committee, 1933), 3.

<sup>7</sup> “Trains Amaze Populace,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1934.



Image 7. “Famine in Northwest China”  
 Source: *Liangyou* No. 39 (September 1929), 8.

Existing scholarship has often followed the example of these sources by identifying the railroad connection as the undisputed watershed in the modern history of Xi’an. The railroad, it is said, inaugurated an industrial age in Xi’an when coastal factories seeking refuge from Japanese military encroachment transported their heavy machinery inland.<sup>8</sup> The Longhai was certainly a catalyst introducing new forms of

<sup>8</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 73; Zhu Shiguang and Wu Hongqi, eds., *Xi’an de lishi bianqian yu fazhan* (*Historical Change and the Development of Xi’an*) (Xi’an: Xi’an Jianzhu Keji Daxue Yinshuochang, 2003), 484-87; Wu Hongqi, *Xi’an lishi dili yanjiu* (Research in the

production, but this classic story of frontiers being opened up by railroads leaves out the most interesting features of local society before and after the event.

First, it uncritically adopts the Guomintang account of a backward region out of sync with material civilization and in need of benevolent state-building practices. Yet an examination of travel accounts shows that when coastal Chinese such as Minister of Finance Song Ziwen arrived in Xi'an, they found to their surprise that the lifestyles they encountered were far from the desolation and backwardness of their imaginations.<sup>9</sup> Some even doubted whether Xi'an should be considered a part of the Northwest at all.<sup>10</sup>

Second, histories premised on an idea of linear progress overlook the extractive economy that the Longhai introduced when it connected Xi'an to the lower Yangzi river valley. The railroad was supposed to facilitate cooperation between interior and coastal regions. Cheap cotton and wheat from the Northwest was supposed to feed and clothe the crowded Southeast. In return, the Southeast would send its commodities and cash to enliven a destitute region.<sup>11</sup> Yet, one of the main criticisms that Communists would later make of their Guomintang predecessors was that the surrounding region had been further impoverished when five-sixths of local cotton was shipped to Shanghai, Qingdao, and other places in exchange for cotton

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Historical Geography of Xi'an) (Xi'an: Xi'an ditu chubanshe, 2006), 357; Pierre-Etienne Will, "Xi'an, 1900-1940," 228.

<sup>9</sup> Song Ziwen, "Jianshe Xibei (Building Up the Northwest)," *Zhongyang zhoukan* No. 309 (1934), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Sun Jun, "Mantan Kaifa Xibei (Discussion of Opening Up the Northwest)," *Xibei Xiangdao* No. 3 (April 21, 1936), 21-24.

<sup>11</sup> Dai. "Minsheng de wuzhi jianshe zhi chubu," 25-32; Ni Xiying, *Xijing* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1939), 131.

fabric.<sup>12</sup> Soon after the railroad connection, the renowned journalist Fan Changjiang expressed concerns about underdevelopment during his trip to Xi'an in November 1935. He did find that in spite of a struggling Depression-era economy, the city was enjoying a boom fostered by the railroad connection and resources funneled in by the central government to support an ongoing Communist suppression campaign. Still, the Longhai seemed to serve as a channel for everyday goods from the coast rather than the machines to make them.<sup>13</sup> Between July 1934 and June 1935, the Longhai transported 16 million yuan of exports (e.g., raw cotton, hemp, hides and furs, nuts and seeds, medicinal herbs) out of Shaanxi and 39 million yuan of imports (e.g., domestic and foreign cotton, silk, satin, and wool fabrics, cosmetics, soaps, medicine, ceramics) into the province.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, the frontier-saved-by-railway story articulated by the Guomindang functioned culturally to project an image of backwardness onto western regions, regardless of the situation on the ground, in order to legitimize the extension of central state authority into the region. Central government intervention, in turn, created an extractive material reality, exploiting local resources to support economic progress in the coastal areas. Scholarly emphasis on the Longhai connection provides a better account of the perspective of Guomindang technocrats than it does of daily life for Xi'an's 100,000 residents.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, see Rui Qiaosong, *Zuguo de Da Xibei* (Our Ancestral Land's Great Northwest), (Beijing: Zhonghua Quanguo Kexue Jishu Puji Xiehui, 1955).

<sup>13</sup> Fan Changjiang, *Zhongguo de Xibei jiao* (China's Northwest Corner) (Chongqing: Xinhua, 1980), 58.

<sup>14</sup> Guo, *Longhai tielu yu jindai Guanzhong jingji shehui bianqian*, 154-157.

This chapter takes up the story of those residents, who saw in their city much more than a blank slate for state action.<sup>15</sup> In search of a better sense of place, it turns to local accounts of everyday life in the early 1930s provided in the newspaper *Northwest Cultural Daily* (西北文化日報 *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*). It draws upon social commentaries in the column *Nanyuanmen* (南院門), named after a prosperous center of mass culture, often described by outsiders as the local version of Shanghai's Nanjing Road (see Image 8).<sup>16</sup> By the time the Guomindang asserted centralized authority in the region in 1931, it certainly found victims of war and famine on the streets, but also present were modern girls and dandies frequenting movie theaters, opera houses, teahouses, department stores, and brothels. From 1931 to 1933, prior to the Longhai railroad's arrival, *Nanyuanmen* served as a local forum for literate individuals to share their thoughts on modern life, and to comment on an urban aura, rhythms, and surroundings marked by severe class, gender, and native place disparities. This rich site of public discussion was short-lived, however, as it was soon transformed into *Northwest Corner* (西北角 *Xibei Jiao*) on April 1, 1933. The change in the newspaper column corresponded to efforts by the Nanjing regime to create a symbolic "Western Capital" (西京 *Xijing*) in Xi'an as a base of operations for "Opening Up the Northwest" (開發西北 *Kaifa Xibei*). Reflecting these events, *Northwest Corner* staked local identity on the development of this new economic

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<sup>15</sup> Here I am drawing from Henri Lefebvre's notion of abstract space – the instrumental view of space by architects, urban planners, and social engineers – versus lived space in which people inhabit and produce meaning. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> For example, see "Xijing de Nanjinglu: Nanyuanmen (Nanyuanmen: The Nanjing Road of Xijing)," *Xibei Wenti* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1935), 2.

region and beseeched Xi'an to focus, not on the people and spaces around them, but on their duties as citizens to a beleaguered nation that was preparing for full-scale war with Japan. Nanyuanmen was not merely abandoned on paper; the location itself declined in importance as the arrival of the railroad in the northeast corner of the city led to the relocation of the city's economic center.

At stake in this shift in print culture and social space were the language and relationships through which locals defined modern life. In *Nanyuanmen*, locals clearly felt the need to explain, often in moralizing terms, the calculating attitudes and sexual drives on display by a cast of greedy politicians, starving refugees, shameful prostitutes, frivolous modern girls, and sex-crazed dandies.<sup>17</sup> The global circulation of commodities and media images certainly meant that Xi'an locals embraced the same material objects and fashioned themselves after the same cultural referents as their more obvious cosmopolitan counterparts in treaty ports, such as Shanghai. However, these modern urban dwellers in Xi'an did not gesture to an abstract and shared universal experience. Aside from the flows of capitalism made visible in consumption by the upper echelons of society, their reality was shaped by years of famine that had sent refugees from neighboring counties fleeing to their doorsteps. For many writers in Nanyuanmen, the blasé attitude of the leisure classes was problematic at a time of famine. Commentators often expressed guilt over the stark disparities on the streets and despair over the insufficiency of compassion, to the point that some of them

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<sup>17</sup> The impulse to identify self-interest within the crowds of 1930s Xi'an resembles the protective barriers Georg Simmel famously described as psychological responses to external stimuli and the money economy found in the modern city. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson, eds., *The Blackwell City Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002).

criticized modern life in Xi'an for being even more degenerate than that in Shanghai. Once Xi'an garnered a national audience with "Opening Up the Northwest," the Guomindang introduced a much more homogeneous and orderly representation of local identity, praising locals for being shining examples of honest, simple, frugal, and diligent citizens. After *Northwest Corner* replaced *Nanyuanmen* in spring 1933, social commentaries became dislodged from local contexts and monopolized by nationalist frameworks in which service to the nation-state was the common ground for all social relationships.<sup>18</sup>



Image 8. "Nanyuanmen following the macadamization of roads"  
Source: *Xi'an Shigong Yuekan* Vol.1, No. 1 (1935), 1.

*Background: Urban Development in Qing and Republican Xi'an*

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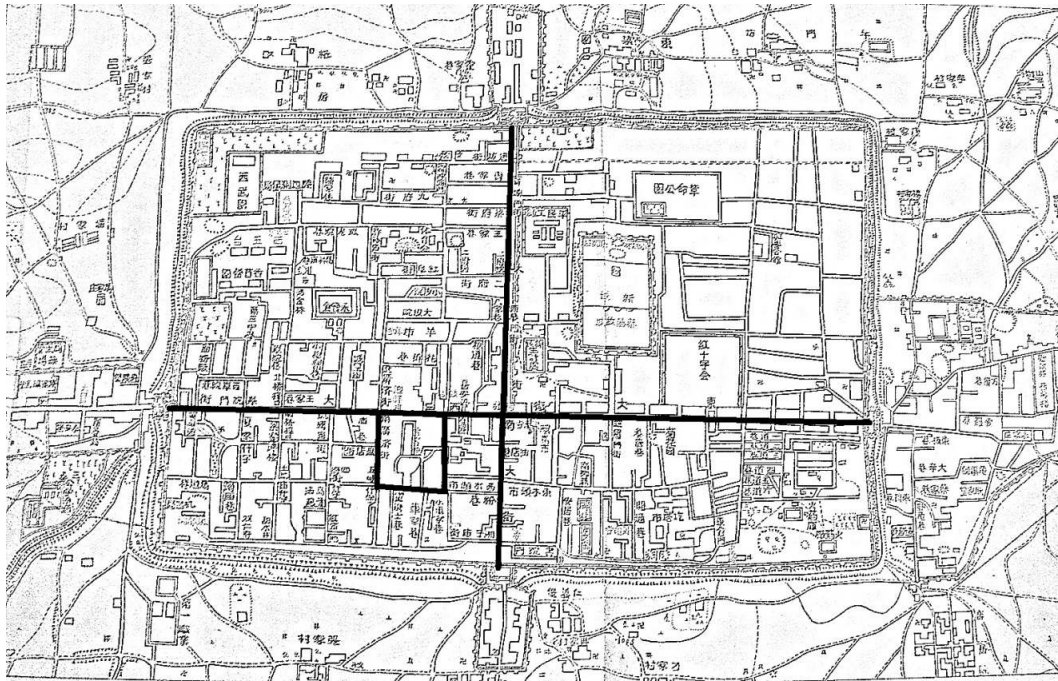
<sup>18</sup> Miriam Silverberg described a historic parallel in Japan, pointing to a shift in the 1940s when the Japanese idea of the modern (*modan*), which had been understood as a montage of the "erotic, grotesque, and nonsensical" aspects of everyday life, was reduced to notions of efficiency under Nazi-inspired rationalization. Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 13-15, 254-255.

In the 1930s, Guomindang officials typically characterized Xi'an as a place that had been long abandoned once the imperial center of gravity shifted eastward after the Tang dynasty (618-907) and yet, Xi'an had actually been a key stronghold for the Qing dynasty just a few decades earlier, home to the first and largest military garrison outside of the imperial capital Beijing. Xi'an is strategically located in the Wei River Valley between mountain passes to the north, south, east and west – an area commonly known as Guanzhong (“within the passes”). It had a vital place in supply routes that had laid the grounds for the Qing conquest of neighboring provinces in the seventeenth century and unprecedented westward territorial expansion in the eighteenth century. As the Qing was consolidating its power, the governor-general (總督 *zongdu*) of Shaanxi and Sichuan established his military headquarters in the Southern Compound (Nanyuan). Nanyuanmen (literally the “Gate of the Southern Compound”) was the plaza in front of this government office and became one of the main commercial centers in Qing-era Xi'an. On the opposite site of the Drum Tower, the civilian governors (巡撫 *xunfu*) of Shaanxi province, including the celebrated official Chen Hongmou (1696-1711),<sup>19</sup> were based in the Northern Compound (Beiyuan).

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<sup>19</sup> William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).





Map 2. Republican Xi'an. The walled city's north-south and east-west axes are highlighted along with the Nanyuanmen area  
 Source: Zhang Changgong, *Xijing Shengji* (Xi'an: Shaanxi Sheng Diyi Tushuguan, 1932)

As this political and commercial axis was established in the western half of the city, Qing military households, known as the Eight Banners, resided exclusively in its northeastern corner – the Manchu City (滿城 Mancheng). Qing officials inherited the spatial layout of the city from the Ming dynasty, with major north-south and east-west thoroughfares meeting at the Bell Tower. The Ming fortified the city with imposing walls equipped with arrow towers at each gate and ninety-eight watch towers around its perimeter. In 1645, walls were also erected under the Qing north and east of the Bell Tower to separate the hereditary military elite, who enjoyed financial support and legal privileges, from neighboring Han and Hui Muslim civilian communities. Yet another set of walls was built within the Manchu City to enclose the

former palace of the Ming Prince of Shaanxi, which became the drilling ground of the Eight Banners. The Manchu City already occupied nearly 30 percent of the city's surface area (about 4.5 square miles), but Chinese bannermen soon spilled over into the far southeast corner of the city to reside in yet another cordoned-off area called the South City (*Nancheng*), built in 1683.<sup>20</sup>

The urban form of Qing Xi'an was characterized primarily by military encampment, but its people and spaces represented a cosmopolitan empire. The Qing built multicultural landscapes combining elements drawn from different ethnic subjects as a show of the universal nature of its authority.<sup>21</sup> No exception to this rule, Xi'an featured a mosaic of landmarks such as the prestigious Guanzhong Academy, where famous scholars articulated interpretations of Neo-Confucianism when they were not on lecture tours; the Hui Muslim community's long-standing Great Mosque; and the Guangren Tibetan Buddhist Lamasery. In addition, besides its banner population, which ran as high as 100,000 in the eighteenth century,<sup>22</sup> Xi'an also became home to people from each of the eighteen provinces, leading one foreign observer to remark in 1916, "Sianfu is one of the most important and most cosmopolitan cities in all China."<sup>23</sup> Many migrants from provinces such as Shandong, Hubei, and Henan came to Xi'an to escape famine at home or as part of Qing efforts to repopulate Shaanxi province after multiple calamities, particularly the political

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 105-110. Zhu and Wu, *Xi'an de lishi bianqian yu fazhan*, 446-455.

<sup>21</sup> For an example of this process elsewhere in China, see Philippe Foret, *Mapping Chengde: The Qing Landscape Enterprise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Elliot, *The Manchu Way*, 120-121.

<sup>23</sup> F. B. Meyer, *Memorials of Cecil Roberson of Sianfu: Medical Missionary* (London: The Carey Press, 1916), 67.

uprisings and multiple famines of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The city was also a base of regional operations for Shaanxi merchants, who controlled a vast network extending from Beijing to Xinjiang, rivaled only by their Shanxi and Huizhou counterparts.<sup>25</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, foreigners of the English Baptist Missionary Society, the Swedish Mission, the China Inland Mission, and the Catholic church also established themselves in the city, providing financial and medical aid to locals.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of Xi'an to the Qing empire would prove both an asset and a liability to local people. In 1862-1863, the city was besieged for over a year by armies participating in the anti-Qing Muslim rebellions.<sup>27</sup> In 1900-1901, Xi'an became a refuge for the imperial court when Beijing was overrun by foreign armies during the Boxer Uprising. Along with the court came grain for the city's residents, who had been struggling with famine for over three years in a period when the price of wheat in public markets increased fifteen-fold and two million perished.<sup>28</sup> The 1911 Xinhai Revolution, however, left the greatest effects on the shape of the city. On October 22, 1911, members of the New Army, many of whom were members of the Gelaohui secret society, seized new weaponry from the city's arsenal before attacking the

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<sup>24</sup> E. W. Burt, *Fifty Years in China: The Story of the Baptist Mission in Shantung, Shansi and Shensi, 1875-1925* (London: The Carey Press), 104; Marshall Broomhall, ed., *The Chinese Empire: A General and Missionary Survey* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1907), 200.

<sup>25</sup> Madeleine Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Millward, *Beyond the Pass*.

<sup>26</sup> Broomhall, *The Chinese Empire*, 202-208.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 124, 134; Wen-djang Chu, *The Moslem Rebellion in Northwest China, 1862-1878* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

<sup>28</sup> Richard Glover, *Herbert Stanley Jenkins: Medical Missionary, Shensi, China* (London: The Carey Press, 1914), 46-47.

northeastern section of the city. The walls of the Manchu City became a deathtrap as the revolutionaries massacred an estimated ten thousand banner men and burned their quarters to the ground.<sup>29</sup> Many Manchus were forced to take their own lives, often by throwing themselves into the city's deep wells.<sup>30</sup> The hospital run by Baptist missionaries, with only two doctors and thirty beds, was inundated with over a thousand wounded patients.<sup>31</sup> Poor soldiers seized young Manchu women as their wives.<sup>32</sup> The revolution provided an occasion not only for the seizure of political power from the Qing, but also for the looting of banks and wealthy establishments, an episode that was later blamed for a shortfall in public finances.<sup>33</sup> The walls of the Manchu City were soon dismantled but, aside from burial grounds, this area remained largely abandoned for more than a decade.

It was only in the late 1920s that a new municipal government, established on November 25, 1927, began to revitalize the northeast section of Xi'an. Feng Yuxiang, the dominant warlord in northwestern China, and his appointees, Shaanxi Governor Song Zheyuan and Xi'an Mayor Xiao Zhenying, responded to damages left by the eight-month siege in 1926 and the flood of refugees from the great famine of 1928-1931 by embracing the 1920s enthusiasm for city administration, which social reformers saw as a vehicle for modernization.<sup>34</sup> Cities no longer served as seats of

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Rhoads, *Manchus & Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 208-211.

<sup>30</sup> J. C. Keyte, *The Passing of the Dragon: The Story of the Shensi Revolution and Relief Expedition* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 43.

<sup>31</sup> Glover, *Herbert Stanley Jenkins*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Keyte *The Passing of the Dragon*, 48.

<sup>33</sup> Keyte, *The Passing of the Dragon*, 31; Meyer, *Memorials of Cecil Roberson of Sianfu*, 68-69.

<sup>34</sup> Esherick, *Remaking the Chinese City*; Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*.

counties, prefectures, and provinces, but as administrative units themselves, furnished with police, health, and public works departments to oversee modernizing agendas. Taking Xi'an as their "revolutionary base" (革命策源地 *geming ceyuandi*),<sup>35</sup> officials sought to create a modern and productive citizenry by eradicating practices they considered harmful, such as bound feet among women and queues among men, opium smoking, gambling, unlicensed prostitution (流娼 *liuchang*), and Communism.<sup>36</sup> In targeting "Communist agitators," local authorities allied with the Guomindang who attempted to purge communist rivals from mass politics.<sup>37</sup> As the municipal government assumed responsibility for managing the physical health of its residents,<sup>38</sup> it established a quarantine to control epidemics, built more public latrines, banned public urination, repaired channels for wastewater, dug new wells to provide water for drinking and fire prevention, relocated slaughterhouses outside of the city, inspected local establishments for cleanliness, regulated medical assistants, and kept statistics on the local population. The influx of refugees joining the ranks of the unfortunate in the city compelled local officials to mobilize thousands of them in

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<sup>35</sup> Yan Zhuang, "Xi'an Shi zanxing tiaoli (Xi'an City Provisional Regulations)," *Shaanxi Shengzhengfu Xingzheng Yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928), Minutes Section, 4.

<sup>36</sup> "Niding jianfa dagang ji fangzu dagang (Formulate outline for cutting queues and releasing bound feet)," *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928), Civil Administration Section, 14; "Yanjin bing quangao renmin xishi yapian (Strictly prohibit and advise against opium usage among the people)" *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928), Civil Administration Section, 2; "Bugao yanjin dubo (Notice of the strict prohibition of gambling)," *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928) Civil Administration Section, 5; "Yanling gexian quzhu liuchang (Strictly command all counties to expel unlicensed prostitutes)" *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928), Civil Administration Section, 9-10; "" Xuanshang chana Gongchandang zhi banfa (Method for rewarding the search and capture of Communist Party members)," *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 1 (January 1928), Party Affairs Section, 3-4; "Tongling yanban Gongchandang you (General Order to Severely Deal with Communist Party)" *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 3 (March 1928), Party Affairs, 11-12.

<sup>37</sup> Tsui, *China's Forgotten Revolution*.

<sup>38</sup> Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*.

work-relief programs as a cheap means of rebuilding public infrastructure. Officials also set up an orphanage, a factory for the poor (貧民工廠 *pinmin gongchang*), a vocational training center for women, and some public housing while supporting the work of local charities, such as the Red Cross, and houses of worship.<sup>39</sup> Officials protected missionaries, who provided much-needed aid, from anti-imperialist student demonstrations.<sup>40</sup>

Transforming the physical environment of the city was considered just as important as social reform. Urban renewal in the late 1920s aimed at remaking the symbolic order of Xi'an to celebrate a regime change and reviving commercial activity by accommodating greater circulation of goods. In 1927, Revolutionary Park (革命公園 *Geming Gongyuan*) was founded to commemorate the vast numbers of deceased from the siege of 1926, many of whom were resting in burial mounds there. The old site of the civil examinations was transformed into Reconstruction Park (建設公園 *Jianshe Gongyuan*) and the entertainment hall *Minleyuan* (民樂園) was built to direct local citizens to respectable venues in their leisure time. To relieve traffic congestion going in and out of the city, in 1927-1928 workers also opened up new gates in the eastern and western sections of the city wall, which were respectively named after Sun Yat-sen and Feng Yuxiang. Eighteen roads were repaired throughout the city, including the major thoroughfare East Street (東大街 *Dongdajie*), which was

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<sup>39</sup> "Xi'an shizheng jihua dagang (Outline of Xi'an Municipal Government Plans)," *Shaanxi shengzhengfu gongbao* No. 512 (December 28, 1932): 12-13.

<sup>40</sup> "Xi'an Tianzhutang yu xuesheng chongtu an (The case of conflict between the Catholic Church and Students in Xi'an)," *Nanjing guominzhengfu waijiao gongbao* Vol. 1 No. 2 (June 1928): 157-163. Students had antagonized the local Catholic church on successive Christmases.

widened and renamed Zhongshan Street. In the neglected northeast section of the city, new streets were named after Confucian moral injunctions: Chongxiao (esteem filial piety), Chongti (esteem brotherly love), Chongzhong (esteem loyalty), Chongxin (esteem integrity), Chongli (esteem propriety), Chongyi (esteem righteousness), Chonglian (esteem honesty), and Chongchi (esteem a sense of shame). Altogether, the municipal government reportedly spent a total of over 200,000 work-days (人工 *rengong*) and 400,000 *jin* of grain to feed refugees, as well as seventy thousand *yuan* on specialized labor, shipping, and materials.<sup>41</sup> After Feng Yuxiang was defeated in the Central Plains War of 1930, the Nanjing regime gained effective control of the region and, while its officials claimed a *tabula rasa*, their modernization initiatives built on this foundation.

### *Nanyuanmen*

In contrast to the Manchu City, Nanyuanmen maintained its vitality in the transition from Qing to Republican China because it was at the heart of local politics and practices of consumption. As the northeast section of the city lay in disrepair, the government compound at Nanyuanmen was occupied successively by the Shaanxi Provincial Assembly, the warlord Feng Yuxiang, and the Guomindang generals responsible for Communist suppression.<sup>42</sup> In the late 1920s, local officials reconfiguring the imperial spaces of the city attempted to convert the main street at

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<sup>41</sup> “Xi’an Shizhengfu gongzhen baogao shu (Report on Work-Relief by the Xi’an Municipal Government),” *Shaanxi Shengzhengfu Gongbao* No.728 (August 4, 1929); No. 729 (August 5, 1929); No. 730 (August 6, 1929); No. 731 (August 7, 1929); No. 732 (August 8, 1929); No. 733 (August 9, 1929).

<sup>42</sup> Tian Kegong, “Xi’an Nanyuan ji Nanyuanmen,” in *Xi’an Wenshiziliao Vol. 7* (Xi’an: Zhengxie Xi’an Shi Weiyuanhui Wenshiziliao Yanjiu Weiyuanhui, 1984), 204-205.

Nanyuanmen into “Masses Street” (民眾大街 Minzhong Dajie).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the majority of commerce remained focused around Nanyuanmen and the Drum Tower. Most goods from eastern China were imported into the city through the nearby South Gate because of poor traffic conditions around the East Gate.<sup>44</sup> In 1912, a new gate was opened up nearby in the south side of the city wall to provide another means of accessing the crowded southeast section of the city. For a city with a record of periodic drought and no running water, Nanyuanmen was also significant because it was located near the best wells in the southwest of town. Alleys throughout the city had their own wells, but much of the water was too bitter, ill-suited for consumption and only usable for household chores. By contrast, the public wells, such as Haiyan Well near the West Gate and Longtou Well near Nanyuanmen, were known for their “sweet water” (甜水 *tianshui*) and often crowded with carts pushed by servants from rich households or independent vendors.<sup>45</sup>

By the early 1930s, the 100,000 residents of Xi’an regarded Nanyuanmen as the undisputed center of modern life in the city, where people from all walks of life converged to satisfy their curiosities and desires. Customers interacted in the shops with merchants hailing from faraway provinces and then stepped out with their exotic purchases onto the streets to face modern women in stylish qipao and high heels

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<sup>43</sup> “Xi’an shizheng weiyuan huiyi gai Nanyuanmen dongxi da jie wei Minzhong Dajie (Xi’an Municipal Government Committee Meeting on changing Nanyuanmen east and west streets to Mingzhong Street)” *Shaanxi Shengzhengfu Xingzheng Yuekan* No. 4 (April 1928), Jianshe Section, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Shi and Wu, *Xibei Zhongzhen Xi’an*, 128-133.

<sup>45</sup> “Nanyuanmen Longtoujing,” *Beilin Wenshi Ziliao*, 27; “Shaanxi shengzhengfu weiyuanhui di sanshiliu ci lihui jilu (Minutes of the Thirty-Sixth Regular Meeting of the Shaanxi Provincial Government Committee),” *Shaanxi shengzhengfu xingzheng yuekan* No. 2 (February 1928), Meetings Section, 23; Fu Jian, “Xi’anshi zhi Dixiashui (Ground water in Xi’an City),” *Shaanxi Shuili Yuekan* Vol. 3, No. 5 (June 1935), 9.



walking hand in hand with gentlemen clad in Western suits and leather shoes. Beggars in search of their next meal, villagers wearing rough homespun clothing, colorfully dressed prostitutes, and sweaty rickshaw pullers thronged the area.<sup>46</sup> The plaza was framed by multistoried Western-style buildings, including the Five Continents Pharmacy (Wuzhou Dayaofang) on the west side and the World Pharmacy (Shijie Dayaofang) on the east, both of which sold Western medicine and medical instruments. South of the square was the Xijing Chinese Goods Department Store (Xijing Guohuo Gongsi), where locals demonstrated their nationalist sentiments through the consumption of domestic products.<sup>47</sup> Other shops surrounding the square included Laojiuzhang, which sold silks and satins from Hangzhou and Suzhou as well as embroidered pieces from Sichuan and Hunan; the jewelers at Laofengxiang and Baofeng specializing in gold and silver; The Atlantic (Daxiyang), the first watch dealer in the city; the Luo Qingyun and Da Fang photo studios run by Guangdong natives; and Nanhua Gongsi, run by Zhejiang merchants selling candies from other regions. Print culture and the performing arts in the city were also based out of Nanyuanmen around the Shaanxi Provincial Library, the Yixingtang used bookstore, the Public Good (Gongyi) and World (Shijie) Publishing Houses, the Commercial Press (Shangwu Yinshuguan), and Fujian Huiguan, a native-place lodge where one of the city's major opera companies, Zhengsushe, staged performances in the local Qinqiang tradition but with contemporary themes. Popular places within walking

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<sup>46</sup> Yun Ting, "Xingqiri de Nanyuanmen (Nanyuanmen on Sunday)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 25, 1932, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Gerth, *China Made*.

distance that further enhanced the sensory experience of Nanyuanmen were the No. 1 Market featuring local delicacies, the City God Temple, the licensed brothels in nearby Baoji Alley and the high-end ones in Kaiyuansi across from the Bell Tower,<sup>48</sup> and Afangong Theater, which introduced local audiences to Charlie Chaplin, Rin Tin Tin, Emil Jannings, and Cary Grant (See Image 9).<sup>49</sup>



Image 9. Afangong Advertisements in *Northwest Cultural Daily*

This urban sensorium found expression in the column *Nanyuanmen* featured in the newspaper *Northwest Cultural Daily* (Xibei Wenhua Ribao) from 1931 to 1933. Its editors invited local readers to submit written contributions for publication, promising generous compensation so long as writers provided their mailing addresses. The column offers rare access to a wide range of local voices, including quite a few regular contributors who identified as students, refugees, unemployed, and even

<sup>48</sup> Li Dongyang, “Xi’an shi fengbi jiyuan jishi (A record of brothel closings in Xi’an)” in *Beilin qu Wenshi Ziliao*, ed. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshanghuiyi Xi’an shi Beilin qu weiyuanhui wenshiziliao weiyuanhui (Xi’an: Xi’an tiehua yinshuachang, 1990), 174-177.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 206-212; Zhu and Wu, *Xi’an de lishi bianqian yu fazhan*, 485-486; Shi Hongshuai and Wu Hongqi, *Xibei Zhongzhen Xi’an* (Xi’an: Xi’an Chubanshe, 2007), 153-154.

prostitutes, segments of the population who have been largely missing in histories focused on state pronouncements. In their writings, the assortment of spectacles seen on the street was recreated in print as a montage of opinions, anecdotes, love letters, short stories, poems, humorous observations, and reviews of operas and movies. To accommodate this visual display and a variety of topics on a quarter broadsheet, longer pieces were serialized. According to one commentator,

Everyone recognizes that Nanyuanmen is the most bustling place in Xi'an. Naturally, this thriving business district is crowded with people. All day long, it is the scene of young men and women rubbing shoulders and following in each other's footsteps. In Xi'an, this place is second to none. But how does it have the magic to enchant people, to send them searching for respite from their busy lives and flocking here like ducks? This is extraordinarily mysterious and thought-provoking. I only fear that people are not coming for the lively atmosphere.

This paper's column *Nanyuanmen* appears in a different form but it does the same trick. Do not underestimate its small domain, for it can be considered a live picture of the microcosm of Xi'an, complete with stories of every shade and description. There are too many fascinating tales to tell – nothing is too bizarre. The stories are also full of shameful behavior and illustrate every manifestation of evil – far surpassing the debauchery of foreign settlements in Shanghai. The

column has everything that one could wish for, from the vulgar to the refined, the serious to the comical. This feast for the eyes has satiated no small number of appetites. As a bonus, its contents frequently include low-standing members of our society, men and women fighting for each other's affections and shouting abuses publicly as part of a modern drama. Even as we dare not flatter them, we get a taste of something exotic.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time that the inexplicable draw of Nanyuanmen compelled locals to reflect on its causes, the column reinforced the strong hold that the plaza had on local imagination by defining modern life in terms of the "bizarre," "shameful," and "exotic."<sup>51</sup> In doing so, *Nanyuanmen* offered readers a new sense of public intimacy augmenting face-to-face contact with strangers on the streets. These writings, far from simply entertainment, presented residents a popular forum for discussing the limits of respectability and its transgressions.

The most commonly expressed sentiment in *Nanyuanmen* was uneasiness arising from the social inequality witnessed on the streets. When Xi'an natives escaped to Nanyuanmen for some entertainment, "the chaotic world of dissonant sounds and flying dust" left their hearts pounding, but they were often also troubled by visible disparities they found structuring this scene of excitement.<sup>52</sup> Between the provocative streetwalker, the immaculately dressed dandy, the naked beggar, the pot-

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<sup>50</sup> Yimin tougao, "Nanyuanmen yu 'Nanyuanmen,'" *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 24, 1932, 4.

<sup>51</sup> The sentiment conveyed here parallels the concept of "erotic grotesque nonsense" that was circulating at the same time in Japan. See Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*.

<sup>52</sup> Yun Ting, "Xingqiri de Nanyuanmen (Nanyuanmen on Sunday)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 25, 1932, 4.

bellied merchant, and the unlicensed peddler, Yu Lin noted it was obvious right away “who was rich and who was poor, who was bourgeois and who was proletarian, who governed and who was governed.” The field of vision was so clear that it seemed to Yu Lin like a scene in a movie. But, not unlike the declaration above that Xi’an was more depraved than Shanghai, he claimed that the inequalities of the modern city witnessed at Nanyuanmen were much worse than those dramatized in the 1928 American silent film *Street of Sin*.<sup>53</sup> Even as this space brought together different social groups, locals seemed never to have felt more fragmentation than when they were standing at Nanyuanmen.

Of the cast of characters on the street, writers typically found beggars most troubling because they represented the growing distance between Xi’an and the surrounding countryside at a time of famine. From 1928 to 1933, Shaanxi province suffered a succession of drought, flooding, locusts, winds, hail, and frost. Life was challenged further with outbreaks of plague and cholera. Government surveys estimated nearly a million deaths during the famine and the abandonment of cultivable land led to an increase of wasteland from 1.5 million mu (1000 square kilometers) in 1917 to 3.3 million mu (2200 square kilometers) in 1935.<sup>54</sup> Yang Shan described the natural disasters affecting the region as products of “three excesses and three lacks” (三多三莫 *sanduo sanmo*). Without rain, money, or food to rescue agricultural communities, famine gave rise to beggars going door to door and crying

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<sup>53</sup> Yu Lin, “Shizi jietou de jianyue (An inspection of a crossroads),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, February 20, 1933, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Zhao, “Shaanxi nongcun jingji pochan zhenxiang zhi huigu yu gaijin fangshi zhi tantao,” 30.

out for alms, prostitutes “swelling waves in the sea of desire,” and bandits killing, burning, and looting. “But in the absence of emergency relief (救濟 *jiuji*), what are they to do?”<sup>55</sup>

Locals sensed no easy solutions to this scene of despair and, in spite of the need for government relief, they remained skeptical about the power of officials to remedy this situation. The principle that famines resulted from negligent rulers rather than natural circumstances had a long history in China.<sup>56</sup> Foreign observers were no less inclined to fault corrupt officials for actions leading to mass starvation. Hallet Abend, a special correspondent of the *New York Times*, blamed Feng Yuxiang for the “political famine” because his troops levied a 100 per cent railway freight tax on all goods entering or leaving Henan and Shaanxi, making it impossible for cotton growers in the two provinces to exchange crops for imported foodstuffs to stave off hunger. To pay taxes that were being collected years in advance, farmers planted poppies instead of cotton and wheat on arable land.<sup>57</sup> After an investigation into the famine in 1929, the American Red Cross concluded that enough food existed to have prevented starvation. Rather than natural causes, the organization also faulted warlords that levied burdensome taxes and disrupted the transport of relief supplies.<sup>58</sup> Dai Jitao complained that Feng Yuxiang pocketed relief funds that the central government had solicited domestically and overseas and further obstructed aid by

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<sup>55</sup> Yang Shan, “Zaihuang zhong zhi san duo san mo (The three excesses and three lacks during famine,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, June 18, 1932.

<sup>56</sup> For example, see Li, *Fighting Famine in North China*.

<sup>57</sup> Hallet Abend, “Politics has Part in Chinese Famine,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 1929, 5.

<sup>58</sup> *The Report of the American Red Cross Commission to China*, 15-19, 52-54.

cutting off transportation lines to hamper foes.<sup>59</sup> In *Nanyuanmen*, Ya Ying accused officials of being the real freeloaders in society, remarking sarcastically that the only way to be a human in modern times was to skim profits off others.<sup>60</sup> Other writers criticized the practice of first buying official titles and then embezzling money.<sup>61</sup> The state of material scarcity and widespread disappointment with corrupt government even led locals who had been prone to ridiculing beggars in the past to admit that, besides coming to Xi'an, the only option left for these victims of famine was to sit back and starve to death.<sup>62</sup> By 1933, an estimated one-fifth of the city's population was living in dire poverty.<sup>63</sup>

Many writers worried that the overpowering stimuli at Nanyuanmen would blind locals to the poverty surrounding them. According to Jing Lie, "wearing Nanyuanmen glasses, you cannot see real life."<sup>64</sup> They reminded readers that they were living next to spaces inhabited by refugees. Hungry children searching for food on the streets put all sorts of filthy objects into their bags, "eating everything that can be eaten and everything that cannot be eaten." To illustrate a loss of humanity, Xi Shida described how they would beg for scraps if someone was eating on the street and fight like dogs over whatever was discarded.<sup>65</sup> A saddened Zuo Chen wrote about a family of six traveling from the countryside, with their clothing now completely

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<sup>59</sup> Dai, *Xibei*, 7, 16, 30-31.

<sup>60</sup> Ya Ying, "Kaiyou (Freeloading)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 7, 1932, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Yushi, "Shengguan facai de xin gongxian (New contributions to the pursuit of power and money)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 14, 1932, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Shen Chu, "Xi'an shi shang de zaimin (The refugees in the city of Xi'an)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 15, 1933, 8.

<sup>63</sup> Chen, *Xijing zhi xianzhuang*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> Jing Lie, "Zhanli zai Nanyuanmen shang (Standing at Nanyuanmen)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 22, 1933, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Xi Shida, "Yanzhong de zaihuai (Grave Disaster)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 19, 1933, 8.

covered with dust and faces full of worry, seen on West Street (Xidajie) in the winter months. Leading a cow and a cart of tattered items, they had obviously come to the city in a last-ditch effort to sell their belongings in exchange for food, but Zuo Chen feared that they would likely have no choice but to abandon the children for everyone's sake.<sup>66</sup> This family was likely on its way to the Coal Market (Tanshi) on the eastern side of town. Villagers congregated in this place to sell their possessions, typically beams and doors salvaged from their homes, as a temporary measure against starvation. Sales were slow, however, reportedly because the monied classes did not have any need for these things and were scared off by the gaunt and thinly clothed refugees.<sup>67</sup> Other refugees gathered at the official pawn shop (便民質所 *bian min zhi suo*) established by Feng Yuxiang on South Street (Nandajie) to trade in their items, even though they would only receive a small fraction of their actual worth. According to one eyewitness, a new gown worth 18 yuan was pawned off for little more than 1 yuan, leading the writer to conclude that the only function of the pawn shop was to further rob the vulnerable of their possessions.<sup>68</sup> Most transactions involved just one or two jiao (a Chinese dime), an amount which could be used to stave off hunger for one day if used economically. Because the cost of living in Xi'an was notoriously high, an unemployed Guangdan ("Pauper") suggested other struggling readers should go to the cheap food stalls outside of the East Gate, where eight copper coins could

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<sup>66</sup> Zuo Chen, "Xidajie zhi suojian (What I saw on Xidajie)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 28, 1932, 6.

<sup>67</sup> Jun, "Xi'an Tanshi shang de yipie (A Glance at the Coal Market in Xi'an)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 20, 1933, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Chen, "Shaanxi nongcun jinrong kujie zhi zhenxiang ji qi jiuji fangfa," 15.



buy one bowl of rice, two coins one bowl of vegetable soup, and ten coins a cut of pork or sausage.<sup>69</sup> To allay their hunger, refugees could also turn to soup kitchens run by local charities.

In contrast to Nanyuanmen, which was described in the column as a “feast for the eyes,” the Coal Market was crowded with refugees, widely regarded by the police as either “eyesores” (有礙觀瞻 *you'ai guanzhan*) or unhygienic and therefore subject to deportation out of the city.<sup>70</sup> Second-hand goods had originally been sold on North Street (Beidajie), but authorities moved their operations to the much less conspicuous Coal Market because the activity was considered too unsightly for a major thoroughfare.<sup>71</sup> Local beautification campaigns in Xi'an coincided with the unprecedented regulation of street life throughout modern Chinese cities by municipal governments aiming to protect their cities' images (市容 *shirong*) from unwanted people and behavior.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, contributors to the column believed well-fed and well-clothed people needed to personally bear witness to the misery at the Coal Market, because they would inevitably be moved to tears and participate in relief efforts – a solution to widespread callousness.<sup>73</sup>

*Nanyuanmen* writers used the pervasive image of hungry beggars as prominent metaphors for understanding the world. Jing Lie asserted the primacy of

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<sup>69</sup> Guangdan, “Shiyezhe de chifan wenti (The problem of eating for the unemployed),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, June 6, 1932, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Wen, “Na shili lai bangzhu (Bring strength to help),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 23, 1933.

<sup>71</sup> Zhao, “Shaanxi nongcun jingji pochuan zhenxiang zhi huigu yu gaijin fangshi zhi tantao,” 29.

<sup>72</sup> Wang, *Street Culture in Chengdu*; Chen, *Guilty of Indigence*.

<sup>73</sup> Liren, “Shaanxi dimian de xianxiang tan (On phenomena seen on the ground in Shaanxi),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 28, 1932, 6; Shen Chu, “Xi'an shi shang de zaimin (Refugees in the city of Xi'an),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 15, 1933, 8.

the “problem of eating” (吃飯問題 *chifan wenti*). Drawing from Sun Yat-sen’s concept of people’s livelihood (民生 *minsheng*), which was considered a prerequisite for national independence and democracy, he argued, “Without solving the problem of eating, our hands will be tied for all other problems.” For Jing Lie, the problem of eating was universal. It was common to teachers burying their heads in books, farmers and workers laboring from dawn until dusk, prostitutes selling smiles and honeyed words, merchants pandering to customers with flowery speech, landlords oppressing renters with usury, officials exploiting the masses, warlords besieging cities and capturing territories, and even imperialists assaulting weaker nations with airplanes, tanks, cannons and machine guns.<sup>74</sup> In another piece, Yu Jiu (愚久 “Long-time Fool”) portrayed school teachers as “civilized beggars,” shouting all day until their voices were hoarse just to maintain a meager existence. The school teacher had to also deal with the principal, students, and a curriculum -- “sometimes having to say things that they are unwilling to say.” Ordinary beggars were more fortunate, however, because their only task each day was to fill their bellies.<sup>75</sup>

In comparison with beggars, who in spite of government cleanups were generally considered by writers as victims worthy of public compassion, prostitutes engendered much more divided opinions in *Nanyuanmen*, ranging from sentimental representations of sex workers as disaster victims to critical articles accusing prostitutes of indecent behavior. In spite of local efforts to contain sex work within

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<sup>74</sup> Jing Lie, “Mantan chifan wenti (An informal discussion of the problem of eating),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, January 14, 1933; January 15, 1933.

<sup>75</sup> Yu Jiu, “Wenming qigai (Civilized beggars),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 18, 1933.

licensed establishments that could provide tax revenue for the city government, streetwalkers frequently appeared within descriptions of the crowds at Nanyuanmen. Prostitutes also took advantage of the newspaper column to share their stories and reach out to others. Jinlou (金樓 “Golden Pavilion”) described how she came to Xi’an to escape a succession of floods and wars in her native Shandong province. Because of the lack of factory work available for women, a telling sign of the poor state of Chinese industry, Jinlou described how she no choice but to turn to sex work. More than sixty times a day, she was paraded alongside other prostitutes in the brothel for customers. Whoever was willing to pay 12 silver coins could have his way with her; otherwise, she would have to retreat in shame. Besides tantrums thrown by unhappy customers and being physically assaulted by her boss, she was certain she would contract a deadly disease in the future. Torn between normative gender expectations and class disparities in society (社會的貧富不均 *shehui de pinfu bujun*), Jinlou was writing in the hopes that a former customer Yin, who had earlier dedicated a poem to her in the newspaper, would rescue her from this “hell on earth.” Because Yin stopped had communicating with her, she speculated that he feared getting entangled with a prostitute who would bring shame to his family or damage his own reputation.<sup>76</sup>

Many prostitutes in Xi’an, like Jinlou, hailed from other regions – most notably, the Suzhou and Yangzhou natives at the high-end brothels at Kaiyuansi. However, locals tended to situate the question of prostitution, widely regarded as a

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<sup>76</sup> “Yongqing ji Jinlou (A Song for the prostitute Golden Pavilion),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, May 10, 1932; “Jinlou de yi fengxin (A letter from Golden Pavilion),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, May 19, 1932, 4.

symbol of national crisis, closer to home in the commodification (為商品 *wei shangpin*) of women during the great famine, when reportedly four out of ten household sold off their family members.<sup>77</sup> Fewer women than men died during the famine in Shaanxi, arguably because an estimated three hundred thousand of them were sold, sometimes for no more than eight yuan, in Wugong and other hard-hit counties. Social reformers were concerned that a demographic crisis would arise from women being sold off to Shanxi, Beijing, and Tianjin to become concubines or prostitutes.<sup>78</sup> In Xi'an, a census taken by public security counted nearly twice as many men (71,777) as women (38,112).<sup>79</sup> One person calling for government intervention in the commodification of women in Nanyuanmen described an alternative practice in which some husbands rented out their wives to a third party for a fixed term, which could cost as little as sixty yuan for ten years. "There are no cheaper wives in the world." Any children born during this period would come under the custody of the third party. If a woman who was rented out as an adolescent returned as a faded old woman (黃臉婆 *huanglianpo*, lit. "yellow-faced old woman"), she might be discarded by her original husband after her return.<sup>80</sup>

The figure of the prostitute was not only an embodiment of the gendered effects of family. It was also a common point of departure for discussing the libidinal

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<sup>77</sup> Lu Zhaoting, "Zhenji guocheng zhong zaizhong gexian jingguo zhi canzhuang (The miserable state of the hardest-hit counties encountered in the process of providing aid)," *Xin Shaanxi* No. 2 (May 1, 1931), 147.

<sup>78</sup> Zhu Shiheng, "Cong Zhongguo renkou shuodao Shaanxi zaihou renkou (Discussing Shaanxi's population after the famine from the perspective of China's population)," *Xin Shaanxi* No. 2 (May 1, 1931), 46.

<sup>79</sup> "Zuijin Xi'an zhi Hukou Tongji," *Xin Shaanxi* No. 2 (May 1, 1931), 81.

<sup>80</sup> Shi, "Zuqi de fengsu (The custom of renting out wives)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 7, 1932, 6.

energy that was being unleashed in public as men and women became intimately acquainted with one another on the streets and in print culture. Men often warned each other of the sexual danger presented by prostitutes when they were away from their wives. Langren (“Vagrant”) reasoned that men became sex addicts (急色兒 *jiser*) when they could not satisfy their lust with faded old women at home. Implicitly drawing from the Qing novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*), in which the character Jia Baoyu famously compared the innocence of women to the purity of water, Langren cautioned male readers that beautiful women have been historically known to ruin entire counties and cities like a disastrous flood (禍水 *huoshui*).<sup>81</sup> In his comments, Jiu Jun wrote, “Even though everyone knows that prostitutes are promiscuous (人盡可夫 *renjin kefu*), lowly and depraved creatures, we are still enamored by their voices and countenance, disdaining the genuine sincerity of our yellow-faced old women and turning instead to disingenuous love in a city of money (黃金市愛 *huangjin shi ai*), unrelentingly even at the cost of one’s life... a flower at home does not smell as sweet as an exotic one.” Jiu Jin accused all prostitutes of being inherently false in their work, luring men with flirtatious glances and compliments, while all the while deriding them as “suckers” (瘟生 *wensheng*) and “bumpkins” (洋盤 *yangpan*) behind their backs.<sup>82</sup>

In an attempt to dispel the popular distinction between matrons (太太 *taitai*) and prostitutes, Minzhen staged a dialogue between them to demonstrate how the two

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<sup>81</sup> Langren, “Nüren jiangzuo (Lecture on women),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*.

<sup>82</sup> Jiu Jun, “Jinü de qingbian,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, January 14, 1933, 6.

figures were linked by their lack of economic independence. After the matron complained that the prostitute was shamelessly enticing her husband, the accused claimed that she was no different from her accuser. They both, after all, relied on the man to eat. But whereas the prostitute had to “reward” him, his wife did not seem to do any work. If living off a man was a crime, then the matron should feel guilty for having done it longer.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Yu Qi found the only difference between the matron and the prostitute was the number of men to whom they had sold themselves.<sup>84</sup>

When critics attacked Nanyuanmen as a place where bourgeois individuals “recognized money and flesh but not people” (認錢認肉不認人 *renqian renrou bu renren*), they took fashion as prime evidence of the superficial attitude being cultivated in the absence of compassion for human suffering. Before the arrival of the Longhai Railroad, the preoccupation with fashion in *Nanyuanmen* suggests that the rhythms of everyday life in Xi’an were already structured by the relentless pursuit of new commodities. For instance, one contributor named “Village Girl” described the ways in which she kept up with trends in order to kill off the fashion bug (時髦蟲 *shimao chong*). Unable to afford long silk stockings, she bought fake ones, even though they were prone to ripping easily. Once “Ms. M stockings” became passé, she adopted the short ankle-high socks that were the latest rage and easier on her thick legs. Even though she was proud of having the bare legs of a Parisian woman, she had to constantly defend herself in Xi’an against those who doubted whether she was

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<sup>83</sup> Minzhen nüshi, “Yuanlai (Originally),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, February 22, 1932, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Yu Qi, “Honglü xianhua,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, August 26, 1932, 6.

stylish at all.<sup>85</sup> At the risk of being caught in a frenzy of consumption, Village Girl attempted to use fashion as a vehicle to forge a cosmopolitan identity and transcend the preconceptions attached to her pen name.

Other letter-writers, however, complained of merchants exploiting the tyranny of the new by using the word “modern” (摩登 *modeng*) as a tool for attracting customers – modern overcoats, modern photographs, modern haircuts, modern fabrics. It seemed that anything deemed modern became fashionable and desirable. Because there was apparently nothing which could not be labeled modern, one writer figured that even “modern streetwalkers” (摩登野雞 *modeng yeji*) would be advertised in the future.<sup>86</sup> As a sign of fleeting styles, storefront banners and newspapers also frequently advertised sales on older merchandise. Aside from the flurry of seasonal reductions and discounts in commemoration of public holidays, merchants also promised “genuine” and “true” sales because prices in Xi’an were known to be marked up so much that discounts were still greater than the real cost of commodities.<sup>87</sup>

Village Girl was part of a generation of modern girls (摩登女郎 *modeng nǚlang*) that emerged locally as part of a global phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>88</sup> In China, the emergence of this single young woman coincided historically

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<sup>85</sup> Cungu, “Shimao bing (Fashion bug),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 12, 1932, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Tongxi, “Haoduo de modeng (The Many Moderns),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 29, 1932, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Kaichun, “Dajianjia (Big Sale),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 17, 1932; He Baoze, “Xi’an shangye gaiguan (The General Outlook of Xi’an Commerce),” *Xin Shaanxi* No. 2 (May 1, 1931): 54-63.

<sup>88</sup> Alys Eve Weinbaum et al, eds., *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

with new educational and occupational opportunities for women in integrated spaces outside the home, May Fourth discourses on romantic love as the basis of the nuclear family, a growing commercial sector that stripped away the political connotations clothing had acquired during earlier revolutionary moments, and a mass culture shaped by images drawn from the silver screen, magazines, and advertisements.<sup>89</sup> In Xi'an, male perspectives dominated representations of the modern girl, objectifying her in terms of the consumer practices that constituted her particular sense of style. On the street, observers easily spotted these young “misses” (the Chinese term 密司 *misi* was a transliteration of the English) with permed hair, powdered face, darkened eyebrows, rouged lips, slender *qipao*, silk stockings, and leather high-heels –all of which distinguished them from older and rural women. According to one writer, these “civilized women” laughed at their rural counterparts for their operatic gowns, colorfully powdered faces, and fiery red embroidered shoes. “Old-style women,” however, rebuffed them for donning clothing as restricting and suffocating as the uniforms worn by soldiers who had besieged the city in 1926. Moreover, one observer noted, one false move in the already-revealing *qipao*, with side-splits extending up the thigh, could expose one’s buttocks to the world. Similarly, a misstep in high heels could send the wearer flying into a somersault. Lastly, old-style women likened the bobbed and permed hairstyles of the modern girls to Pekingese dogs.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Dong, “Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?” 195. Louise Edwards, “Policing the Modern Woman in Republican China,” *Modern China* Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 2000): 116, 129; Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Shanzhui ceren, “Nanyuanmen,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribaoi*, June 10, 1932, 4; see also, Jingqiu, “Yong shimao nulang (A song for fashionable girls),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, September 2, 1932, 6.



As they were dissecting her appearance into individual body parts, male writers criticized the modern girl for being impractical, often to the point of harming her health. In a story entitled “Leather High Heels,” Jun recounted how modern girls, who tried too hard to be fashionable, typically produced the opposite effect. Leather high heels were certainly “full of the power to seduce” but they could easily break on the uneven roads of Xi’an. After one such accident, a mortified woman could not locate a rickshaw so she could only flee from her laughing and clapping eyewitnesses by limping away with one foot high and one foot low, like the immortal Li Tieguai.<sup>91</sup> Aside from providing a possible source of embarrassment, high heels often left the body in pain. According to Song Jiao, city women undertook many labors for the sake of beauty, becoming angels (安琪兒 *anqi'er*) among mortals, but never took their health into consideration. Even in the harsh winters, modern girls kept up their appearances, disregarding the risk of frostbite in their short-sleeved qipao even though their exposed arms and legs looked like cold cuts of meat (凍肉 *dongrou*).<sup>92</sup> While urbanites constantly suffered from sore feet and legs, lively village girls could walk thirty to forty li in one day without any difficulty. Still, one could not speak of beauty in the countryside, where women’s faces were unadorned and covered with dust. “In our country, the challenge is for women to be both healthy and beautiful.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Jun, “Gaogen pixie (Leather High Heels),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 13, 1932, 6.

<sup>92</sup> Fenxin, “Meili maodun de fv dongzhuang (Beautiful and contradictory womens winter clothing),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 19, 1932, 6.

<sup>93</sup> Song Jiao, “Woguo funü zhi jianmei tan (On the health and beauty of women in our country),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 10, 1932.

At a time of widespread famine, when women in the countryside were being traded as commodities, the modern girl's participation in fashion trends became a clear indicator of social standing that afforded her full sovereignty over her body. The intention behind her risqué cuts of clothing stood in stark contrast with the involuntary nakedness of refugees, whose emaciated bodies were only just covered by threadbare clothing. On the streets of Xi'an, fashion did not afford the modern girl the anonymity available in coastal cities, where her look blurred status lines because it was adopted by a broad spectrum of leisure and working classes.<sup>94</sup> In Xi'an, fashionable individuals were highly conspicuous on the street. Beggars apparently could decipher the status of outsiders by their clothing, calling them "Gentlemen from the East" (東方先生) and even intimidating some of them so much that they bought new outfits to disguise themselves.<sup>95</sup> Fashion in Xi'an, therefore, made obvious the disparity between urban privilege and rural crisis, such that the public baths appeared to be the only levelers of social status.<sup>96</sup> A lack of clothing among disaster victims was, in fact, invoked in travel accounts as a metaphor of the breakdown of rural households because a women's work in spinning and weaving was one of the foundations of household respectability.<sup>97</sup>

In their discussions of the modern girl, male writers often expressed anxiety over the increasing economic independence of women. Some of them certainly tried

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<sup>94</sup> Dong, "Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?" 196.

<sup>95</sup> Chen Bikuang, "Chang'an daoshang jishi (Record of the Streets of Chang'an)," *Xin Shaanxi* No. 1 (April 1, 1931) 121; Lin, *Xibei Xing*, 40.

<sup>96</sup> "Yifu zuochong (Worshipping clothing)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, January 7, 1933, 6.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Lin, *Xibei Xing*.

to cast the modern girl as a gold-digger in search of a wealthy or powerful man to sustain her conspicuous consumption. “When it comes to love between men and women, Xi’an women will recognize money, power, and flesh but not a person.”<sup>98</sup> Most representations indicted the modern girl as a leisure-oriented subject by locating her in theaters and the recently refurbished Lianhu Park rather than her workplace.<sup>99</sup> Yet, the modern girl’s engagement in waged work ultimately set her apart from the figures of the prostitute and the matron. Productive work outside of the home was often used to explain the progress of women’s rights and the emergence of the modern girl.<sup>100</sup> In Xi’an, modern girls tended to work as saleswomen, receptionists, typists, bookkeepers, clerks, and secretaries. (Factory work was often the source of disposable income for the modern girl, but it had a slow start in Xi’an, with vocational training centers for poor women only introduced in 1928 under Feng Yuxiang and cotton mills arriving after the railroad connection in 1934.) To trivialize their work, conservatives claimed that these “arrogant” young women were merely hired for their looks, luring customers into stores or balancing out an all-male office like “a flower vase displayed on a desk.” Critics went further to accuse her of being financially irresponsible, taking her attractive appearance as evidence that she was squandering her wages on her appearance. “How can their monthly earnings even buy one week’s worth of rouge and powder? Has it ever been the case that these

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<sup>98</sup> “Tantan Xi’anshi de yiban nüzi,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 6, 1933; March 7, 1933.

<sup>99</sup> In the context of interwar Japan, Miriam Silverberg believed the modern girl was better represented by the figure of the wage-earning café waitress and militant women workers than the frivolous consumer assigned to her in later depictions. See Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, 66-67.

<sup>100</sup> Zhang Ruxun, “Qingnian lian’ai wenti (The Question of Youth in Love),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, November 1, 1932, November 2, 1932.

professional women take their hard-earned monthly salary home to raise a family?”<sup>101</sup> When critics targeted feminine consumption as seemingly wasteful behavior, they reiterated the contemporary Taylorist perspective of social reformers preoccupied with maximizing the contributions of each individual to the well-being of the nation.

In Nanyuanmen, moralizing commentators targeted not only modern girls but also the dandy, who was notorious for captivating women with his refined demeanor (風度翩翩 *fengdu pianpian*).<sup>102</sup> Ti Xiu (逖修 lit. “far from embellished”) criticized Chinese for diluting the explanatory power of the word modern, originally brimming with the dynamism of the new age, to simply mean “good looking” (漂亮 *piaoliang*). Consequently, good-looking men and women became modern men and women. Before long, the significance of being modern further devolved into trying one’s best to act like a dissolute spendthrift. Modern men brought sexual partners to hotels, called on singing prostitutes, visited dance halls, gambled their money away, and courted women, while modern women dolled themselves up, bared their breasts and legs in public, mingled freely with men, watched movies, strolled in gardens at night, and rushed to Western restaurants. Because these moderns were always wandering about the city in search of pleasure, Ti Xiu deemed them nothing more than high-class vagrants.<sup>103</sup> Shisou also characterized these “beautiful men” (美男子 *mei nanzi*) as playboys, wearing crisply pressed Western suits, leather shoes, and a bright tie as a

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<sup>101</sup> Baiyun, “Nüzi zhiye (Womens Occupations),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, December 4, 1932; December 5, 1932.

<sup>102</sup> Jing Lie, “Zhanli zai Nanyuanmen shang (Standing at Nanyuanmen),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 22, 1933.

<sup>103</sup> Ti Xiu, “Modeng de nannü (Modern men and women),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, January 12, 1933.

ploy to attract women. “Whatever could easily attract the attention of the opposite sex is considered good looking.” Dandies consumed cosmetics, such as cold cream and perfume, at a rate no less than that of modern girls. According to Shisou, “If you did not look up at him, you would certainly mistake him for a girl.”<sup>104</sup> Some women used the figure of the dandy to turn the limelight back on men and express their own feelings of sexual danger in public space. Huang Wenjuan warned these “shameless, stinky men” that women could see right through their “despicable” attempts to seduce the opposite sex with fashionable artifices, leading male respondents to portray modern girls as the real sexual predators.<sup>105</sup> For all these writers, the dandy resembled the modern girl because he partook in practices of consumption in order to increase his sex appeal, which was deemed a feminine practice. However, unlike the modern girl, the dandy was never rebuked for squandering hard-earned money, whether his own or his lover’s. Only a handful of writers mentioned young handsome men (小白臉 *xiaobailian*) who were supported by older women. Rather than embodying economic ruin, the figure of the dandy was always explained in terms of his libido.

Another major difference between the modern girl and the dandy was that the patriotism of the latter was never in question. Criticisms of the modern girl often included calls for the politicization of women at a time of national crisis. For instance, Ming was repulsed by the “stinking pretension” of women he had seen and heard on the streets of Xi’an, asking, “When do women care about the decline of the nation,

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<sup>104</sup> Shisou, “Yixing de zhuizhu (The pursuit of the opposite sex),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, January 7, 1933.

<sup>105</sup> Huang Wenjuan, “Zhonggao chou nanzi (A word of caution to stinky men),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, August 7, 1932, 4.

the tragic deaths of our compatriots, and the cries of hungry and cold indigents?” In spite of continuous Japanese military encroachment, he found that the women of Xi’an still led carefree lives, frequenting theaters and parks with their lovers. Deadened to reality, the dramatization of national crisis in movies at Afanggong Theater did little to awaken them. It was no surprise to Ming then that “Xi’an women know not of worry” became a popular saying. Even though Xi’an women claimed to seek equality, they did not dutifully engage in military service like their male peers. They were also indifferent to class. At Nanyuanmen, a large woman clad in a cotton qipao sat with her child in a rickshaw pulled by a coolie whose tattered clothing was drenched in sweat on the hot and humid day. For Ming, there was no equality that could be spoken of when capitalists could use money to turn the poor into beasts of burden.<sup>106</sup> Many writers, such as Ming, did not advocate class struggle but used the language of class to criticize women’s behavior and national disunity.

### *Northwest Corner*

Growing territorial crises made existing discussions appear as frivolous as the modern girls they criticized. In the *Nanyuanmen* column, writers continuously articulated nationalist sentiment in reaction to contemporary territorial and economic crises. As Xi’an was thrown into the national spotlight, anti-imperialists criticized Nanyuanmen, the place where locals flaunted modern identities assembled through

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<sup>106</sup> Ming, “Zai fu Huang Wenjuan ji zhonggao Xijing nüjie tongbao (Replying again to Huang Wenjuan and a word of caution to female compatriots of Xijing),” *Xibei wenhua ribao*, August 21, 1932.

objects and images acquired from global capitalist networks. They viewed the area as a site of economic encroachment.<sup>107</sup> Foreign goods reportedly comprised at least half of all merchandise in local markets.<sup>108</sup> Letter-writers worried about the economic underpinnings of the aura at Nanyuanmen, which enchanted visitors with so much extravagance and debauchery that they could not help but feel happy there. After witnessing the extent of villages bankrupt by the economic depression, Jing Lei could only smell the stench of blood and imagine corpses in Nanyuanmen.<sup>109</sup> Students' strikes, rallies, and boycotts were often staged in Xi'an to protest ongoing territorial encroachment. Meng Jiang, however, was bitterly disappointed that the boycott of Japanese goods was having such a slow start in the secondary capital. Large merchants were only instructed to sell existing merchandise at reduced prices and exhorted to refrain from buying more.<sup>110</sup> Ziming also noted how locals feigned compliance with boycotts but, in truth, they preferred cheaper and higher-quality merchandise being dumped by foreign countries. Distraught with the state of Chinese patriotism, he wondered if the modern men and women of Xi'an could ever use exhibit courage on the battlefield comparable to the determination they demonstrated pushing their way into Afanggong Theater, so that the country could resist further encroachment and recover lost territory.<sup>111</sup> Zhen Feng believed that the rich patrons

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<sup>107</sup> Shi and Wu, *Xibei Zhongzhen Xi'an*, 153.

<sup>108</sup> Chen, *Xijing zhi xianzhuang*, 7-8.

<sup>109</sup> Jing Lie, "Zhanli zai Nanyuanmen shang (Standing at Nanyuanmen)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 22, 1933.

<sup>110</sup> Meng Jiang, "Xi'an rihuo heduo (How many Japanese goods are in Xi'an)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, May 30, 1932.

<sup>111</sup> Ziming, "Zhongguo ren de aiguoixin (The Patriotism of Chinese People)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*

streaming into the brothels and theaters should spend their money instead on charity when the nation was facing troubled times.<sup>112</sup>

A nationalist framework, however, only dominated the content of the column once it was retooled to become *Northwest Corner* on April 1, 1933. Prior to that change, nationalist sentiment was merely one of many forms of desire discussed by writers and the editors of *Nanyuanmen* did not ever let it reign over all the content. On March 7, 1933, the editors were inundated with new material about the national crisis but a few serialized articles still needed to be printed. Rather than offering readers the next installment of a three-part play about the occupation of Manchuria called “Northeast Tragedy,” which had been running for three days, they delayed it for a few days in favor of the latest from “Discussing the Average Xi’an Woman,” a sensational examination of the modern girl that unleashed a wave of responses, and “Wedding Night,” which staged a dialogue between a bride and groom.<sup>113</sup> The editors had often been more faithful to the montage effect and fascination with newness than nationalist sentiment.

Even though the existing column was so popular it was shortly expanded from a quarter to a half broadsheet, the editors announced their intention to overhaul its content in late March. Taking the designation “Nanyuanmen” to be too narrowly focused on Xi’an and unrepresentative of the Northwest at large, they asked the

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<sup>112</sup> Zhen Feng, “Wei zaimin jiuji zhi zhen (Aiding in the Relief of Disaster Victims),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 7, 1933.

<sup>113</sup> Yifu, “Tantan Xi’an shi de yiban nüzi (Discussing the Average Xi’an Woman,” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 6, 1933; March 7, 1933; March 8, 1933; Chengzhi, “Xinhun zhi ye (Wedding Night),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 6, 1933; March 7, 1933.



public to suggest a new name for the column.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, they wanted to guide the column in a more respectable direction, noting that rich and famous patrons frequented the businesses at Nanyuanmen, but the column seemed to be a hub for lowlifes.<sup>115</sup> The new title was released on March 27 and the editors opened the new column on April 1 with the following statement:

*Nanyuanmen* has been closed down but we dare not be too hopeful about *Northwest Corner*. Oh, the Northwest. Vast and lonely desert, bare open country, scattered remains, the cries of refugees. It is as if the sign of Doomsday has arrived. It is as if the Chinese nation's lifeline has withered away. This pressing crisis cannot but frighten us to the core. We cannot continue to linger around the intersection at Nanyuan. We cannot but loudly call on Chinese to attend to the *Northwest Corner*. Our only fear is that we, the editors, disaster victims of the Northwest, have lived too long with famine, are spiritually and materially deficient, and do not have the necessary power to raise people's awareness of the Northwest. So we can only beg readers as well as the gentlemen wandering around Nanyuanmen to join our call: "Gentlemen with energy to spare, cultivate the wild *Northwest Corner!*"<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Feixian, "Ye tan sui lu (Nighttime story)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 22, 1933.

<sup>115</sup> Feixian, "Ye tan sui lu (Nighttime story)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 24, 1933.

<sup>116</sup> Lengquan, "Xie zai Xibei Jiao (Writing in Northwest Corner)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 1, 1933.

Under the sign of respectability and patriotic duty, the discursive field in the newspaper narrowed as the meditations on social fragmentation and uneven development in *Nanyuanmen* were discarded in favor of content that adhered more closely to the language of the Guomintang's development campaign in the region. Visually, the column remained the same, but the ensemble of characters embodying the bizarre, shameful, and exotic were replaced by the nation as the hegemonic subject of modern life. Within this sanitizing shift, editors wholeheartedly accepted the Guomintang vision for modernization at the expense of attention to everyday life, whose contradictions unavoidably would have exposed the limits of progress.<sup>117</sup>

### *Western Capital*

The redefinition of modern life occurred as the Nanjing regime catapulted Xi'an onto the national stage because ongoing territorial encroachment in eastern China increasingly threatened the regime's political and economic base. The Japanese military occupation of Manchuria, beginning with the Mukden Incident on September 18, 1931, was followed by war in Shanghai from January 28 to March 3, 1932. Even though these military incursions occurred far away in Northeast China, Xi'an was directly affected by the events. In March 1932, the central government, which had temporarily relocated from Nanjing to Luoyang in Henan Province during

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<sup>117</sup> Here I am borrowing the categories of "the modern" and "the everyday" from the work of Harry Harootunian. Harootunian understands the modern as "the regime of the 'new'" defined by global capitalism. The everyday represents the local site where the repetitions of work and consumption are negotiated with the linear time of capitalism. Because uneven development is inherent in the everyday, Harootunian argued that the material instantiations of modernity always fall short no matter where they take place. Harootunian, *History's Disquiet*.

the Shanghai war, decided to create a secondary capital (*peidu* 陪都) in Xi'an. The city was renamed "Xijing" (西京), "Western Capital," and placed directly under the control of the Executive Yuan. For the Guomintang, not only would the capital building in Xi'an provide a refuge for an embattled nation but, as "Gateway to the Northwest," the city could also serve as a stepping stone to frontier regions rich in resources that could stem the tide of the worldwide economic crisis. Intellectual interest in "Opening Up the Northwest" grew by leaps and bounds alongside state-led economic development, materializing in the form of books, journals, study societies, travel diaries, and inspection tours that typically departed from Xi'an.

The arrival of the Longhai Railroad reconfigured the urban fabric of Xi'an, particularly the abandoned northeast corner of the city. In 1928, the municipal government began auctioning off vacant land in the former Manchu City, which was renamed New City District (新城區 *Xinchengqu*), in anticipation of the railroad connection outside the northeast section of the city wall. In addition to the capital and human resources spent by local officials under Feng Yuxiang in rebuilding infrastructure in this area, the Guomintang spent over ten million yuan between August 1932 and December 1934 on the section of tracks between Tongguan and Xi'an. The value of land in New City District skyrocketed in the span of less than one decade from as little as three or four silver coins per mu in the early 1920s to thousands of yuan after the connection.<sup>118</sup> The journalist Fan Changjiang criticized

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<sup>118</sup> Wu, *Xi'an lishi dili yanjiu*, 350, 360-361; Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 73; Jing Youlin, "Chang'an shi shang (In Chang'an City)," *Duli Manhua* No. 6 (December 10, 1935).

real estate speculators who exploited the political clout of officials to become rich off investments around the railroad station.<sup>119</sup> Some of the money that city made from the sale of land was used to repay bankers for money borrowed to build housing to accommodate the poor in the district.<sup>120</sup> Industrialization jumpstarted within the two years after railroad operations commenced when manufacturing, textile, food, and chemical industries relocated to Xi'an from distant cities such as Shanghai, Wuxi, Jiujiang, Qingdao, Shijiazhuang, Zhengzhou, Luoyang, and Hankou. Nearly a third of all industries were located in New City District.<sup>121</sup> After the railroad connection was completed, nearby East Street (Dongdajie) and Dachaishi became lively commercial centers rivaling Nanyuanmen.<sup>122</sup>

The secondary capital and the railroad were the showpieces of central government efforts to build a base of cotton production in the surrounding Guanzhong region, one of the main economic initiatives launched under the rubric of Opening Up the Northwest. In the face of growing trade deficit, the National Economic Council was preoccupied with creating a self-sufficient national economy, encouraging coastal factories to stop looking to the international market and turn to the rural hinterland for both raw materials and markets for finished goods.<sup>123</sup> Economic leaders oversaw the building of an interprovincial highway network to facilitate the accumulation of resources and marketing of finished goods. To make up

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<sup>119</sup> Fan, *Zhongguo de Xibei jiao*, 59.

<sup>120</sup> "Gongcheng gaikuang (General state of engineering), *Xi'an shigong yuekan (Xi'an Civil Engineering Monthly)* No. 1 (October 15, 1935): 7-23.

<sup>121</sup> Wu, *Xi'an lishi dili yanjiu*, 358-360.

<sup>122</sup> Wang Wang, *Xin Xi'an (New Xi'an)* (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1940), 115.

<sup>123</sup> Zanasi, *Saving the Nation*.

for the shortage of railroads, Xi'an was connected by road to nearby cotton producing areas in central Shaanxi as well as Lanzhou in Gansu province (750 km) and Hanzhong in southern Shaanxi (253 km), near the border with Sichuan province.<sup>124</sup> The National Economic Council also ensured adequate water supplies by funding the survey, building, and repair of major irrigation canals, particularly, the Jinghui which irrigated 730,000 mu, the Luohui irrigating 500,000 mu, and the Weihui irrigating 600,000 mu.<sup>125</sup> It also worked with the Shaanxi Bureau of Public Works to spread the use of American seeds, improve quality, ban opium, and clamp down on the adulteration of yields with water. From 1933 to 1936, cotton fields in Shaanxi grew from 2.1 million mu to 4.25 million mu.<sup>126</sup> The Guanzhong region reportedly produced 8.9 million jin of cotton on 742,000 mu.<sup>127</sup>

The start to industrialization in Xi'an was guided by improvements in agricultural production and transportation. Its largest factory was the Dahua cotton mill, established across from the railroad station in February 1936 with initial capital of 3 million yuan. Its labor force of 1000 workers operated 820 looms and 25,000 spindles, producing 1800 bundles of yarn and 50,000 bolts of cloth out of 9000 *dan* (450,000 kg) of raw cotton each month. Also, the two largest flour mills, Chengfeng and Huafeng, were established in October 1935 and April 1936, respectively. The 350

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<sup>124</sup> Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui, "Xibei jianshe shiye gaikuang."

<sup>125</sup> Zhongguo di'er lishi danganguan, *Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui huiyilu*.

<sup>126</sup> Quanguo jingji weiyuanhui, "Xibei jianshe shiye gaikuang."

<sup>127</sup> "Guanzhong mianchan diaocha (A Survey of Cotton Production in Guanzhong)," *Shaanxisheng defang zhengwu yanjiuhui yuekan* Vol. 1, No. 2 (January 1934).

people working at these two mills produced 165,000 sacks per month.<sup>128</sup> Compared with cotton production in the surrounding region, light industries in Xi'an had a much smaller market. In 1935 alone, the railroad transported 53,500 *dan* (2.675 million kg) of raw cotton to Zhengzhou, Shanghai, and Qingdao in 1935. Local cotton yarn (180,000 bolts) and flour (1.98 million sacks), however, were shipped to nearby counties.<sup>129</sup>

A new identity for Xi'an residents began to emerge alongside these changes in the urban fabric, one that is hardly recognizable when considering earlier depictions in *Nanyuanmen*. While officials under Feng Yuxiang took Xi'an to be their revolutionary base, Guomindang politicians drew on the widespread desire for national revival in the Depression era to mold the image of Xi'an in light of its glorious past. For conservatives, the ruins scattered around Xi'an and its environs embodied the high culture of ancient Chinese civilization. In the national imagination, the residents of the nation's "ethnic place of origin" (民族策源地 *minzu ceyuandi*) became widely regarded as uncorrupted models of honesty, simplicity, frugality, and diligence.<sup>130</sup>

Reflecting a global fascist current, these efforts separated out the material and spiritual dimensions of life in order to maintain a constant site of cultural identification amidst rapid industrialization and military mobilization. The perceived

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<sup>128</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 74; Xi'an Municipal Archives, ed., *Shaanxi jingji shinian, 1931-1941 (Ten Years of Shaanxi's Economy, 1931-1941)* (Xi'an: Meitan kexueyuan, 1997), 163, 166.

<sup>129</sup> Guo, *Longhai tielu yu jindai Guanzhong jingji shehui bianqian*, 118.

<sup>130</sup> For example, see "Baochi Xibei minfeng (Maintaining the customs of the Northwest)," *Xijing Ribao*, December 23, 1934.

threat of being “overcome by modernity” led many right-wing ideologues around the world to center identity around the spiritual nation, rather than the material relations of the factory.<sup>131</sup> In China, this tendency was expressed most prominently in Chiang Kai-shek’s conservative New Life Movement, which responded to radical politics and the continuing presence of the communist movement by appealing to traditional morality.<sup>132</sup> In order to demonstrate female virtue, women were expected to be decently covered. The modern girl’s permed hair, provocative clothing, breast-binding, and high heels were prohibited.<sup>133</sup> Alongside the constant of tradition, the leaders of the New Life Movement adopted the principle of Taylorism in the hopes of producing an efficient citizenry for industrial development and national defense.<sup>134</sup> Because of its proximity to the Communist base in northern Shaanxi, Xi’an became the base for the Guomindang’s suppression campaign starting in July 1935. In local neighborhoods, the *baojia* system of mutual surveillance was soon instituted in December 1935. Reflecting these anti-communist sentiments, the introduction of factory work, and the glorification of the past, its Shaanxi branch extolled the

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<sup>131</sup> Harry Harootunian has argued that fascism in Japan responded to the alienation and divisions engendered by capitalism by designating and glorifying a singular representation of Japanese culture situated beyond the commodity and historical contingency. Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> Arif Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution.” *Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. XXIV, No. 4 (August 1975): 945-980.

<sup>133</sup> Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China*, 171.

<sup>134</sup> Clinton, *Fascism, Cultural Revolution, and National Sovereignty in 1930s China*, 199-200.

“militarization, productivization, and aestheticization of life” (生活軍事化生產化藝術化 *shenghuo junshihua shengchanhua yishuhua*).<sup>135</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The arrival of the Longhai railroad in 1934 meant much more to the world of Xi’an than the start of industrial progress. In the name of “Opening Up the Northwest,” the Guomindang not only transformed the physical environment of the city Xi’an but also attempted to remake local perceptions of modern life. Social commentaries in *Nanyuanmen* demonstrated a common concern with the unevenness of modern life, which, in the case of Xi’an, was largely shaped by perennial famine that sent refugees into the city. Without adequate government relief and private charity to stem poverty, many writers worried about a lack of compassion. The modern mind appeared to them to be driven instead by gendered calculations of money and sex, from the crooked official to the gold-digging modern girl, the seductive prostitute to the libertine dandy. *Nanyuanmen*, however, was not just a space for moralizing criticism. This cast of modern characters sent in their own letters expressing desires that exceeded the clichés built around them, such as the prostitute Jinlou, who longed to share in familial conventions, and the fashion-minded Village Girl, who saw herself on a cosmopolitan stage. The column became a forum for the

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<sup>135</sup> Shaanxisheng xinshenghuo yundong cujinhui (New Life Movement Society of Shaanxi Province), *Xinshenghuo yundong fuwutuan jilü yu xunlian banfa* (*New Life Movement Service Regiment: Disciplinary and Training Methods*), Xi’an Municipal Archives, Xi’an shizheng gongchengchu (Xi’an Department of Civic Engineering) 05-158.



public to negotiate ideas of respectability amidst the endless changes brought by modern life.

In the face of the Communist movement and Japanese military encroachment, the Guomindang imposed its own agenda of industrial and military mobilization onto modern life in Xi'an. The New Life Movement stripped away the bizarre, shameful, and exotic aspects of local society in Nanyuanmen and implemented instead the militarization, productivization and aestheticization of disciplined citizens. Not only was the surrounding Guanzhong region integrated into the national economy as a center of cotton production, but Xi'an also was represented as a beacon of Chinese civilization where national identity could be grounded. In Guomindang writings, the magic of Nanyuanmen would be replaced by the magic of an ancient homeland immune to the changes and charms of modern civilization. Meditations on modern life structured by unevenness were dismissed from the realm of collective discussion so that Xi'an could conform to this new image. Through the transformations of print culture and social space, the Guomindang attempted to narrow the possibilities for local identification to encompass two elements: national heritage and productive labor in the service of the nation.

## Chapter Four

### The Garden City and the Eyesores of Xi'an

The outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 ushered in a long period of calamity for Xi'an, a city that was already considered deficient in industry and infrastructure from decades of warfare and famine. At the start of the 1930s, the central government had promised to rescue local victims from political dysfunction and natural disaster as part of its program for "Opening Up the Northwest." Now Xi'an was catapulted into a crisis that was national in scope, with little relief possible from the central government, which had relocated to Chongqing.

The Northwest was generally considered to be a home front (literally, a "great rear area" 大後方 *dahoufang*) in need of safeguarding, but Xi'an was actually at the frontline of war, located at the edges of Guomindang control, bordered by Communist revolution to the north and the Japanese occupation to the east. An endless stream of refugees followed the Longhai Railway to the city to escape battles and occupation in eastern China, crowding into slums around the railroad station and straining the resources of local charities and government services. With the westward flow of population came Japanese bombers, which attacked Xi'an from 1937-1941 and then resumed in 1944.<sup>1</sup> Aside from Xi'an's strategic location between mountainous passes leading to the Communist base in Yan'an and the Guomindang in Sichuan, wartime

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<sup>1</sup> "Kangzhan shiqi Riji hongzha Xi'an jilu (Record of Japanese bombing in Xi'an during the War of Resistance," *Shaanxi shenji* (2005), 40.

writers claimed that Xi'an was symbolically important for Japan, as important elements of Japanese culture had been imported from the ancient capital of Chang'an.<sup>2</sup> Air raids often targeted new factories, dealing a heavy blow to industrialization, which would be largely postponed until the Maoist period. Runaway inflation further destabilized the local economy by doubling prices in 1940, tripling them in 1945, and quadrupling them in 1946 after the war's end.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the production of these social crises, conventional histories celebrate the wartime period as the moment in which Xi'an finally transformed itself into a modern industrial city. Preoccupied with quantifying developmental progress, these narratives enumerate the growth of factories, businesses, local production, and population from wartime migration while disregarding the burdens faced by refugees who followed these enterprises inland, not to mention the anxieties expressed by Guomindang officials in local newspapers and government reports.<sup>4</sup> This account of wartime growth fails to explain the pervasive fear on the part of social reformers that Xi'an would turn into an unruly, industrialized city, foreclosing the very different visions they had articulated for this place before the war. Estranged by coastal industrial society, right-wing supporters of Opening Up the Northwest had envisioned Xi'an as the centerpiece of a conservative revolution based on a return to China's civilization and agricultural origins.

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<sup>2</sup> "Baowei Xibei wenti de jiti taolun (A group discussion of the question of safeguarding the Northwest)," *Datuanjie*, March 25, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Li Xiaosu, "Cong shuzi shang kan Shaanxi (A look at the numbers behind Shaanxi)," *Xibei Tongxun* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1948), 14-22; Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 81.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Zhu and Wu, *Xi'an de lishi bianqian yu fazhan*.

Urban planning and governance in 1930s and 1940s Xi'an was guided by a conservative gaze preoccupied with seeing signs of a national renaissance in the Northwest. This chapter first situates Guomindang planning and governance in 1930s Xi'an within a conservative ideology that was most effectively popularized in the New Life Movement launched in 1934 to create a militarized, hygienic, and moral society. The conservative effort to train a modern body politic in the 1930s involved not only the famous behavioral regulations of the New Life Movement, but also the construction of sentimental landscapes. In Xi'an, officials appointed by the Nanjing government worked to remake this famine-ridden backwater into a symbolic capital that appealed to both locals and outsiders, showcasing edifying symbols of ancient civilization and creating restorative natural surroundings. Urban planners and civic engineers focused their energies largely on historic preservation, road building, and tree planting, creating scenic routes to relics that would impart the innate spirit of the nation to the beholder. In particular, imperial tombs near the Western Capital began to figure centrally in a new political ritual called National Tomb Sweeping Day (*Minzu saomu jie*).

Second, I will explain the particular vision that conservatives in the 1930s had for urbanization in the Western Capital. The capitalist process of urbanization has been defined by the tendency to concentrate population, infrastructure and investment into agglomerations that are simultaneously premised on extensive circuits of labor,

commodities, cultural forms, energy, raw materials, and nutrients.<sup>5</sup> Conservatives in 1930s China, by contrast, had a vision of expansion without concentration. Guomindang authorities painstakingly built a network of roads stretching out from Xi'an to historic relics, cotton-producing areas, and neighboring provinces. As they strengthened the city's ties to nearby areas to facilitate the flow of goods and travelers, officials sought to control the scale of industrial and demographic growth within Xi'an. They pointed to globally circulating criticisms of the densely populated industrial city as a breeding ground for poverty, crime, filth, and moral degeneracy. On the eve of the Longhai railroad connection in December 1934, social reformers advocated comprehensive urban planning so that Xi'an would be able to escape the pitfalls of rampant industrialization. Many of them were attracted to Ebenezer Howard's idea of the garden city, a planned community combining the benefits of the city and the country, as a possible path for the Western Capital. Conservatives reworked Howard's utopia, however, to address imbalances they perceived between spiritual and material life as well as the city and the countryside in China. A central organizing principle of Guomindang ideology was the idea of balance (調劑 *tiaoji*) to cope with the modern age, materialized in urban plans that divided the city into rationalized zones in order to contain industry and offset its negative effects with historic and scenic zones. The rationalization of space, however, would be interrupted by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945).

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Brenner, "Theses on Urbanization," *Public Culture* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2013): 85-114, 102-104.

Lastly, I turn to the ways that Guomintang officials attempted to discipline citizens in order to maintain a clean and orderly visual regime in the 1930s and 1940s. In the name of protecting the city's appearance (市容 *shirong*), local police often targeted practices and spaces deemed an affront to a modern conservative gaze. Among the "eyesores" of Xi'an were unsightly nightsoil collection and drying areas along scenic routes, as well as slums of ramshackle huts. The police also introduced mutual surveillance in the *baojia* system in order to root out suspicious characters, especially Communists. In the end, the conservative image for the Western Capital struggled to keep up with the unfolding crisis faced by local people, especially during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45) and the subsequent civil war between the Guomintang and the Communists (1946-1949). The housing problem, in particular, forced officials to look to other methods of crisis management to handle the refugees streaming into the city, sending refugees off to colonization sites and repatriating undesirable populations to their places of origin.

#### *National Essence on Display*

In the 1930s, right-wing politicians largely shaped Guomintang visions for Xi'an as the Western Capital. When the Guomintang leadership designated the interior city as a secondary capital in April 1932, they selected Zhang Ji (also known by his courtesy name Zhang Puquan, 1882-1947), a prominent right-wing member of the central leadership, to oversee the Xijing Preparatory Committee (西京籌備委員會 *Xijing choubei weiyuanhui*). Educated in Japan, Zhang had entered into politics in

the first decade of the twentieth century as a leader in Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui. By the mid-1920s, he had become a staunch anti-Communist and joined the right-wing Western Hills faction of the Guomindang. Once the Nanjing government was established in 1927, Zhang quickly joined the chorus for a national revival (民族復興 *minzu fuxing*). Like other conservatives, he attributed the sorry state of China to the lack of national spirit (國魂 *guohun*) as much as material backwardness.

For exemplars of national revival, Zhang Ji pointed to Italy and Germany, the two countries that he believed were the most like China in the world. The secret to Mussolini's power, he observed, was apparently his ability to arouse the Italian masses by appealing to the spirit of ancient Rome. In the same manner, Zhang believed when the German nation had been trampled and divided by Napoleon's forces a century earlier, the philosopher Fichte awakened his people by rekindling the innate spirit of Germania. This spirit was even stronger after the Great War, allowing Germany to stand firmly on its own feet.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, right-wing politicians in China lambasted youth (青年 *qingnian*) representing 1920s political radicalism and cultural iconoclasm, whom they diagnosed with a lack of cultural self-confidence. Zhang accused them of chasing after "foreign superficialities" (外國皮毛 *waiguo pima*), being defeatist, and holding individualistic rather than patriotic allegiances.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Zhang Ji, "Kaifa Xibei ying xian tan jiuji (Opening Up the Northwest must first begin with relief)," *Zhongyang Zhoubao* No. 239 (1932): 1-2; Zhang Ji, "Xijing choubai de qingxing (The state of preparations for the Western Capital)," *Zhongyang Zhoubao* No. 270 (1933): 1-3; Zhang Ji, "Xin shenghuo yundong (New Life Movement)," *Zhongyang Zhoubao* No. 306 (1934): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Zhang Ji, "Zenyang cai shi minzu zhuyi zhi zhen jingshen (What is the true spirit of nationalism)," *Zhongyang zhoubao* No. 203 (1932): 2; Zhang Ji, "Guoren neng nuli Dongbei jue buneng jiu wei Riren

Following Dai Jitao, Zhang Ji argued that China could rediscover its own ancient spirit in the Northwest, the long-time place of Chinese empires. According to Zhang, just as Manchuria was the lifeline of Japan, the Northwest would provide the nation with a way out of both economic and cultural crises.<sup>8</sup> In Xi'an and its environs, he claimed, "even though crop failure has left only a strip of barren land, the great spirit of the Chinese nation's ancestors still vividly fills the eye (躍然滿目 *yueran manmu*)."<sup>9</sup> While China's youth flocked to Shanghai for window-shopping, he called on Chinese patriots to instead head to Xi'an. Once they climbed atop the city wall, they would be able to see the mighty Zhongnan Mountain in one direction and, in the other, the tombs of Han- and Tang-dynasty notables, whose achievements had established the foundations of Chinese civilization. Standing there, Chinese could imagine their ancestors gazing back at them from the distance.<sup>10</sup>

When implementing this vision, the first order of business for Guomindang officials was the survey and repair of historic relics that put the nation's spirit on display (精神的表現 *jingshen de biao xian*). Local efforts at historic preservation reflected nationalist desire to protect local sites of collective memory in early twentieth-century China. Guomindang officials believed ancient relics (古蹟 *guji*) could impart moral and cultural values to citizens. The central government passed the landmark Antiquities Protection Law in 1930, setting the responsibilities of local,

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suo zhanju (Compatriots can strive so that the Northeast will not be occupied by the Japanese for long)," *Zhongyang Zhoubao* No. 224 (1932), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Zhang, "Xijing choubei de qingxing," 2.

<sup>10</sup> Zhang, "Kaifa Xibei ying xian tan jiuji," 2.



provincial, and national stewards safeguarding these touchstones of national progress.<sup>11</sup> The newly established Central Commission for the Protection and Regulation of Antiquities set up an office in Xi'an and regularly reminded organizations in the province to report discoveries of antiquities found in the process of Opening Up the Northwest.<sup>12</sup> The commission was one of the government organizations that provided additional subsidies to the centrally funded Xijing Preparatory Committee, which was perpetually short of funding, for surveys and preservation.<sup>13</sup> As the tracks of the Longhai railroad were being laid east of the city, the Xijing Preparatory Committee surveyed the route for relics, jealously guarding any buried artifacts that were found. When railroad employees sent artifacts from Lintong to Zhengzhou in Henan province, it petitioned supervisors to return them to the Northwest so that they could be preserved and viewed in collections at the Shaanxi Provincial No. 1 Library.<sup>14</sup>

Zhang Ji gave the sense of sight a central place in the awakening of national consciousness. He argued that the realm of ideals (理想 *lixiang*) was not enough, but rather that “it is necessary to go see [relics displaying national spirit] for oneself in

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<sup>11</sup> Carroll, *Between Heaven and Modernity*; “Guwu baocun fa (Antiquities Protection law),” *Sifa gongbao* No. 75 (June 14, 1930), 12-14.

<sup>12</sup> “Guwu baoguan weihui zhuyi guwu (Commission for the Protection and Regulation of Antiquities attending to relics),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 25, 1937.

<sup>13</sup> “Zhongyang Guwu baoguan weiyuanhui wei buzhu peixiu Maoling Zhaoling kuan zhi Xijing choubai weiyuanhui gonghan (Official letter from the Central Commission for the Protection and Regulation of Antiquities to the Xijing Preparatory Committee regarding subsidies for the repair of Maoling and Zhaoling),” *Choujian Xijing Peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> “Xijing choubai weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao (Xijing Preparatory Committee work report), July 1933-February 1934,” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*.

order to meet the eye and touch the soul” (觸於目感於心 *chu yu mu er gan yu xin*).<sup>15</sup> Once Xi’an gained a national audience in the 1930s Opening Up the Northwest campaign, Guomindang officials began to reorganize space in Xi’an and its environs to suit the gaze of the visitor expecting to discover a collective past. In 1932, Dai Jitao initiated the repair of Zhou dynasty mausoleums in neighboring Xianyang that could serve to stimulate the local economy. He believed income from pilgrims, archaeologists, and others looking to enjoy the landscape (探勝賞景 *tansheng shangjing*) could, in turn, be used for public works and benefit local people as had been done in Europe, America, and domestically, in Hangzhou. Dai stressed that the grounds of the Zhou tombs must be pleasing to the eye (美觀 *meiguan*), advising the cultivation of trees suitable for the local climate and soil in order to add to the character of the place. In addition, historical records of the Zhou tombs should be compiled and published for the benefit of both tourists and local history.<sup>16</sup>

Following Dai Jitao, the Xijing Preparatory Committee spent much of its earliest years on a project in Maoling, the mausoleum of emperor Wu (156-87 BCE) of the Han dynasty. Among his achievements, Han Wudi (literally, “the Martial Emperor of the Han”) had ended the policy of appeasement towards the Xiongnu confederation of nomadic tribes that had been raiding northern China. Instead, he launched aggressive military campaigns that involved territorial expansion into the northeast and the northwest. Speaking in the 1930s context of Guomindang state-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Dai Chuanxian, “Xiuzhi Xianyang yuan shang Zhou dai zhu lingyuan ji bian Zhou ling zhi banfa gaiyao (Outline of measures for the restoration and management of Zhou imperial mausoleums and compilation of Zhou mausoleum gazetteer),” *Xin Yaxiya* Vol. 4, No. 5 (1932).

building efforts in the midst of ongoing territorial losses to Japanese encroachment, the Committee published a biography that praised Han Wudi for his achievements on the battlefield as well as civil administration, the promotion of Confucian learning, and irrigation works.<sup>17</sup> Located forty kilometers west of Xi'an, the burial ground also featured the tombs of Wei Qing and his nephew Huo Qubing, the generals who had led military campaigns against the Xiongnu. Huo Qubing's grave was particularly well-known for its stone sculptures, one of which was a horse stomping on a Xiongnu warrior. The Xijing Preparatory Committee worked with Xingping county officials to survey, repair and preserve the tombs of these historic figures famous for repelling foreign aggressors. The organization drafted labor to build a road from Xi'an lined with trees on both sides so as to ease travel for visitors seeking to "look upon [these tombs] with reverence" (瞻仰 *zhanyang*) and raise their spirits at a time of Japanese military encroachment. They were concerned that if transportation was too difficult, people would be unwilling to travel to see these pillars of national essence (國粹 *guocui*).<sup>18</sup> According to Zhang Ji, soldiers would be especially moved once they saw Han Wudi's tomb, which represented his struggle for the nation's survival.<sup>19</sup>

The Guomindang was dedicated to connecting the Western Capital to historical spaces in the surrounding countryside that could translate scenes of Chinese culture into economic and spiritual value. As part of a new transportation network,

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<sup>17</sup> Xijing choubai weiyuanhui Maoling banshichu (Xijing Preparatory Committee Maolin Office), *Minzu yingxiong Han Wudi shilüe* (*National Hero Han Wu Di*) (Xi'an: Xijing Preparatory Committee, 1936).

<sup>18</sup> "Xijing choubai weiyuanhui chengli zhounian baogao (Report on the anniversary of the founding of the Xijing Preparatory Committee)," *Choujian Xijing Peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 156-157, 161.

<sup>19</sup> Zhang Ji, "Xijing choubai de qingxing," 2; "Xijing Guihua (Xijing City Plan)," *Choujian Xijing Peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 146.

the Xijing Preparatory Committee built dozens of roads branching out from the city in all directions. By 1935, ten of these roads (over 500 li in length) were located in the south, conveying visitors to historic sites and bringing goods from nearby villages and mountainous regions.<sup>20</sup> One road led to the famed Tang poet Du Fu's memorial temple (杜公祠 *Du gong ci*), built in 1526 near the site of his former residence. After a visit by Zhang Puquan in April 1932, the committee announced that the temple was yet another repository of national essence, but its buildings had become so run-down and dilapidated without regular repairs in the war-torn early Republic that it had become "unbearable to look at" (不堪入目 *bukan rumu*).<sup>21</sup> Living through political and social disorder created by the An Lushan rebellion, Du Fu had written poems that depicted the sufferings of the common people. The Xijing Preparatory Committee followed literary conventions in deeming his body of work to be "poetry-history" (詩史 *shishi*) but it also used modern terms to characterize him as a "proletarian poet" (普羅詩人 *puluo shiren*) because of his sincere concern with the common people.<sup>22</sup> To pay homage to Du Fu's memory in equally troubled times, top Guomintang officials such as Dai Jitao, Zhang Ji, Chu Minyi, Chen Lifu, and Shao Lizi funded a rebuilt temple, a new memorial stele and pavilion, a garden, a mountain path, and

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<sup>20</sup> "Xijing shi jiji jianshe (Actively building Xijing city)," *Daolu Yuekan* Vol. 46, No. 2 (March 15, 1935), 24-26; "Xijing jinjiao huancheng gonglu wang wancheng (Highway network encircling Xijing in suburbs complete), 1937," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 182; "Xijing choubei weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao (Xijing Preparatory Committee work report), November 1935-March 1938" *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 183-188; "Xijing Choubei Weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao (Xijing Preparatory Committee work report), June 1940," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 197-199.

<sup>21</sup> Chen Guangyao, *Xijing zhi xiankuang*, 107.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

further embellishments.<sup>23</sup> Reportedly, the brand new appearance with red doors, gold ornaments, red pillars and green windows set in a wooded area filled visitors with poetic sentiment (滿腔詩意 *manqiang shiyi*), such that they temporarily forgot about the world.<sup>24</sup>

In its attempt to realize a visual regime that could uplift the nation's spirits, the Xijing Preparatory Committee also had to take immediate measures against a formidable enemy, the local environment. The charm of historical sites seemed to be lost within a barren sea of yellow earth ravaged by years of drought and famine. Coastal Chinese discovered what the geographer George Cressey termed the "tragedy of the forests" in loess country. Centuries of wanton cutting had stripped the Chinese homeland, once covered in continuous forests, of its natural scenery. The only traces of this lush past were now in the courtyards of temples and monasteries, where devout monks and nuns protected the few remaining trees.<sup>25</sup> East of Xi'an, the head of Lintong lamented that tourism in his county was lagging far behind that other counties because of its lack of trees. Even though it had one of the most significant collection of relics, drab surroundings deterred visitors from coming to Lintong.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, provincial officials found that the aura of nearby Huashan, one of China's

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<sup>23</sup> Rebecca Nedostup has referred to this group as the "custom coalition," Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>24</sup> "Xijing Choubai Weiyuanhui chengli zhounian baogao (Report on the anniversary of the founding of the Xijing Preparatory Committee)," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 160-161, 169-170; "Xijing Shi jiji jianshe," 25; Chen Guangyao, *Xijing zhi xiankuang*, 107-108, 118.

<sup>25</sup> Cressey, *China's Geographic Foundations*, 199-201

<sup>26</sup> "Shaan Lintong xijiao chou pi fengjinglin (Shaanxi Lintong preparing a landscape forest in western suburb)," *Nongxue (The Agricultural Science)* Vol. 1, No. 3 (December 1, 1935), 113.

five sacred mountains and a popular tourist destination, suffered from bare slopes totaling over sixty thousand mu.<sup>27</sup>

To fully restore past glory to the landscape, Guomindang officials began to “adorn” (點綴 *dianzhui*) the landscape with trees. They planted scenic forests (風景林 *fengjinglin*) on barren lands and mountains and built scenic routes (風景路 *fengjinglu*) running from Xi’an to Zhongnanshan in the south (27.8 kilometers) and Lintong in the east (26.8 kilometers). Civil engineers coupled the road to Zhongnanshan with a light rail that would haul stone back to Xi’an for macadam and construction materials.<sup>28</sup> While planning these seven- to eight-meter-wide roads for car transport, engineers promised to adhere to the routes of existing dirt roads, unless they were too steep or pierced through a village, and avoid encroaching onto private farmland.<sup>29</sup> Local leaders in Chang’an and Lintong counties delegated responsibilities of tree planting to landlords and residents living along these routes, who received

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<sup>27</sup> “Shaanxi nonglin shiye zhi fazhan jihua (Plan for the development of Shaanxi agriculture and forestry),” *Zhongguo jianshe yuekan* Vol. 6, No. 4 (1932), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Wang Yinqiao, *Xijing youlan zhinan* (Xi’an: Tianjin Dagongbao Xi’an fenguan, 1936), 71; Jinjiao fengjinglu gongwusuo (Suburban scenic route affairs office), “Jinjiao fengjinglu ge xiang gongcheng jihua ji jinxing gaikuang (Plans for suburban scenic routes and state of its progress),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* No. 2 (November 1935), 3-20; “Jinjiao fengjinglu Xi’an Nanshan duan qingbian tielu gaishu (Overview of light rail on suburban scenic route between Xi’an and Nanshan),” *Xi’an Shigong Yuekan* Vol. 1, Nos. 3-4 (January 31, 1936), 11-21.

<sup>29</sup> Wang, *Xijing youlan zhinan*, 71; Jinjiao fengjinglu gongwusuo, “Jinjiao fengjinglu ge xiang gongcheng jihua ji jinxing gaikuang,” 3-20; “Jinjiao fengjinglu Xi’an Nanshan duan qingbian tielu gaishu,” 11-21. Provincial officials had to intervene when plans for the Lintong route involved substantial disruptions to the existing social fabric outside of Xian’s East Gate, including extensive demolition and the wholesale abandonment of older means of transportation, such as mule carts. “Shaanxi shengzhengfu wei Xilin fengjing luxian zhi Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui gonghan” and “Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui wei Xilin fengjing luxian zhi Shaanxi shengzhengfu gonghan (Official letter from Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee to Shaanxi Provincial Government regarding the Xilin scenic route),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 262-263.

three fen for each tree.<sup>30</sup> Because of the dry spring season, the Xijing Preparatory Committee dispatched personnel to water saplings to ensure their survival.<sup>31</sup>

In Lintong, as a new forested area was planted outside the city gates and the scenic route was built, the Guomindang contracted the China Travel Service to manage its main attraction, Huaqingchi. Located at the foot of Lishan mountain, Huaqingchi was famous for its hot springs where the emperor Xuanzong (685-762 CE) of the Tang dynasty and his imperial consort Yang Guifei (719-756 CE) once bathed. To promote tourism, the China Travel Service refurbished the facilities consisting of gender-segregated baths, one for women and two for men, and provided transportation from Xi'an.<sup>32</sup> Chiang Kai-shek would eventually visit the renovated Huaqingchi in December 1936, when he was kidnapped in the famous coup staged by Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng known as the Xi'an Incident.

Beautification initiatives on barren mountains and lands intersected with efforts by local scientists and officials to utilize afforestation to meet the needs of farming, soil conservation, and industry in the 1930s. In 1932, Dai Jitao began preparations for the founding of the Northwest Agriculture and Forestry College (西北農林專校 *Xibei nonglin zhuanxiao*) based in Wugong, west of Xi'an.<sup>33</sup> One of its

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<sup>30</sup> "Fengjinglu yong mindi huomian liangfu (Private land used by scenic routes exempt from grain tax)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 26, 1936; "Jinjiao fengjinglu yeyi xiujian wanjun (Suburban scenic routes already completed)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 27, 1936; "Fengjing lu zhishu (Tree planting along scenic routes)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 24, 1937.

<sup>31</sup> "Xijing chouweihui dianzhui fengjinglu yanxian peizhi shumu (Xijing Preparatory Committee embellishing scenic routes by planting trees)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 24, 1937.

<sup>32</sup> "Huaqingchi chongxiu gongjun (Repair of Huaqingchi completed)," *Xin xin yuekan* (New Events Monthly Review) (October 1935), 12.

<sup>33</sup> "Zhongzhenghui jueyi jianshe Xijing shi (Central Political Committee decided to built Western Capital)," *Shenbao*, December 29, 1932, 3.

leading professors was the German scientist Gottlieb Fenzel, who had been recruited from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou.<sup>34</sup> He was soon chosen to serve as vice-director of the Shaanxi Bureau of Forestry, established in 1934. The college and forestry bureau planted tree farms and nurseries around the relics in Xianyang, near the campus in Wugong, and outside the west gate of Xi'an. They also began planting shelter forests on the banks of the Wei and Yellow Rivers to prevent erosion and flooding. At Nanwutai and Cuihuashan, economic forests (經濟林 *jingjilin*) were founded to provide timber for public works projects and industry.<sup>35</sup> Most importantly, scientists and officials trusted that afforestation combined with proper irrigation would solve the problem of famine in the drought-prone Northwest. Trees could help regulate (調劑 *tiaoji*) the climate by reducing run-off and increasing evaporation, leading to more rainfall. Scientists also ran experiments with different plant varieties to test their ability to absorb inorganic salts to make the soil less alkaline.<sup>36</sup> In Xi'an,

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<sup>34</sup> Fenci'er (Gottlieb Fenzel), "Zhongguo linsen wenti (China's forestry problem)," *Dongfang zazhi* Vol.26, No. 6 (March 25, 1929), 69-71.

<sup>35</sup> "Shaanxisheng jiansheting ershier nian zhi ershisi nian xingzheng jihua (Shaanxi Provincial Bureau of Public Works Administrative Plan for 1933-1935)," *Minguo kaifa Xibei*, 193, 197-199; "Shaansheng zuzhi linwuju (Shaanxi has organized a Forestry Bureau)," *Shenbao*, August 26, 1934, 9; "Shaanxi sheng linwu sheshi zhi jinkuang (State of plans for Shaanxi Forestry Bureau)," *Linxue (Journal of the Forestry Association of China)* No. 5 (July 1936), 77-81; "Sheng linwuju choushe Nanshan senlin gongyuan (Provincial Forestry Bureau preparing Nanshan forest park)," *Xijing Ribao*, October 22, 1936; "Xibei nongzhuan linchang Wugong fenchang gaikuang (State of Northwest College of Agriculture and Forestry's forestry center in Wugong)," *Xijing Ribao*, October 24, 1936, 8; "Linju jiji tuiguang Shaansheng zaolin quyue (Forestry Bureau expanding afforestation in Shaanxi)," *Xibei wenhua ribao*, April 17, 1937; April 18, 1937; "Pingmin linchang (Pinming Forestry Center)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 26, 1937; "Linju niding gongzuo jihua zhengdun Nanshan Gongyuan (Forestry Bureau drafting plan to reorganize Nanshan Park)," *Xijing Ribao* (May 28, 1937); "Shaanxisheng jiangli zaolin ji baohu zanzing banfa (Temporary measures for rewarding the planting and protection of trees in Shaanxi)," *Minguo Kaifa Xibei*, 232.

<sup>36</sup> "Shaanxi sheng linwu sheshi zhi jinkuang," *Linxue*, 81; "Xibei nongzhuan linchang wugong fenchang gaikuang," *Xijing ribao*, 8; Jia Chengzhang, "Xibei zaolin yundong zhi huyu (An appeal by the Northwest afforestation movement)," *Jianshe zhouxun* Vol. 10, Nos. 23-26 (December 31, 1940), 86-87.



at the request of Li Yizhi, head of the Shaanxi Bureau of Irrigation, local officials also set up a meteorological station.<sup>37</sup>

As it remade the landscape to stimulate the local economy, members of the Xijing Preparatory Committee also issued publications that catered to fellow treaty port natives, while also revealing the biases of an urban middle class.<sup>38</sup> In 1933, the Committee published a guidebook in Shanghai called *Contemporary Conditions in Xijing* that provided unacquainted visitors with descriptions of current events, local customs, historic sites, and economic opportunities. Its principal author Chen Guangyao, a native of Hankou, often betrayed a sense of detachment by describing how people and places “looked from a distance” (遠處視之 *yuan chu shi zhi*).<sup>39</sup> In contrast to his ability to step back and contemplate, he observed that local villagers who visited Du Fu’s memorial temple barged into any room they saw, touched anything they saw, and asked how much everything was worth.<sup>40</sup> Chen was certainly offended that these villagers lacked his sense of decorum, but it is also clear that their ideas about the production of economic value diverged from his. For manual laborers, historical objects acquired a value through tactile handling and exchange. By contrast, Chen envisioned value produced in the flows of bourgeois tourists looking to escape to new vistas.

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<sup>37</sup> “Li Yizhi shi qing she Xijing qixiangtai (Li Yizhi requests the establishment of a meteorological station in Xijing),” *Shaanxi shuili yuekan* Vol. 3, No. 10 (November 1935), 53.

<sup>38</sup> The monthly publication of the Xi’an Department of Civil Engineering included special sections on relics. “Mingsheng guji (Famous relics),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* No. 1 (October 15, 1935) 43-46; “Mingsheng guji (Famous relics),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* No. 2 (November 1935), 29-31; “Chang’an ba jing (Eight sights of Chang’an),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* Nos. 3-4 (January 31, 1936), 7; “Siguan (Temples),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* No. 6-7 (August 1936), 2-6.

<sup>39</sup> Chen, *Xijing zhi xiankuang*, 118, 142, 143, 154, 158.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

The Guomindang mobilized this ability to see the Northwest as a landscape, a sensibility grounded in capitalist development, for the generation of nationalist sentiment.<sup>41</sup> During the New Life Movement, the Guomindang admonished urbanites about how they should be spending their time off: they should escape to the countryside, where their communion with nature would presumably have a restorative effect and allow them to be more productive at work.<sup>42</sup> Right-wing politicians attempted to further exploit leisure time on behalf of the nation-state by encouraging coastal Chinese to head to the Northwest to behold a landscape symbolizing the nation's glorious past. At a time when the Guomindang prohibited Chinese geomancy (*fengshui*) as a superstitious practice, authorities made their own preoccupation with the emotional impact of landscapes (*fengjing*) respectable by tying it to political, economic, and ecological necessity.<sup>43</sup>

Chen Guangyao's account of the landscape was dotted with evolutionary motifs that superimposed stages of historical progress onto geographical difference. In his essays on journeying from Beiping to Xi'an with Zhang Ji, and then back east to Shanghai, Chen presented his own movement in space as the unfolding of national history. According to Chen, his encounter with the ancient aura (古風古色 *gufeng guse*) of Henan and Shaanxi, once political centers of Chinese civilization, was

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<sup>41</sup> This sensibility is precisely the "contemplative attitude" that Lukacs once attacked in bourgeois thought, where the object of thought becomes something alien to the subject. For Lukacs, this detachment was apparent in the division between humanity and nature, in which the latter becomes "the repository of all inner tendencies opposing the growth of mechanization, dehumanization and reification" (Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, 136).

<sup>42</sup> "Fu Xinchenghuo junshihua shengchanhua yishuhua chubu tuixing fang'an (Appendix initial plans to promote the militarization, productivization, and aestheticization of the New Life Movement)," *Shaanxi shengzhengfu gongbao* No. 2525 (May 31, 1935), 14.

<sup>43</sup> See Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*.

tantamount to traveling one thousand years back in time to a “primal and simple world” (混樸世界 *hunpu shijie*).<sup>44</sup> While looking out from the train, Chen first took notice of the archetypal portrait of northern China: a vast, boundless landscape of yellow earth.<sup>45</sup> The color of the soil matched the red and yellow undertones of the topless men tilling it under the burning sun. Not only did their tan skin resemble the camouflage of animals, but Chen also likened their bodies covered in dust and dirt to those of apes. From humanity’s oneness with nature, Chen’s narrative traverses space and time to find signs of political organization and incipient nationalism. In villages that were hardly able to feed themselves, farmers had to donate great sums of money to fund fortifications against bandits.<sup>46</sup> In northern China, Chen also took note of the uniform roads (車同軌 *che tong gui*) dating back to the First Emperor Qin Shihuang that were still used for ox-, horse-, or mule-drawn carts. Local ways in Henan seemed to be much simpler than in Shanghai, Wuhan, Beijing, and Tianjin. In Zhengzhou and Xi’an, there were certainly some visible expressions of nationalism in decorative couplets (對聯 *duilian*) and inscriptions (題字 *tizi*) of the slogan “Resist foreign aggression, strive for national salvation,” but there were not as many as one would find in eastern cities.<sup>47</sup>

While the Northwest lacked modern improvements and ideologies, Chen Guangyao would, however, contrast the “purity” of its ancient places to the “world of

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<sup>44</sup> Chen, *Xijing zhi xiankuang*, 142.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 140-141.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145.

deception” (欺騙世界 *qipian shijie*) back east.<sup>48</sup> Ever since the Guomindang had made Nanjing its capital in 1928, Chen observed, the pace of urban development had been astonishing, but Chen lamented the depravity, rotten habits, and wasteful behavior in eastern society. In Shanghai, Chen criticized the evils that were unleashed alongside progress in material civilization (物質文明 *wuzhi wenming*) and the conquest of nature (征服天然 *zhengfu tianran*), including dog racing, roulette, streetwalkers, vagrant youth, opium, and an overall dearth of human feeling.<sup>49</sup> Like other Chinese disaffected from the contradictions of coastal society, which in the case of Shanghai were most obviously structured by colonialism, Chen sought solace in the Northwest, which was conceptualized as a spiritually uncorrupted space that could serve as a refuge for nationalism under siege.

#### *National Tomb Sweeping Day*

During 1933-1934, Zhang Ji attempted to raise the profile of Xi’an further by proposing National Tomb Sweeping Day (民族掃墓節 *Minzu saomu jie*). Zhang imagined patriots traveling to Xi’an each spring to pay homage to past emperors, generals, and ministers buried nearby. The collection of stone sculptures found at the tombs at Maoling directly conveyed to visitors imperial praise for the past sages of Chinese history. In the past, emperors had memorialized these historic figures in the hopes that their service to the country would never be forgotten. Ritual sacrifices (祭

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 160, 164-165.

祀 *jisi*), however, had terminated in modern times, which, according to Zhang, was tantamount to instructing people not to commemorate their own past. Now, all the youth of Chinese cities knew nothing of the greatness of their own ancestors, worshipping foreigners instead and looking down on their own customs. Far from being a sign of backwardness, Zhang argued that the revival of public sacrifices could regularly remind a forgetful nation of the achievements of its ancestors so that it would regain its independence (自立 *zili*) and self-confidence (自信 *zixin*).<sup>50</sup>

After Zhang Ji submitted his proposal, the central government decided to designate Qingming Jie, the lunar festival when Chinese customarily tended the graves of their ancestors, as National Tomb Sweeping Day in 1934. This decision coincided with the launch of Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement in February, which espoused the four Confucian virtues of propriety, righteousness, honesty, and humility (禮義廉恥 *liyilianchi*) to unite the nation under a traditional moral compass.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, social commentaries would later situate this decision by Lin Sen, the president at the time, as part of the reform of social traditions to meet the demands of the modern age. National Tomb Sweeping Day signaled the evolution from clan and tribal affiliations to national consciousness that the Guomindang leadership believed to be crucial to national survival on the world stage.<sup>52</sup> Not only

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<sup>50</sup> Zhang, "Xijing Choubai de qingxing," 2-3; See also, Zhang Ji, "Xibei jiaotong yu peixiu Huangdiling (Northwest transportation and the repair of Yellow Emperor mausoleum)," *Zhongyang zhoubao* No. 426 (1936): 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Dirlik, "The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement," 945-980.

<sup>52</sup> For example, see Chang, "Cong minzu saomu dao minzu fuxing (From national tomb sweeping to national revival)," *Kangzang qianfeng* Vol. 2, No. 8 (1935): 7-8; "Gongji Huangdi Qiaoling bieji (Record of Public Memorial Service for the Yellow Emperor at Qiaoling)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April

had Korea and Taiwan fallen prey to colonization, but soon the case of Abyssinia became a warning sign for the country's four hundred million that they too could become the slaves and servants of another nation. Looking up to national heroes would inspire newfound consciousness and conviction that could be channeled into power and action.<sup>53</sup> Supporters of National Tomb Sweeping Day also looked to the texts and practices of Sun Yat-sen for precedents. They reinterpreted the revered leader's famous criticisms of the absence of national consciousness in China because its people only observed clan and religious allegiances to mean "Nationalism is precisely clanism. The Chinese nation is one big clan."<sup>54</sup> They also noted that Sun had paid homage to the Ming tombs in Nanjing when he was inaugurated as the first president of the Republic of China in 1912. The Guomindang began holding parallel ceremonies in Nanjing and in Xi'an on National Tomb Sweeping Day.

On April 5, 1934 Zhang Ji, Dai Jitao, and other members of the central government joined local officials, including the Shaanxi governor Shao Lizhi and General Yang Hucheng, and 200 members of local Xi'an society in the first commemoration of National Tomb Sweeping Day. The entourage headed to Xianyang in more than twenty vehicles for a ceremony at the Zhou tombs. Attendees stood reverently, sang the party anthem, bowed three times, presented a wreath, observed three minutes of silence, and then posed for a photograph. After the formal ceremony, each participant planted a tree as part of the first National Tomb Sweeping

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7, 1937, 6; "Minzu saomu jie zhi yiyi (The Significance of National Tomb Sweeping Day)," *Guangbo zhoubao* (*Broadcasting weekly*) No. 133 (April 17, 1937): 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> "Jinnian Minzu Saomu zhi xin yiyi (The new meaning of National Tomb Sweeping Day this year)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 31, 1937, 2.

<sup>54</sup> "Minzu saomujie zhi yiyi," *Guangbo zhoubao*, 24.

Commemorative Forest. In the afternoon, they headed to Maoling to repeat the public ritual and tree-planting at the tombs of Han Wudi, Huo Qubing, and Wei Qing. The press reported that the politicians had vowed to revive the rites of the ancient Zhou period (禮化 *lihua*), recover the territory of the Great Han, worship the nation's heroes, and revitalize Northwest culture.<sup>55</sup>

The following year, the observation of National Tomb Sweeping Day expanded to a multiple-day affair to accommodate a trip by Guomintang officials to the mausoleum of the mythical Yellow Emperor Xuanyuan located in Zhongbu county, 175 kilometers north of Xi'an. Led by Shao Yuanchong of the Legislative Yuan, Guomintang conservatives glorified the Yellow Emperor as the primogenitor of the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu de shizu*). In the previous decade, the historian Gu Jiegang had famously challenged the idea that all the ethnic groups in China had descended from a single origin. According to Gu, the Yellow Emperor was a fabrication by Qin historians to depict a unified and centralized Golden Age, erasing the diversity of ancient China. He criticized the Guomintang's similar attempt to unify China's ethnic groups through the myth of racial consanguinity.<sup>56</sup> Conservative politicians believed that adherents of Gu's Doubting Antiquity school were recklessly overturning history and values that cemented the nation together – yet

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<sup>55</sup> “Minzu saomu (National Tomb Sweeping),” *Dagongbao*, April 5, 1934; “Dai Chuanxian deng yeling (Dai Chuanxian and other pay homage at imperial tombs),” *Shenbao*, April 7, 1934, 8.

<sup>56</sup> See James Leibold, “Competing Narratives of Racial Unity in Republican China: From the Yellow Emperor to Peking Man,” *Modern China* Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 2006): 181-220; Laurence Schneider, *Ku Chieh-kang and China's New History: Nationalism and the Quest for Alternative Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 229-230, 260-262.

another instance of self-doubt trumping eternal truths.<sup>57</sup> Shao Yuanchong reassured his audiences that the nation could be mobilized through the collective worship of the Yellow Emperor. He pointed out that anti-Manchu revolutionaries had declared themselves to be descendants of the mythical figure.<sup>58</sup>

In fall 1933, the central administration began discussing repairs to the tomb of the Yellow Emperor who, according to legend, left behind only his clothing and cap when he attained immortality and was taken up to heaven. After the Xijing Preparatory Committee requested that Shao Yuanchong present President Lin Sen a plan to build and repair roads leading to the tomb, the National Economic Council sent thirty thousand yuan.<sup>59</sup> In April 1935, Shao Yuanchong, Zhang Ji, and Deng Jiayan of the central administration visited the tomb. In front of an audience of five thousand attendees, they made offerings of incense, laid wreaths, and read an elegy to the Yellow Emperor.<sup>60</sup> After the commemoration, Zhang Ji and other members of the central administration advocated restoring the dilapidated shrine adjacent to the tomb, improving local transportation, and revitalizing the local economy. They also wanted to restore the former grandeur of the tomb by replacing the once famed cypresses of

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, an interview with Zhang Ji in Lü Chun, “Zhang Puquan xiansheng tan Huangling (Zhang Puquan discussing Huangling),” *Lüxing zazhi* Vol. 18, No. 1 (1944): 7-10.

<sup>58</sup> Shao Yuanchong, “Qiaoshan Huangdiling kao (An inspection of the Qiaoshan Yellow Emperor Mausoleum),” *Jianguo Yuekan* Vol. 9, No. 4 (October 1933), 1-2; Shao Yuanchong, “Huifu minzu jingshen yu chongshi minzu li (Restore national spirit and strengthen national power),” *Zhongyang Zhoubao* No. 281 (1933): 4-6; See Chapter One in Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>59</sup> “Peixiu Huangdiling dao jingfei (Funds for the repair of roads to Huangdiling),” *Shenbao*, October 29, 1933, 9; “Xijing choubei weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao (Xijing Preparatory Committee work report), July 1933-February 1934,” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 166.

<sup>60</sup> “Shao Deng feng pai fu Shaan (Shao and Deng assigned to Shaanxi),” *Shenbao*, April 1, 1935, 3; “Minzu saomu dianli (National Tomb Sweeping Ceremony),” *Shenbao*, April 8, 1935, 3.



the site, which had been wantonly cut down decades earlier without government protection.<sup>61</sup> In March 1936, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Shaanxi Government to make repairs to the tombs of the Yellow Emperor, Kings Wu and Wen of the Zhou, and even Cheng Tang, the legendary founder of the Shang dynasty, in preparation for the next National Tomb Sweeping Day.<sup>62</sup>

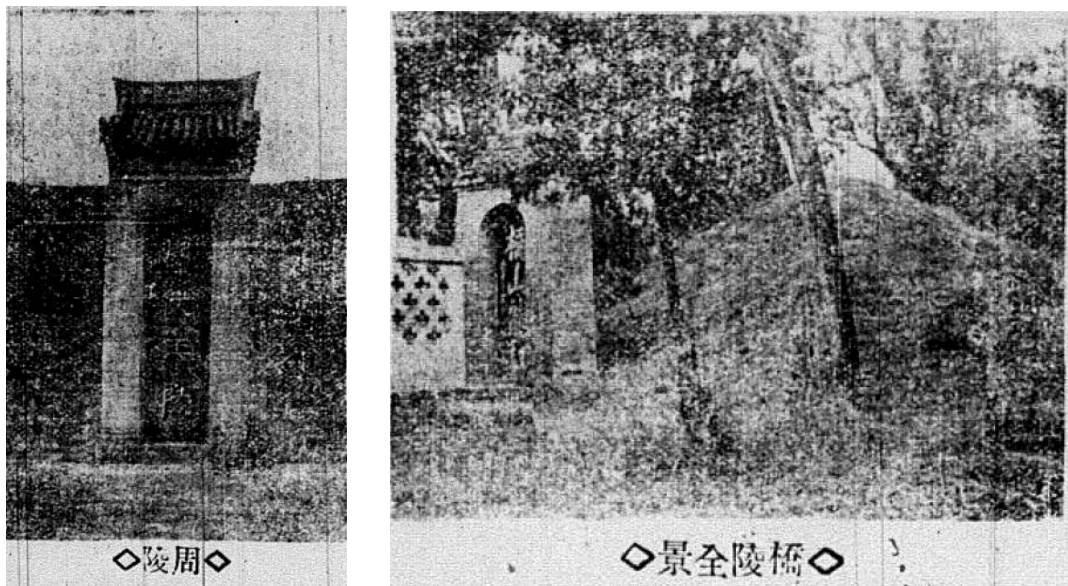


Image 10. Photographs of the Zhou (left) and the Yellow Emperor's (right) tombs  
Source: *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, April 5, 1937

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<sup>61</sup> "Shaansheng jue xiu Huangling (Shaanxi province decides to repair Yellow Emperor mausoleum)," *Shenbao*, April 12, 1935, 3; "Zhongyang Guofu liang jinianzhou baogao (Central Committee and National Government Commemorative Week Report)," *Shenbao*, April 23, 1935, 3; "Zhongyang guofu liang jinianzhou baogao (Central Committee and National Government Commemorative Week Report)," *Shenbao*, April 30, 1935, 3.

<sup>62</sup> "Jiang Yuanzhang ling Shaansheng xiuqi lingqin (Minister Jiang orders Shaanxi province to repair tombs)," *Shenbao*, March 17, 1936, 7.



張溥泉氏代表中央致祭黃陵

Image 11. “Zhang Puquan performing rites at Huangling on behalf of the central government”  
(Source: “Minzu Saomujie zhi yiyi,” *Guangbo Zhoubao* No 133 (April 17, 1937): 24-25.)

Beyond raising historical consciousness, National Tomb Sweeping Day had a strategic function of generating publicity for Guomindang campaigns in the backwater region. The ritual became an occasion for centrally located government officials to conduct inspections of local conditions. For instance, upon leaving the ceremony at Zhouling in 1934, Dai Jitao reportedly visited local farmers to inquire about their hardships and harvests.<sup>63</sup> The Guomindang’s celebration of the Yellow Emperor’s tomb occurred at the same time that its generals were engaged in a pacification campaign against the Red Army in northern Shaanxi. From Xi’an, the journey north was perilous. Attendees could easily travel to Zhou tombs in Xianyang on either the Longhai Railroad, which provided free transport on reserved trains, or

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<sup>63</sup> “Dai Chuanxian deng ye Zhouling (Dai Chuanxian and others visit the Zhou mausoleum),” *Shenbao*, April 7, 1934, 8.

buses that highway transportation officials would supply from other routes.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, Shaanxi's governor Shao Lizi had to specially request Yang Hucheng, the general in charge of communist suppression, to provide military escorts to accompany an entourage of a hundred people in 1936.<sup>65</sup> After the Guomindang and Communists established their alliance against Japanese encroachment, the Communists too began to perform rites at the tomb. Mao Zedong even penned a famous poem that paid homage to the Yellow Emperor in 1937.<sup>66</sup> In 1938, his rival Zhang Guotao famously defected to the Guomindang by claiming to go to offer sacrifices at the Yellow Emperor and then fleeing to Xi'an.<sup>67</sup>

There were certainly those that questioned how these commemorations were actually contributing to the Guomindang objectives of political unification and economic reconstruction. For example, one critic published under the penname Ai argued in the Nanjing-based journal *Zhengzhi Pinglun* (Political Review) that the word national (*minzu*) was being used too loosely to describe what amounted to publicity stunts by poor role models. Ai warned readers that when "a certain minister" (e.g., Dai Jitao, Shao Yuanchong) headed to the Northwest for a so-called "inspection," it was a cover for "playing" (玩玩 *wanwan*). In Jiangnan, one could find

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<sup>64</sup> "Zhang Ji zhuji Zhouling (Zhang Ji performs rites at Zhou mausoleum)," *Shenbao*, April 6, 1936, 5; "Gongluju jiang kaishi Zhouling youlanche (Highway bureau starts sending tour buses to Zhou mausoleum)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 23, 1937, 6.

<sup>65</sup> "Shoudu Xi'an fenbie juxing Minzu Saomu dianli (National Tomb Sweeping ceremonies held separately in the capital and Xi'an)," *Zhongyang zhoukan* No. 410 (1936): 1-3; "Minzu saomu (National Tomb Sweeping)," *Xibei Xiangdao* No. 1 (April 1936): 7.

<sup>66</sup> Chunhou Zhang and C. Edwin Vaughan, *Mao Zedong as Poet and Revolutionary Leader: Social and Historical Perspectives* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002), 54

<sup>67</sup> "Zhongyang guanyu kaichu Zhang Guotao dangji de dangnei baogao dagang, April 19, 1938," *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyao wenxian xinxiu* (*Archives of the Communist Party of China*).

the tombs of the late Song general Yue Fei and the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang – national heroes who were even more important than the King Wen and King Wu of the Zhou. Yet central authorities headed all the way to Zhongbu county in Shaanxi. According to Ai, these officials appeared to be braving an arduous trip but, in fact, they traveled within the comforts of first-class coaches, not to mention being wined and dined by local hosts. The writer admitted there were certainly well-meaning people who promoted National Tomb Sweeping Day to draw attention to Opening Up the Northwest. In Ai’s opinion, however, these tombs were not located in an undeveloped frontier, such as “the real Northwest” in Gansu, Ningxia and Xinjiang, but in places that were more akin to Henan and Shandong. Ai believed it would be better to pay homage to recent martyrs than to search for inspiration in distant pasts and places.<sup>68</sup> Other critics believed that National Tomb Sweeping Day certainly would raise historical consciousness, but that the government needed to do more to solve the people’s hardships and raise popular morale.<sup>69</sup>

### *A Balancing Act*

In Xi’an, local authorities welcomed the influx of visitors from tourism and political rituals, but the impending railroad connection at the end of 1934 made them grow anxious that increased connections to the outside world would irrevocably change the character of the city. Guomindang conservatives had romanticized the

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<sup>68</sup> Ai, “Mei zai Minzu Saomu (How Beautiful is National Tomb Sweeping),” *Zhengzhi Pinglun* No. 147 (1935): 583-585.

<sup>69</sup> “Minzu saomu dianli (National Tomb Sweeping Ceremony),” *Minming* Vol. 1, No. 44 (1935), 3; Li Min, “Qingming xiaogan,” *Shenbao*, April 6, 1935, 19.

Northwest as an exotic other to treaty ports conceived as cesspools of colonial privilege, radical politics, vice, and infectious disease. Moreover, the economic premise of Opening Up the Northwest was reviving China's agricultural foundation by sending pioneers to colonize empty lands in the region. On the eve of the connection to the Longhai, conservatives began to worry that the railroad would not serve as a channel for agricultural expansion but rather would foster an urbanization that would bring the evils of the modern city to the Western Capital. An editorial in the official newspaper *Xijing Daily* on December 23, 1934 warned the "honest, simple, frugal, and diligent" residents of Xi'an that they needed to uphold their spiritual foundations so that they did not become slaves to material civilization, symbolized by foreign goods.<sup>70</sup> Social reformers also warned that the railroad connection would be a catalyst for chaotic growth, turning their beloved city into a mishmash of polluting factories, out-of-place skyscrapers, cramped living quarters, and confused streets. Accordingly, they turned to city planning to rationally organize the space of the city before urban growth haphazardly proceeded on its own terms. Civil engineers could apply scientific principles to designate commercial and political city centers, locate industrial areas on large tracts of cheap land downwind and near sources of water and transportation, protect residential districts from the noise and dangers of heavy machinery, place educational sites in a scenic setting to "educate and mold noble characters," and preserve spaces for future growth.<sup>71</sup> For a model of

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<sup>70</sup> "Baochi Xibei minfeng (Maintaining the customs of the Northwest)," *Xijing Ribao*, December 23, 1934.

<sup>71</sup> Li Ping, "Xijing shiqu fenhua wenti chuyi (My humble opinion on the question of zoning Xijing)," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 74-88.

comprehensive planning that cohered with the broader visions of settler colonialism for the region, Guomindang politicians, civil engineers, and social reformers were particularly inspired by the Garden City.

In the early twentieth century, the Garden City was an emergent paradigm of urban planning that promised to reconcile the division developing between the city and the countryside across the world. The English social reformer Ebenezer Howard first proposed the Garden City in response to the mass migration of people into already overcrowded cities in England and elsewhere in Europe and the Americas at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Howard, this population movement apparently gave rise to the universally recognized question of “how to restore the people to the land.”<sup>72</sup> Through the metaphor of the magnet, Howard identified the “attractions” drawing people to the cities, such as high wages, employment opportunities, and prospects for advancement, but also noted “the problems of intemperance, of excessive toil, of restless anxiety, of grinding poverty.”<sup>73</sup> As for the countryside, natural beauty and resources were marred by a lack of refinement, capital, and public spirit. In his search for an alternative to these polarized but equally flawed spaces, Howard claimed that “town and country must be married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.”<sup>74</sup> The Garden City would be built on a 6000-acre rural estate and accommodate up to 32,000 people. The town would be circular in form, with boulevards radiating out

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<sup>72</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd, 1902), 13.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

from centralized parks and public buildings, past commercial, residential, and industrial areas to the surrounding countryside. Settlers of different trades and professions would enjoy higher purchasing power for their wages and healthier surroundings while farming populations living around the town center would benefit from new markets.<sup>75</sup>

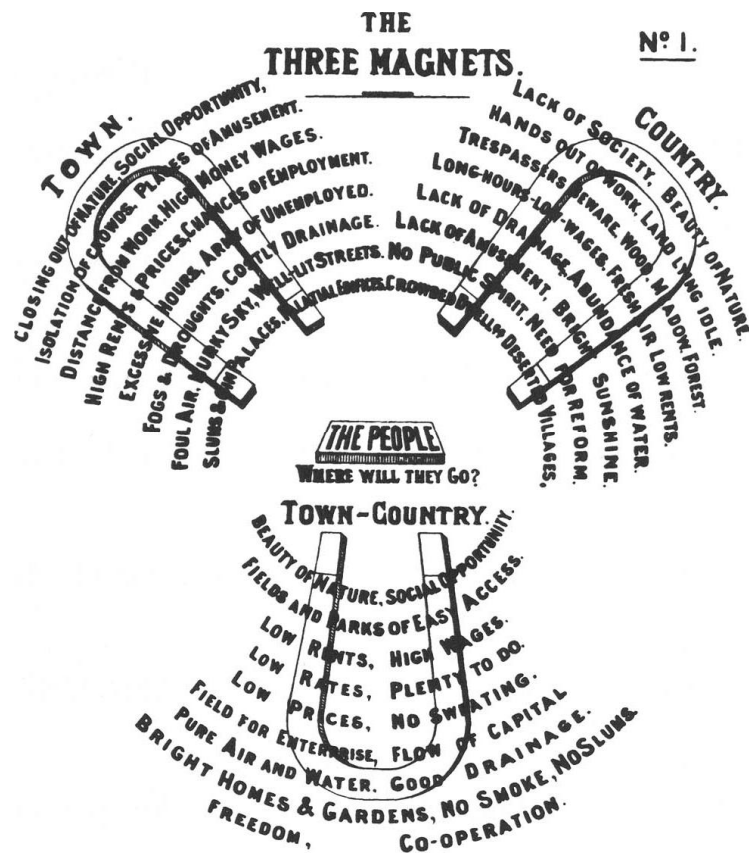


Image 12. The Three Magnets  
 Source: Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd, 1902).

In this social experiment launched at the turn of the twentieth century in Letchworth and Welwyn, England, which became models for garden cities in

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 18.

Germany, Sweden, and the United States, Howard attempted to strike a balance not only between the city and the country but also between political extremes created under capitalism.<sup>76</sup> The garden city paradigm presented an alternative to the redistribution of wealth advocated by contemporaneous socialist and communist movements in the form of a colony that would accommodate both private enterprise and the collective ownership of land.<sup>77</sup> As one of his sources of inspiration, Howard cited Edward Gibbon Wakefield's *Art of Colonization*, which urged the scientific planning of colonies that represented diverse classes of the metropolis and not just its underclass. Howard wanted to bring colonization home.<sup>78</sup> Not unlike the frontier story, the solution to overcrowded cities, in his view, lay in organized migration to sparsely settled rural districts.

By the 1920s, the polarization of the city and countryside, much to the detriment of the latter's place in political economy, engendered agrarian movements around the world. On the world stage, Chinese audiences read about the "Green International" that had been established in 1921 among agrarian opposition parties in European countries, such as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Operating through the International Agrarian Bureau headquartered in Prague, this peasants' international championed small private property against large landed estates and communists focused on the industrial proletariat.<sup>79</sup> The rise of agrarian parties

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 68, 95-96, 115-117.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>79</sup> Zhang Weici, "Zhanhou de Ouzhou nongmin: Lüse Guoji (Postwar European Farmers: The Green International)," *Dongfang Zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany) Vol. 23, No. 13 (July 10, 1926): 33-44; "Lüse de Guoji (Green International)," *Shishi Zhoubao* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1930): 20-21; "Lüse Guoji (Green



soon compelled the Comintern to set up the Krestintern, its own peasants' international, in 1923. In China, the Guomindang and its then Communist allies had established the Peasant Movement Training Institute in 1924.<sup>80</sup> One writer, Yan Yan, called it a “green movement” (綠色運動 *lüse yundong*) within the party that was taking the agrarian class as the subject of politics. Like Howard, Yan Yan observed how “toxic” industrial polices produced extreme demographic shifts in China. Fields were left to lie untilled while vagrants roamed the cities. Desolation struck northwestern China while the southeastern corner was plagued by overcrowding. Rejecting these modern developments, especially in light of the insurmountable financial hurdles facing China's fledgling industry, Yan Yan trusted that agricultural development built on four thousand years of experience was simply a better fit for China. An agricultural revival would put the country back on the path to self-sufficiency and spread population evenly throughout the nation's vast territory.<sup>81</sup>

In comparison with grassroots peasant organizing, the garden city represented a top-down measure with which to address the geographical disparities and public health problems produced from populations flocking to the industrial city. Editors of prominent periodicals and publishing houses in China published articles and books on the garden city (田園都市 *tianyuan dushi* and 花園都市 *huayuan dushi*)— texts that would later be cited by social reformers and civil engineers in Xi'an. All agreed that

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International),” *Nongye Jingji* Vol. 1, No. 1 (June 1, 1934): 2; “Lüse Guoji (Green International),” *Xinsheng* (1934) Vol. 1, No. 43 (1934): 870.

<sup>80</sup> Under the leadership of Peng Pai, Zhou Enlai, Qu Qiubai, and Mao Zedong, the Peasant Movement Training Institute trained 1700 men as part of a wave of rural organizing in the mid-1920s. Peter Zarrow, *China in War and Revolution, 1895-1949*, 220-221.

<sup>81</sup> Yan Yan, “Lüse yundong (Green movement),” *Guowen Zhoubao* (1924), 3-4.

the industrious but squalid Victorian city had already surfaced on Chinese shores, spurring the historical emergence of modern police forces, public health departments, and urban sociology in China. In *Shenbao*, one author's observations of the port towns of Shanghai, Tianjin, and Hankou led him to conclude that "the more the city develops, the more tragic urban life."<sup>82</sup> Translations of Japanese texts too reinforced the notion that the Victorian city was simultaneously the origin of modern civilization and unparalleled decadence.<sup>83</sup> The building of mid-sized satellite communities was needed to reduce the number of factories and population in large metropolises. Concentration was the source of modern ills. In his essays on the garden city, Dong Xiujia, an expert trained in municipal administration at the University of Michigan and the University of California, called upon older cities in the interior and newer cities along the coast to adopt the idea of "country living in the city" (寓鄉於市之意 *yu xiang yu shi zhi yi*). He believed new garden cities should be built in the suburbs of existing cities, where land was cheap, new construction would not threaten many existing buildings, and building supplies were plentiful. Visually, Dong presented a spatial layout for these colonies resembling the idealized universe of a mandala.<sup>84</sup> He also drew on the early poet Tao Yuanming's description of a worry-free paradise as the "land of peach blossoms outside of the world" (世外桃源 *shiwai taoyuan*) to depict Howard's utopia as a "land of peach blossoms outside of the city" (市外桃源

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<sup>82</sup> Ma Chonghui, "Yingguo tianyuan dushi yundong shi (The history of the English Garden City Movement)," *Shenbao*, August 5, 1923, 21-22.

<sup>83</sup> Jun Shi, "Xiandai wenming yu dushi jihua (Modern civilization and city planning)," *Dongfang zazhi* Vol. 15, No. 12 (December 15, 1918): 17-23, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Dong Xiujia, "Tianyuan xinshi yu woguo shizheng (New garden cities and municipal government in our nation)," *Dongfang zazhi* Vol. 22, No. 11 (June 10, 1925), 31.

shiwai taoyuan).<sup>85</sup> Not only had garden cities begun to appear around the world, but Dong found that the attempts by Shanghai industrialists and the YMCA to construct new villages in Pudong and Wuxi were in the same spirit.<sup>86</sup>

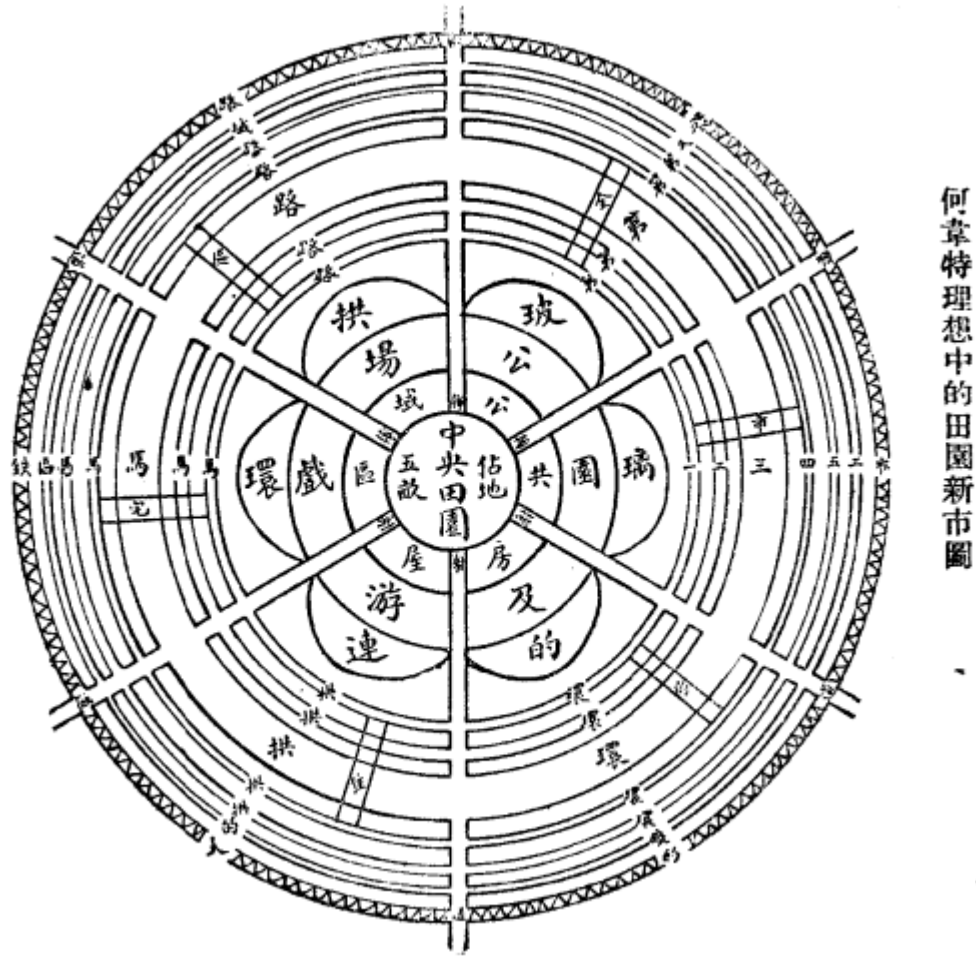


Image 13. “Howard’s ideal of a garden city”  
Dong Xiujia, “Tianyuan xinshi yu woguo shizheng,” *Dongfang zazhi* Vol. 22, No. 11  
(June 10, 1925), 31.

<sup>85</sup> Dong Xiujia, “Yingguo de huayuan dushi (English garden cities),” *Qiantu zazhi* Vol. 5, No. 5 (May 16, 1937), 51.

<sup>86</sup> Dong, “Tianyuan xinshi yu woguo shizheng,” 41; Dong, “Yingguo de huayuan dushi,” 51; Zhang Mingqin, “Shanghai qingnianhui Pudong laogong xincun shizhou jinian ganyan (Impressions on the ten year anniversary of the Shanghai YMCA’s labor village in Pudong),” *Shanghai qingnian* Vol. 35, No. 35 (October 23, 1935), 15-32.

Other Chinese intellectuals went beyond the problems of housing and hygiene to steer the garden city in a conservative political direction. Originally conceived as a middle ground between liberal individualism and communism, the garden city was given a place in the eradication of communism by conservatives. In 1932, Liu Yunchou, an Edinburgh- and Berlin-trained agronomist who headed the Institutes of Agricultural Science at Central University and Beiping University, equated the garden city with the rustication (鄉村化 *xiangcun hua*) of the city. Like Ebenezer Howard, who had characterized the country as the origin of “God’s love and care for man,” and Japanese authors, who claimed it was “the source of the nation’s vitality” (元氣活力之淵源 *yuanyi huoli zhi yuanyuan*), Liu located spirituality in the countryside. Liu pitted “yellowing” against “greening:” “Yellow is a dark symbol of withering, gloom, aridity, depression, commotion, pathology, and death; green is a sign of being vivacious, distinct, affluent, lively, tranquil, healthy, and prosperous.”<sup>87</sup> For Liu, yellow represented China’s cities, which he considered to be filthy, foul, cramped, noisy, polluted, disorderly, and filled with criminal activity. Speaking to the Guomindang’s anti-communism, he warned that yellowing would eventually lead to reddening. Liu argued there was no place that did not have artistic meaning and poetic sentiment in the countryside, with its flowers, grass, trees, bamboo fences, thatched houses, wooden bridges, clear brooks, woodcutters, shepherd boys, and water buffaloes. From dawn until dusk, one would remain connected to the great natural

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<sup>87</sup> Liu Yunchou, “Huanghua yu luhua (Yellowing and greening),” *Shidai gonglun* No. 11 (1932): 36-37.

world. Because of the indispensability of cities in the modern age, Liu called for their “greening” through tree planting and the building of parks.<sup>88</sup>

In the 1930s, when Guomindang authorities found their Western Capital covered in a blanket of yellow dust, they sought to transform Xi’an into a “green landscaped city” (綠面風景市 *lümian fengjing shi*).<sup>89</sup> In 1932, after observing the scarcity of trees in the city and lackluster parks where manmade lakes had dried up, the newly founded Xijing Preparatory Committee urged the Shaanxi Bureau of Public Works to plant trees and divert water from local rivers into the run-down Longqu canal.<sup>90</sup> The Shaanxi Bureau of Public Works planned new forested areas around the city would include 30,000 trees along the circumference of the city and along major roads, nurseries in existing parks, and Forest Park (森林公園 *Senlin Gongyuan*) with 85,000 trees.<sup>91</sup> By restoring a long-lost natural environment, officials hoped to rebalance the spirits of urbanites (調劑市民精神 *tiaoji shimin jingshen*) and foster their “love for the city” (愛市心裡 *aishi xinli*). Tree planting also promised salubrious effects by providing shade during the intense summer heat and holding back strong winds that gave rise to dust storms.<sup>92,93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> “Shaanxisheng jiansheting ershier nian zhi ershisi nian xingzheng jihua (Shaanxi Provincial Bureau of Public Works Administrative Plan for 1933-1935),” *Minguo Kaifa Xibei*, 193, 197-199.

<sup>90</sup> “Xijing Choubei Weiyuanhui chengli zhounian baogao,” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> “Shaanxisheng jiansheting ershier nian zhi ershisi nian xingzheng jihua,” *Minguo Kaifa Xibei*, 193, 197-199.

<sup>92</sup> “Xijing Choubei Weiyuanhui chengli zhounian baogao,” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 155.

<sup>93</sup> Qin Zhongren, “Benshi yangkui xingdaoshu zhi fazhan (The development of poplars lining the streets of this city),” *Xibei Nongxue shekan* Vol. 3, Nos. 3-4 (November 1, 1936), 11-12;

Social reformers trusted that the garden city ideal would be a roadmap to introducing industrial production without losing local character. In 1933, public works officials drafted an opinion regarding the establishment of a “special municipality” at the request of Zhang Ji and Dai Jitao, in which they argued that the development of Xi’an needed to be modeled after the garden city rather than Shanghai or Tianjin. In their formulation, new economic flows would revitalize the stagnant economy, but a restorative natural environment would tame the totalizing effects of industrialization so the city could preserve its distinct character. In their words, “The people will be as pure as in the past but benefit from living in peace and working in contentment (安居樂業 *anju leye*). The land will be as scenic as the past but have a flourishing and developed appearance.”<sup>94</sup>

Local conservatives equated an overemphasis on material development with the Westernization of cities, which they opposed. In a 1934 letter to the Xijing Preparatory Committee, Sun Jingtian of Yisushe, a local opera society, stressed the importance of spirituality over material progress. Because these were trying times filled with misery, torment and persecution, Sun believed that what the world’s people needed in the wake of the Great Depression was the asceticism of Gandhi, Mussolini’s sense of duty, and Chiang Kai-shek’s New Life Movement – not Westernization (*xiyanghua*) in the form of “lopsided material development” (物質之

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“Shaanxisheng jiansheting ershier nian zhi ershisi nian xingzheng jihua,” *Minguo Kaifa Xibei*, 193, 197-199.

<sup>94</sup> Shaanxisheng Jiansheting, “Wei fengling nijiu ‘Sheli Xi’an tebieshi zhi yijian’ cheng Shaanxi Shengzhengfu wen (An opinion presented to the Shaanxi Provincial Government on the establishment of a special municipality in Xi’an),” *Minguo Kaifa Xibei*, 216-218.

畸形發展 *wuzhi zhi jixing fazhan*). In his opinion, developing Xi'an in the same manner as Anglo-American cities and Shanghai would compromise the age-old morals and customs of Xi'an's honest and upright residents. Sun did admit that Xi'an had its own history of warlords and official corruption, but he believed that westernizing the city would heighten these problems and undoubtedly make Xi'an "a factory for corrupt officials" and a "hotbed of evil." Instead of Westernization, Sun Jingtian encouraged Xijing officials to follow the trend of garden cities, imitating the countryside with its thatched cottages and shady trees to provide a refreshing natural environment.

Unlike Howard's vision of the colonization of empty space, Sun took Xi'an as a blank slate for the building of a garden city. It would have been difficult to implement the garden city model, he said, if there were already unplanned growth and overcrowded dwellings within the city. However, in the remote interior city of Xi'an, ancient customs were still preserved and the shape of the modern city was barely in place. Moreover, a third of the city's surface area consisted of open space, roads were wide, and there was no lack of options for the construction of public facilities in even the populated districts. In particular, the widespread installation of gardens would be able to lift the spirits of the city's residents as officials had started to do at Nanyuanmen. Just as Howard associated the country with a lack of civic-mindedness, Sun believed that the public needed to be educated about the importance of municipal government through propaganda campaigns. But Sun went further to advocate ideological control (統治思想 *tongzhi sixiang*) because the city was where politicians,

educators, investors, writers, soldiers, and students all gathered. In order to maintain a steady political climate that would support the goals of economic development in the Northwest, officials needed to shape the thoughts of Xi'an residents; otherwise their work would be to no avail.<sup>95</sup>

Others believed that Xi'an was too already populated to evade future crises in housing and hygiene so garden city planning had to take place in the suburbs instead. According to Feng Zhenchang of the Xi'an Department of Public Works, Xi'an was ill-prepared for its future as a transportation center of the region. Feng called for garden cities in the suburbs of Xi'an as a precautionary measure against further concentration stemming from railroad and highway connections. For Feng, garden cities would accommodate modern industrial production but redistribute population and satisfy aesthetic needs. Citing popular resistance to redevelopment in other older cities of China reported by Dong Xiujia and other urban experts, he believed that the opening up of new areas in the scenic suburbs of Xi'an would bring twice the results with half of the effort.<sup>96</sup>

Even though officials continued greening initiatives in the wartime period, the garden city never materialized in the city or the suburbs. In 1940, less than three percent of the city's surface area comprised parks, compared to the ten percent

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<sup>95</sup> Sun Jingtian, "Xijing shizheng jianshe jihua zhi zhunze (Criteria for planning the construction of Xijing municipal government)," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 88-91.

<sup>96</sup> Feng Zhenchan, "Tianyuan dushi jihua yu Xijing shizheng jianshe (Garden city planning and the construction of Xijing municipal government)," *Xi'an Shigong Yuekan* Vol. 1, Nos. 3-4 (January 31, 1936): 2-9.



decried by a national law on urban planning.<sup>97</sup> The efforts of garden city advocates, however, demonstrate how conservatives proposed to deal with the question of urbanization within the larger project of Opening Up the Northwest. The garden city was a model of urban growth that was still compatible with the goals of the frontier story, as both imaginaries claimed to solve the problems of uneven development within China through colonization. Moreover, at a time when conservatives decried the totalizing effects of industrialization as tantamount to Westernization, the garden city and the frontier story supported conservative visions of maintaining Chinese sovereignty in the agricultural and cultural realms.

At a time when the world increasingly appeared to Chinese politicians across the ideological spectrum in binary terms, such as the city versus the country, industry versus agriculture, foreign versus Chinese, and the Southeast versus the Northwest, Guomindang conservatives rejected grassroots organizing and radical politics in favor of “harmonizing/balancing” (調劑 *tiaoji*) these contradictions. Just as they believed that a strong corporatist state would be able to harmonize class interests,<sup>98</sup> right-wing politicians conceived of urban planning as a top-down balancing act could effectively rationalize space so as to allow for modern industry without agricultural bankruptcy and cultural degeneration. After the railroad connection, local planners in Xi’an began to envision the city divided into functional zones to achieve balance. Seeing how new industries had sprouted throughout the city, they sought to limit its presence

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<sup>97</sup> “Xijing choubei weiyuanhui ji Shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui ershijiu nian gongzuo shishi baogao (Xijing Preparatory Committee and the Municipal Public Works Committee Work Report for 1940),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 342-343.

<sup>98</sup> Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism*, 128.

to the northern suburbs around the railroad station. A historic relics zone had to be strictly delimited northwest of the city as well for the protection of imperial ruins. Also in keeping with conservative visions, fertile lands south of the city would be a zone for agricultural testing and Zhongnan Mountain a scenic zone for tourists.<sup>99</sup>

### *Keeping Up Appearances*

The perceived impact of the railroad connection was the point of departure for imagining not just the garden city but also increased police surveillance. The police department complained that the railroad was a catalyst for criminal activity: “Since the Longhai Railroad extended west into Shaanxi, transportation has become more convenient by the day. There is no end in sight for the bustling atmosphere, transforming overnight the simple and calm look [of the city] into a complex and noisy society. The population has increased rapidly, a mix of the good people and the weeds (良莠不齊 *liangyou buqi*).”<sup>100</sup> Newspapers abound with sensational reports of criminal activity, including prison breaks, armed robbery by bandits, and even homicides of government employees. In spite of its rhetoric that a verdant landscape itself would mold the bodies and minds of the people (陶冶市民身心 *taoye shimin shenxin*),<sup>101</sup> Guomintang appointees poured their resources into a security apparatus

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<sup>99</sup> “Xijing shiqu jihua diyici huiyi jilu (Minutes of the first meeting on Xijing’s zoning plan),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 93; “Xijing shi fenqu jihua shuoming (An explanation of the zoning plan for Xi’an),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 93-95; “Jihua quyue (Planned regions),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shiliao xuanji*, 144-150.

<sup>100</sup> “Xi’an jingzheng yiyong changzu jinbu (Xi’an military government already making rapid progress),” *Xibei daobao* Vol. 3, No. 10 (June 25, 1937).

<sup>101</sup> Ershiwu niandu Xi’an shizheng gongcheng jihua (Plan for Xi’an Municipal Engineering Projects in 1936),” *Xi’an shigong yuekan* Vol. 1, No. 5 (May 1936), 2.

that actively targeted offensive behavior and individuals. The beautification of the exterior world in Xi'an was accompanied by the desire to weed out bad characters and reform the inner self, as suggested by Sun Jingtian's garden city proposal.<sup>102</sup>

Whereas "landscape" (*fengjing*) signified value-production tied to the tourist gaze, the "city image" (*shirong*) became a keyword for urban governmentality ensuring that members of the public kept up appearances because they knew they were being watched. The police department partnered with the Shaanxi New Life Movement Association to "reorganize the city's image" (整理市容 *zhengli shirong*). Police implemented household registration and the *baojia* system of mutual surveillance to keep accounts on the growing population, especially possible Communist activity. They claimed that disorderly conditions would make it possible for thieves to go into hiding. *Baojia* supervisors were expected to disseminate government orders and report back on public order, cleanliness, and epidemics in twenty-seven districts. Civilians were required to report births, deaths, missing persons, adoptions, relocation, marriages, separations, shop openings or closings within three days.<sup>103</sup> Public surveillance was also assisted by the installation of street lights made possible by the new diesel-powered power plant that lit a few neighborhoods for the first time on January 2, 1936.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> In his consideration of modern disciplinary spaces, Japanese scholar Maeda Ai argued that the ideas of the garden city and the panoptic prison were two sides of the same coin. For Maeda, the garden city set about "reforming the dark, unclean spaces (which had also served to shield criminals from the watchful gaze of officials) into a hygienic space of clear vision." Maeda, *Text and the City*, 33-34.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, "Jingchaju diaocha shimin hukou biangeng (Police inspect changes in urban household registration)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao* (April 21, 1937).

<sup>104</sup> Shou Guang, "Xijing dianchang zhi gaikuang (The state of Xijing power plant)," *Ziyuan weiyuanhui yue kan* Vol. 1, No. 2 (1939), 114.

The Shaanxi New Life Movement Association explained how responsibility for modernizing the city's image did not only fall on the shoulders of the local military and police forces; rather, all residents were duty bound to participate in the construction of a clean and orderly city. Through newspaper articles and radio announcements, New Life leaders explained how a new society needed to be established in accordance with the principles of their movement, namely, good order, cleanliness, simplicity, frugality, speed, and truthfulness. They required residents to, for instance, walk along the left side of the road, wet down and sweep their door fronts, use spittoons, discard litter in designated bins, avoid loitering, refrain from sleeping in parks, and protect trees and flowers – all of which had to be done within view of the military, police, and baojia supervisors. Officials aspired to secure ideological hegemony through regular inspection of public bulletin boards and the immediate removal of posts on non-designated wall areas.<sup>105</sup> When New Life organizers and the police department claimed measures taken in the name of public order and hygiene would give residents a newfound impression of the city, they expected urban residents to embrace a new sense of personal responsibility in maintaining the cleanliness and order of their surroundings.

Alongside the New Life behavioral regulations, official attention to the city image generated a long list of eyesores (有礙觀瞻 *you'ai guanzhan*) throughout the

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<sup>105</sup> “Zhengli shirong, yao qingjie, yao zhengqi (Put city's appearance in order to be clean and orderly),” *Xijing Ribao*, October 17, 1936; “Zhengli shirong (Put city's appearance in order),” *Xijing Ribao*, October 19, 1936; “Zhengli shirong,” *Xijing Ribao*, October 20, 1936; “Zhengli shirong yu shixing liu xiang biao zhun (Put city's appearance in order and put into effect six standards),” *Xijing Ribao*, October 23, 1936; “Sheng xinyunhui zhengdun shirong (Provincial New Life Movement Association remaking city's appearance),” *Xijing Ribao*, May 2, 1937.

city, especially in tourist areas. Officials often expressed their displeasure with traffic congestion and unsanitary conditions in aesthetic terms. The surface of the street leading to Beilin (the Stele Forest), one of Xi'an most popular attractions, was far too bumpy and needed to be repaved.<sup>106</sup> Water carts gathering at the public well outside of the West Gate brought traffic to an unpleasant standstill, so officials opened up another gate in the city wall to facilitate flow.<sup>107</sup> At Nanyuanmen, where authorities had been setting up flower terraces and planting trees, hawkers gathered every evening to hang their gas lamps and set up ring toss games, creating congestion and too much noise from laughter. Officials ordered the police to put an end to the disorder and requested the forestry bureau to plant more trees to heighten the beauty of this place.<sup>108</sup> At the Bell Tower, police shooed away peddlers and vagrants.<sup>109</sup> Visitors to Lianhu Park, which was described by the editor of *Xijing ribao* as being “in a state of lawlessness and unrestraint,” snapped off flowers and plants, urinated and defecated wherever they pleased, and damaged the tomb of the German scientist Fenzel, who had died in 1936.<sup>110</sup> North of the city, residents living without public toilets relieved themselves indiscriminately.<sup>111</sup> Day and night, nightsoil collectors transported excrement throughout the city's street, horrifying all bystanders with the

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<sup>106</sup> “Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui di ershisan ci huiyi jilu (Minutes of the twenty-third meeting of the Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee), June 12, 1935,” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 255.

<sup>107</sup> *Minguo Xi'an chengqiang dang'an shiliao*, 257-265, 329-367.

<sup>108</sup> “Jingchaju zhengdun Nanyuanmen shirong (Police department putting appearance of Nanyuanmen in order),” *Xibe Wenhua Ribao*, April 10, 1937.

<sup>109</sup> “Sheng xinyunhui zhengdun shirong,” *Xijing Ribao*, May 2, 1937.

<sup>110</sup> “Cong gongyuanli huilai (Coming back from the park),” *Xijing Ribao*, May 12, 1937.

<sup>111</sup> “Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui di wushi san ci huiyi jilu (Minutes from the fifty-sixth meeting of the Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 299.

stench.<sup>112</sup> Officials were especially aghast that these workers dried their collections of human waste within view of the scenic route south of the city and directed them to designated areas in more remote locations.<sup>113</sup> Beggars filled the city's streets and police forced them into shelters (收容所 *shourongsuo*) every night.<sup>114</sup>

The most unfortunate members of local society found themselves singled out by the police as eyesores. Near the railroad station, outfitted with traditional architectural motifs, famine victims lived in what officials derided as “shacks” (*penghu* 棚户). There refugees from Shanxi, Henan, Jiangsu, and Shandong sold merchandise and tea out of huts thrown together with straw mats. Officials worried that this slum occupying both sides of the main road leading into the city would be the first introduction that visitors arriving on the Longhai would have to Xi'an. In 1935, the Department of Civil Engineering issued building regulations that authorized the police to demolish any structures in the city that were deemed to be too dangerous.<sup>115</sup> Soon afterwards, the agency ordered the tearing down of these “eyesores.” Seeing that these heavy-handed measures only further immiserated refugees, who set up tents or slept on the damp ground, one writer argued that it

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<sup>112</sup> “Xi'an jingzheng yiyou changzu jinbu,” *Xibei daobao*, 12.

<sup>113</sup> “Shenghui jingchaju qudi Nanguan fenchang (Provincial Capital Police Department prohibit night soil fields in southern suburb),” *Xibei Wenhua Ribao*, March 26, 1937; “Jingchaju chishu zhuyi gonggong weisheng (Police department orders increased attention to public hygiene),” *Xijing ribao* (April 9, 1937), 6.

<sup>114</sup> “Xi'an jingzheng yiyou changzu jinbu,” *Xibei daobao*, 14.

<sup>115</sup> Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui (Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee), *Xijing zanzheng jianzhu fagui (Xijing City Provisional Building Regulations)* (November 1935). Xi'an Municipal Archives, Xi'an shizheng gongchengchu 05-197.

would be better for authorities to mobilize rich merchants to employ these unfortunates.<sup>116</sup>

In March 1936, police officers began uniformly deporting refugees arriving from the east, claiming that they were eyesores and impediments to public order (妨害秩序 *fanghai zhixu*). One editorial complained that these unfortunate masses apparently knew very well that begging was an eyesore and disorderly but they were forced into starvation by natural disaster. According to the author, exploitation in the Japanese-occupied areas and the spring famine that had hit Communist-controlled areas in northern Shaanxi sent starving and freezing people to Xi'an. Instead of expelling them, the government should instead provide relief to these victims and then defeat the Communists and Japanese, who were manufacturing these refugees.<sup>117</sup> Police continued to dispatch personnel to escort Henan refugees back to their homes, but they also opened a "vagrant training center" (遊民教養所 *yumin jiaoyangsuo*) on July 26, 1936 for a small fraction of the fifty thousand unemployed people in the city.<sup>118</sup>

The local government's consciousness of eyesores heightened as when Xi'an experienced an economic downturn after the Xi'an Incident. The Longhai connection

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<sup>116</sup> Ci Yang, "Xijing xunli zhi er (Pilgrimage to Xijing, Part Two)," *Xibei Xiangdao* (Northwest Guide) No. 7 (June 1, 1936), 16-18.

<sup>117</sup> "You'ai guanzhan (Eyesores)," *Xibei xiangdao* No. 1 (April 1, 1936), 6-7.

<sup>118</sup> "Shenghui youmin jiaoyangsuo shourong youmin jiaoyang jianshi (Provincial capital vagrant training center taking in vagrants and training them)," *Xijing Ribao*, October 17, 1936, 7; "Yusheng nanmin (Henan refugees)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 27, 1936; "Xibei shiri (Ten days in the Northwest)," *Xibei xiangdao* No. 14 (August 11, 1936), 30; "Shenghui jingchaju huifu youmin jiaoyangsuo (Provincial capital police department restores vagrant training center)," *Xibei Wenhua Ribao* April 20, 1937; "Benshi siyuefen shimin renshu tongji wuyezhe zhan wuwan erqian yu ren (Over 52,000 unemployed people in city's April census)," *Xijing Ribao*, May 26, 1937, 7.





### *Wartime Crisis*

Soon after Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China in July 1937, Xi'an became inundated by an influx of refugees that engendered the overcrowding, disorder, and unhygienic conditions that officials had long worried about. Many of the civilians who arrived in Xi'an were flood victims from Henan. In June 1938, the Guomindang, in an act of desperation, breached the dikes of the Yellow River to hold back the Japanese offensive. While temporarily disrupting the transport systems of the Japanese military, flooding reportedly killed over 800,000 people and displaced over one million people in Henan alone.<sup>122</sup> By July 1938, over 900,000 people followed the Longhai railroad to Shaanxi, either by foot or on train cars that were frequently shelled by Japanese artillery.<sup>123</sup> The shortage of housing for the urban poor meant that many refugees would use the scant resources available to them and continue the tradition of building huts out of straw matting to squat on vacant land.

The growing shantytown near the train station prompted the police department to issue new regulations that decreed that all refugees and their shacks would have to be registered with the police. Ramshackle dwellings were only permitted if they were located in remote areas, the same height and width as neighboring shacks, and located at a distance from one another. Shack dwellers were required to pay attention to cleanliness and set up vats of water in case of fire. Any “eyesores” that violated these

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<sup>122</sup> Micah Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 31.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

rules would be torn down immediately.<sup>124</sup> Only later did officials begin to admit that demolition of these shacks would make it exceedingly difficult for refugees to make a living. After years of deliberation, the police department requested in 1941 that the public works department rebuild the slum and provide new residences on vacant land near the train station as measures to rejuvenate the appearance of the area (復壯觀瞻 *fuzhuang guanzhan*).<sup>125</sup> Later, a meeting between government offices, representatives from the slum, and members of the local *baojia* reached an agreement that they would seek businessmen to fund the redevelopment of the area and the temporary relocation of the poor.<sup>126</sup>

Having escaped flooding in Henan, refugees searching for a safe haven found themselves the targets not only of policing but also of years of Japanese raids. Not long after the war began, Japanese aircraft began entering the airspace of Xi'an and bombing targets on the outskirts of the city.<sup>127</sup> After the capture of Wuhan in October 1938, one of the Japanese military's reported strategies was to move into the Northwest to cut off supplies of Soviet arms and pacify the Communist movement.<sup>128</sup> Chinese observers believed that commanders also intended to take advantage of the

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<sup>124</sup> "Qudi penghu ding zanxing banfa (Provisional measures to prohibit shacks)," *Xijing Ribao* (November 16, 1938).

<sup>125</sup> "Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui di liushi ci huiyi jilu (Minutes of the sixtieth meeting of the Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee), April 8, 1936," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 302; *Minguo Xi'an chengqiang dang'an shiliao*, 410.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 414.

<sup>127</sup> Foreign observers later that the Japanese army could have defeated the 300,000 troops fighting under General Hu Zongnan, but preferred to leave Xi'an as a zone of conflict between the Guomindang and Communists. Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 75.

<sup>128</sup> F. Tillman Dudin, "China list gain at Taierhchwang," *The New York Times*, November 17, 1938; "Japanese threat to Shensi," *The Times*, November 25, 1938, 13; "Chinese push on Hunan attack," *New York Times*, October 12, 1939, 13; "Pigu shengzhong hua Xi'an (Xi'an amidst the sound of warfare)," *Shenbao*, December 6, 1938, 8.

poor state of Han-Hui relations to establish another puppet regime in the Northwest.<sup>129</sup> After a year of raids, enemy planes bombarded densely populated sections of Xi'an for the first time in November 1938.<sup>130</sup> On the morning of November 16, thirteen planes heading to Xi'an split into two formations and dropped over forty bombs. According to reporters, it appeared that the Japanese planes were targeting the railroad station, but because of poor visibility from the weather, the bombs instead hit a nearby section of the moat where refugees were living in cave dwellings.<sup>131</sup> After a week of air raids that destroyed mosques and homes in the Muslim Quarter, reporters became convinced that Japanese planes were bombing indiscriminately.<sup>132</sup> Regular bombardment seemed to continue without any end in sight. One of the most destructive attacks occurred on the afternoon of March 7, 1939. Fourteen planes unleashed over a hundred bombs that killed and injured six hundred civilians and destroyed thousands of buildings around the city, including refugee settlements, the two Catholic churches, and the English Baptist Mission's Jenkins Robertson Memorial Hospital.<sup>133</sup> Japanese pilots also dropped leaflets warning residents that China was on the verge of Bolshevism and Japan was its only true

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<sup>129</sup> "Pigu shengzhong hua Xi'an," *Shenbao*, 8.

<sup>130</sup> "Xi'an zuo zao kongxi (Xi'an raided yesterday morning)," *Shenbao*, November 13, 1937, 2; "Xi'an zuo zao kongxi (Xi'an raided yesterday morning)," *Shenbao*, November 28, 1937, 2.

<sup>131</sup> "Diji canwurendao zuo kuang zha chezhan yidai (Enemy planes inhumanely bomb area around train station yesterday)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 17, 1938.

<sup>132</sup> "Diji zuochen xi benshi zai shiqu lanshi hongzha (Enemy plans indiscriminately bomb urban districts yesterday morning)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 24, 1938.

<sup>133</sup> "Benshi haojie (A great catastrophe for our city)," *Xijing Ribao*, March 8, 1939; F. Tillman Durdin, "Bombing of Ichang brings US Protest," *New York Times*, March 10, 1939, 6; "Riji shisi jia hongzha Xi'an Ying yiyuan beihui (Fourteen enemy planes bomb Xi'an English hospital destroyed)," *Shenbao*, March 10, 1939, 3; F. Tillman Durdin, "Hospitals bombed in Japanese raids" *New York Times*, March 19, 1939, 42.

friend, complete with a caricature of Chinese people squeezed within the grasp of Stalin.<sup>134</sup>

Yet another wave of unprecedented destruction destroyed one of the largest industrial enterprises in the city after the Japanese defeat in Changsha, Hunan in October 1939. Seventy-five planes dropped 240 bombs over the course of two days on October 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> during the National Day celebrations.<sup>135</sup> Among the thousands of buildings left in ruins was the Dahua cotton textile mill. Its owners suspended operations after their facilities were raided multiple times.<sup>136</sup> Thousands of people, who had been working fourteen to fifteen hours a day, were now out of work and forced to seek shelter in “caves, gullies, graveyards, and the wilderness.” Management offered no support and simply told them to “go home.” These migrants protested that they would be working for the enemy if they went back to occupied areas.<sup>137</sup>

Air raids compelled the local government to organize residents in order to “avoid senseless sacrifice.” Officials admonished locals to protect their “useful bodies” so that they could contribute to wartime production.<sup>138</sup> But mounting civilian casualties made it apparent to officials that most residents were ill-prepared for air raids, so they decided to extend New Life behavioral training to defense strategies.

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<sup>134</sup> “Xi’an jinzhuang yiban (Present situation in Xi’an),” *Shenbao*, April 15, 1939, 4.

<sup>135</sup> “Victory Claimed for Chinese Reds,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1939, 10.

<sup>136</sup> “Dahua shachang quanbu tinggong (Dahua cotton mill completely shut down),” *Shaanhang huikan* Vol. 5, No. 5 (May 1940), 87.

<sup>137</sup> “Xi’an Dahua fangzhi chang shiye gongren juan qi (Statement submitted by Xi’an Dahua spinning and weaving factory laid off workers),” *Zhongguo gongren yuekan* No. 1 (1940).

<sup>138</sup> “Diji hongzha bushefang chengshi houyuan hui dian geguo huyu (Enemy planes bomb open city, reinforcements appeal to other countries),” *Xijing Ribao*, November 19, 1938, 2.

According to official sources, every time air-raid sirens sounded, people would take to the streets and run around in all directions, only adding to the chaos from bombardment. Officials instructed residents to take directions from police and military personnel in order to maintain orderly conditions. Those at home should take cover to avoid shrapnel or calmly escape to a bomb shelter nearby. Those in the middle of the street should take cover in the nearest bomb shelter or under a tree so as to avoid becoming a target. As in the case of the New Life Movement, officials warned citizens that traitorous behavior manifested in disorder.<sup>139</sup>

From functional zoning that designated industrial, residential, commercial, and cultural areas, officials now divided the city into bomb shelter districts so that civilians could respond to raids in a rational and orderly manner.<sup>140</sup> Bomb shelters came in different forms: caves (防空洞 *fangkongdong*), trenches (防空壕 *fangkonghao*), and cellars (防空地下室 *fangkong dixiashi*). Many residents headed to the city wall, which had long defended the city from invading armies. In the 1930s, Xi'an was unique among major Chinese cities for retaining its city wall at a time when these imperial enclosures were believed to obstruct transportation and economic development.<sup>141</sup> In other cases, city walls may have seemed defunct and nothing more than an impediment to the flow of raw materials, factory goods, and people, but, in Xi'an, their military function never faded. In 1926, the walls had provided a protective barrier for residents during the eight-month siege by the army of Liu

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<sup>139</sup> "Cujin fangkong xunlian (Promote air defense training)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 1, 1938.

<sup>140</sup> "Benshi dixiashi huafen quyu (Our city's air raid shelters divided into districts)," *Xijing Ribao* (January 20, 1939).

<sup>141</sup> Esherick, ed. *Remaking the Chinese City*; Dong, *Republican Beijing*

Zhenhua. The walls of Xi'an were officially saved by a national decree in 1931 that all cities with their walls intact must preserve them for defense unless they received permission from the Department of Military Affairs to dismantle them.<sup>142</sup>

The new possibility of aerial assaults transformed the ways in which locals conceived of the defensive possibilities of the wall. When Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped in 1936, locals reportedly began digging “caves” (窑洞 *yaodong*) into the foundation of the walls to shelter them in case the central government raided the city.<sup>143</sup> These practices proliferated once the war brought Japanese bombardment. Public works officials had previously focused on restoring sections of the wall to beautify its appearance and ensure proper drainage during rainfall.<sup>144</sup> In the late 1930s, they stepped up supervision of the wall to ensure that bomb shelters were actually safe places for people to take cover. Haphazard digging by personnel of the radio station and telegraph office and then private individuals along the southern wall led some sections to collapse. While investigating the circumstances, officials discovered in one case that individuals, who were living in these caves, were destabilizing the foundations by expanding their underground homes. Others came to the caves to pillage dirt, bricks, and lime for private needs.<sup>145</sup>

Officials worried that these spaces beyond their watchful gaze posed a threat to public security. The local garrison found that some shelters actually traversed the

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<sup>142</sup> “Baocun chengyuan banfa ling” (Order to preserve city walls), *Faling zhoukan* No. 45 (May 13, 1931): 2-3.

<sup>143</sup> *Minguo Xi'an chengqiang dang'an shiliao*, 89.

<sup>144</sup> “Xijing shizheng jianshe weiyuanhui di shisan ci huiyi jilu (Minutes of the thirteenth meeting of the Xijing Municipal Government Public Works Committee),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 245; *Minguo Xi'an chengqiang dang'an shiliao*, 3.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44, 47.

length of the wall. Through these tunnels, officials worried, thieves could sneak in and out of the city. Traitorous merchants could supposedly bypass inspection points and smuggle enemy products into the city.<sup>146</sup> Officials banned all of these practices and sought to implement some degree of uniformity in the shelters, but most caves continued to be built in violation of their standards. Caves were frequently too wide and needed additional pillars for support. Ceilings, walls, and entrances were constantly in a dangerous state of disrepair. Rainfall flooded caves that were not outfitted with drains.<sup>147</sup> By 1945, there were a total of 625 bomb shelters in the wall, most of which desperately needed repairs.<sup>148</sup>

Air raids forced local people increasingly to move their activities indoors, underground, and into the suburbs. According to one reporter, people in Xi'an began to work at night for fear of air raids. Businesses performed their transactions behind closed doors. No lighting was permitted to shine outside of establishments. For customer inquiries, shop owners posted notices on their storefronts and sent out sales representatives. Government agencies also dispersed to the suburbs so that in case of air raids, the entire province's "spiritual center" (精神樞紐 *jingshen shuniu*) would not be lost.<sup>149</sup> After its compound was struck multiple times, the Xijing Preparatory Committee was among those that had to relocate.<sup>150</sup> The English Baptist Mission's

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>149</sup> "Xi'an jinzhuang yiban," *Shenbao*, 4.

<sup>150</sup> "Xijing choubei weiyuanhui gongzuo gaikuang (The state of the Xijing Preparatory Committee's work)," *Choujian Xijing peidu dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 206.

hospital too moved its patients to the suburbs after its building was destroyed.<sup>151</sup> Chinese doctors established an underground hospital. Located thirty feet under the surface, the hospital was made up of a series of caves serving as wards, treatment rooms, and dormitories for the staff. Five hundred patients were treated every day.<sup>152</sup> Southeast of the city, the Xijing Preparatory Committee refurbished the Tangyu hot springs to create a treatment center that would help wounded soldiers recover in pleasant surroundings.<sup>153</sup>

Local officials turned to population dispersal to solve the problems of housing, hygiene, and public safety. According to the local Refugee Relief Committee, from October 1937 to the end of 1938, 58,065 people registered with their asylums and training centers, where they could receive rations of rice, millet, steamed bread (饅 *mo*), and salted vegetables. The committee sent tens of thousands of these refugees off to nearby Jingyang and Sanyuan counties as well as to faraway reclamation sites in Huanglongshan, Longnan, and Hanzhong.<sup>154</sup> Beginning on November 18, 1938, local officials expanded these initiatives to the general population, ordering the elderly, weak, women, children, and personnel who were not contributing directly to the war to head to safer western regions. Able-bodied men were conscripted for

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> “Xi’an zhi dixia yiyuan (Xi’an’s underground hospital),” *Shenbao*, May 9, 1940, 3; Harrison Forman, “New Chinese cities rise on war ruins,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1942, 5.

<sup>153</sup> “Xijing choubei weiyuanhui kangzhan yilai gongzuo gaikuang (The state of the Xijing Preparatory Committee’s work since the start of the War of Resistance),” *Choujian Xijing peidu dang’an shhiliao xuanji*, 216.

<sup>154</sup> “Xi’an nanmin jiujiuhui fenpi husong nanmin (Xi’an refugee relief committee escort groups of refugees),” *Shenbao*, November 28, 1937, 2; “Bensheng jiuji nanmin jingguo qingxing (The state of relief for refugees in our provinces),” *Xijing Ribao*, February 4, 1939, 2; for a discussion of the reclamation site in Huanglongshan, see Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*.



service in the army. The police were responsible for enforcing dispersal while the Refugee Relief Committee escorted people to neighboring counties. Displaced people traveled on the Longhai, took their own transportation, or simply walked.<sup>155</sup> Less than two weeks later, over one hundred thousand residents had been reportedly dispersed from Xi'an.<sup>156</sup>

Population dispersal was certainly a strategy advocated by national relief agencies but it was also in keeping with earlier desires for a garden city in Xi'an. Social reformers did not abandon the garden city ideal during the war, but attempted to mold it to suit wartime needs. In 1939, the Xi'an-based journal *Northwest Research* published a serialized article by Zhang Guorui on "Wartime Garden City Planning." Zhang was particularly concerned with the problem of refugees inundating interior cities, such as Chongqing, Guilin, and Xi'an, from war-torn areas in other provinces. Not only was there a housing crisis in these cities but Japanese air raids only led to many casualties and a great sense of insecurity among urban residents. Zhang looked to the building of new garden cities as a means of dispersing population from overcrowded wartime cities and reviving the destitute countryside in a rational and planned manner. He trusted the garden city would be a great improvement to

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<sup>155</sup> "Shusan benshi renkou" *Xijing Ribao*, November 17, 1938; "Xi'an shimin kaishi shusan (Xi'an residents begin to disperse)," *Shenbao*, November 20, 1938, 6; "Shenghui renkou shusan banfa (Method of dispersing the provincial capital's population)," *Xijing Ribao*, November 25, 1938.

<sup>156</sup> "Rifang zhunbei daguimo qinfan Zhongguo Xibei zhusheng (Japan preparing to launch large-scale invasion of China's Northwest provinces)," *Shenbao*, November 26, 1938, 4.

existing dispersal measures that were often too haphazard and disorganized, bringing the economy of the great rear area to a halt.<sup>157</sup>

The housing problem only worsened during the 1940s as refugees continued to stream into the city. From 1942 to 1943, Henan suffered a famine arising from prior ecological damage, drought, locust infestations, and militaries competing for food supplies. Because villagers were not able to obtain enough calories, this “energy crisis” killed between 1.5 and 2 million people and forced another 2-3 million to flee.<sup>158</sup> Most of these refugees ended up in Shaanxi, though they found no support from a city that was already strained. Refugees were forbidden from entering the city without documentation and settled outside of Xi’an on its peripheries.<sup>159</sup> Observers often complained that the government was ineffectively responding to the population growth, citing weak dispersal policies and the lack of new construction.<sup>160</sup> Hoarding practices that triggered rampant inflation began to affect housing too. Officials and rich merchants invested their money in newly built properties but did not rent out unoccupied units, causing rents to skyrocket because of the high demand for housing. Newspaper editorials called for the government to effect more rational distribution by compelling owners to rent out “surplus housing,” assessing rents, and building new

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<sup>157</sup> Zhang Guorui, “Zhanshi tianyuan shijihua (Wartime Garden City Planning),” *Xibei yanjiu* (*Northwest Research*) Vol. 1 No. 26 (October 31, 1939); No. 27 (November 16, 1939).

<sup>158</sup> Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*, 87, 90.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>160</sup> “Ruhe jiejie benshi fangwu wenti (How to solve our city’s housing problem),” *Xijing Ribao*, November 28, 1942.

residential areas, especially in the southern suburbs, to assist in population dispersal.<sup>161</sup>

In the fall of 1942, the Guomintang revived the frontier story as a tactic for solving the problem of surplus population. This time, instead of inducing unemployed people in the Southeast to move to the Northwest, they hoped to muster wartime refugees, who left to their own devices could also acquire communist sympathies, to move out of Xi'an and farther Northwest. Officials claimed that agricultural colonies, which had been largely limited to Shaanxi and Gansu, needed to be expanded to Xinjiang in order to restore the livelihoods of displaced villagers from Henan and provide food supplies.<sup>162</sup>

Besides responding to the Henan famine, the proposal reflected a changing political landscape. Until 1942, Xinjiang had remained out of the Guomintang's orbit and was the stage for Uyghur independence movements and local rulers backed by the Soviet Union. In the spring of 1942, Sheng Shicai, who had been governing Xinjiang since 1934, feared he was going to lose outside support once Hitler invaded the Soviet Union so he reached out to the Guomintang. The central government was eager to extend its control through Han colonization and began to devise plans for sending demobilized troops and Henan refugees to Xinjiang.<sup>163</sup> In Xi'an, local

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*, 81.

<sup>163</sup> Millward, 210-212; "Jiang Jieshi guanyu yimin Xibei congshi linmu kenzhi zijin tigong banfa zhi Kong Xiangxi ling," *Kangzhan shiqi Xibei Kaifa dang'an shiliao xuanji*, 166-167

newspapers began publishing a flurry of editorial and speeches on “the new Northwest” that were reminiscent of an earlier decade.<sup>164</sup>

During the summer of the following year, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry set up stations in Xi’an to truck settlers (*kenmin*) out to eastern Xinjiang. The first group of 50 departed for Hami (Kumul) on August 25, 1943 and arrived two weeks later. Newspapers assured readers of the safety of settlers by reporting their journey from Xi’an to Lanzhou, through the Gansu corridor, before reaching their agricultural settlements in Hami, Qitai, and Urumqi. Reports also described how settlers were generously received by officials with gifts of clothing and lambs as well as grain rations of three *jin*. By October 1943, 2000 people had departed in 44 trucks and officials began to contract private vehicles to convey people to Xinjiang.<sup>165</sup> In spite of early rose-colored reports, archives reveal a case of refugees freezing to death from harsh conditions. In early 1944, over ten people froze to death en route from Anxi to Xingxingxia in Hami. Others had fled along the way while passing through the Hexi corridor.<sup>166</sup> Colonization plans were soon halted by Sheng Shicai in

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<sup>164</sup> For example, see Wang Songnian, “Zhanwang Xin Xibei (Prospects of a New Northwest),” *Xijing Ribao*, September 26, 1942, 3; Weng Wenhao, “Kaifa Xibei jingji wenti (The question of opening up the Northwest economy),” *Xijing Ribao*, November 4, 1942, 3; November 5, 1942, 3.

<sup>165</sup> “Yiken Hami fanrong Xibei shoupi kenmin zuori chufa (First group of settlers departed yesterday to reclaim land in Hami and make a prosperous Northwest),” *Xibei wenhua ribao*, August 26, 1943, 2; “Yiken Xibei (Reclaiming land in the Northwest),” *Xijing ribao*, September 2, 1943, 3; “Xinjiang kenmin fenfen xishang (Xinjiang settlers head west one after another),” *Xibei wenhua ribao*, September 13, 1943, 2; “Shoupi yi Xin kenmin andi Hami (First group of settlers safely arrive in Hami),” *Xijing Ribao*, September 15, 1943, 3; “Zhiyuan yiken nanmin rizhong (Refugees volunteering for resettlement increasing by the day),” *Xijing ribao*, September 17, 1943, 3; “Kenmin di Xin beishou weilao yi fu Qitai kenqu (Settlers received with gifts upon arriving in Xinjiang and sent to Qitai reclamation district),” *Xijing ribao*, September 18, 1943, 3; “Yi Xin kenmin (Settlers to Xinjiang),” *Xibei wenhua ribao*, October 7, 1943, 3; “Fu Xin kenmin daiyu youhou (Settlers in Xijiang receive generous wages),” *Xijing ribao*, October 15, 1943, 3.

<sup>166</sup> “Chengbao yi Xin kenmin cheyun tuzhong dongbi qingxing qing,” “Xibei kaifa yu yimin” Academia Historica 001-111031-004011a.

August 1944 during a new wave of revolts. Soon afterwards, he fled from Xinjiang and the Eastern Turkestan Republic was founded.<sup>167</sup>

As the Second Sino-Japanese War ended in 1945, Guomintang leaders were no closer to seeing their conservative revolution materialize. Beautification initiatives around historic relics and scenic routes, which had continued throughout the wartime period, seemed to have left little impact on writers who looked out to Xi'an and saw only a "country of wandering people" (流民國 *liumin guo*).<sup>168</sup> Many locals expected an exodus from their city, but refugees were reluctant to return to their homes in light of the state of political uncertainty that eventually led to civil war between the Communists and the Guomintang. In the meantime, government relief efforts were simply not meeting the needs of migrants. By 1946, more than five hundred thousand people had been taken in by the provincial relief commission and three times that number were supported by charities and other organization, but writers complained that "everywhere you [looked] there [were] refugees living in caves and underground."<sup>169</sup>

If refugees stayed after the war, it was not because the end of the war brought better opportunities to Xi'an. According to a 1946 editorial written at the onset of the winter relief season, it was clear that "the average person [was] worse off than during

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<sup>167</sup> "He juzhang jingwu zhun Sheng duban dianqing tingyun kenmin zhuancheng heshi you," Xibei kaifa yu yimin." Academia Historica 001-111031-004023x.

<sup>168</sup> "Nanmin huanxiang chubu wenti yantao (Preliminary Discussion of the Repatriating Refugees)," *Xijing Ribao*, April 4, 1946.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

the war.”<sup>170</sup> The economy was in shambles, especially because transportation lines were cut and factories could not resume production. Prices in Xi’an increased from a base of 100 in the first half of 1937 to 8,235,000 in October of 1947.<sup>171</sup> In particular, inflation caused the price of wheat to skyrocket, causing widespread hunger among refugees and now members of the working class, who increasingly found themselves unemployed. Editorials in newspapers expressed concern that people were losing confidence in the government because it was failing to stabilize prices.<sup>172</sup> Writers encouraged the local government to provide work relief and no-interest loans for the poor instead of adhering to the past practice among a few charities of “distributing a pittance of relief grain, a few *mantou*, and cold porridge.”<sup>173</sup> In 1948, local government officials appealed to central authorities for funds to expand existing relief practices to include these and other measures, including the repatriation of 20,000 refugees.<sup>174</sup> Refugees would, however, continue to pour into the city until the Communist takeover of Xi’an on May 20, 1949.

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<sup>170</sup> “You dongfang shuodao dongzhen (Winter relief from the perspective of winter defense),” *Xijing Ribao*, December 28, 1946.

<sup>171</sup> Li Xiaosu, “Cong shuzi shang kan Shaanxi (A look at the numbers behind Shaanxi),” *Xibei tongxun* Vol. 2, No. 1 (1948), 14-22.

<sup>172</sup> “Jimin de yixian shenghuo (Slim chances for hungry people),” *Xijing Ribao*, December 26, 1946.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> “Xi’an shi sanshiqi niandu bixu banli jiuji shiye jihua (The Relief Plan for Xi’an in 1948).” Xi’an Municipal Archives 01~7 196 (1948.5.21).

## Chapter Five

### Xi'an as a Producer City

In 1959, after a decade of Communist rule, the *People's Daily* proudly announced the transformation of Xi'an into precisely what Guomindang conservatives had long dreaded for the nation's ancestral homeland and what Guomindang technocrats had long rejected for the ecologically fraught Northwest: a modern industrial city. In the article "Youthful Spring in the Ancient Capital," the author Qin Hanming invoked aesthetic sensibilities that the previous regime had reserved for romanticizing cultural relics to describe an urban setting that was now overwhelmingly structured by factory production. Over the past ten years, Qin reported, thermal power plants, steel factories, cotton mills, machine shops, and defense industries had all cropped up in Xi'an which, according to Soviet advisors, was developing at "fairytale speed." Now, unending streams of streetcars, buses, dump trucks, and pickup trucks crisscrossed the city's chessboard grid day and night, their alarms and horns sounding off one after another. For Qin, the clamor of local industrialization roared like a "dragon dashing forward." The physical layout of the city also made it appear to him as a creature of flight. Qin described the city's "Spinning and Weaving Town" (紡織城 Fangzhicheng) in the east and "Electric Engineering Town" (電工城 Diangongcheng) in the west as the industrial wings of an "eagle preparing for liftoff." In contrast to the conservative Guomindang wish to

revive past glory, socialist desire in Qin's account was fixated on a city that was moving onward and upward.

In order to fully bear witness to this scene of industrial progress, Qin ascended the city's panoptic towers. At night, standing atop Renmin Dasha (People's Tower), the nine-story tower where Chinese and foreign dignitaries were typically hosted, he saw tens of thousands of lights transforming a city that never rested from production into a splendid "crystal palace." From the Great Goose Pagoda (Dayanta), he could look out and see socialism unfolding before his eyes, a new spring for the ancient city.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter delves into the historical transformation of Xi'an into one of the industrial capitals of Maoist China. Central to this process was the desire of officials to transform Xi'an into a "producer city" (*shengchan chengshi*). In its original formulation, the producer city was supposed to undo the exploitative relationship that had developed between the city and the countryside under the capitalist division of labor. The state would mobilize urban populations for factory work because cities had lived off of the fruits of rural labor for far too long, without providing anything in return. Like their Guomindang predecessors, Communist officials sought a solution to rural crisis in cooperation between urban industrialization and agricultural production, though a much stronger state would regulate economic flows in the service of either redistribution or extraction. In addition to carrying out land reform to empower poor and landless farmers and raise their incomes, officials in the Northwest regulated the

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<sup>1</sup> Qin Hanming, "Gudu qingchun (Youthful Spring in the Ancient Capital)," *Renmin ribao*, November 26, 1959, 8.



rate of exchange between industrial and agricultural goods as an incentive for the rural population to reap greater harvests of grain and raw materials to sell. Once farmers were brought out of dire poverty, the state claimed, they would have the means to buy manufactured goods and constitute a great market for urban industry. In practice, the industrialization of the Northwest, as in the rest of China, would certainly rest on a strong agricultural foundation secured during the first few years of the People's Republic of China. But the relationship between the city and the countryside remained unequal and the language of cooperation allowed the state, especially following collectivization, to extract a rural surplus to feed the urban population, supply light industry, and trade with the Soviet Union.

From tracing the attempt to establish interdependence between the city and the countryside, this chapter then turns to the ways that the producer city in Xi'an became identified with the emergent industrial spaces developed by the central government under the rubric of "assisting the Great Northwest." As discussed in earlier chapters, the Guomindang envisioned a national economy based on the exchange of raw materials from the Northwest for manufactured goods from the coastal cities. Seeing that these policies had only resulted in the underdevelopment of cities, such as Xi'an, Maoist redistributive policies aimed to spread industry out evenly throughout the country. Scholars have shown how the Communist leadership addressed the problem of regional inequality during the First Five Year Plan by building capital-intensive

industries in the Northwest and other inland regions.<sup>2</sup> During the First Five Year Plan, the Communists poured state investment into industrial development in Xi'an. Newspaper reports celebrated thermal power plants, the relocation of Jiaotong University from Shanghai, and the cotton mills that formed the city's "Spinning and Weaving Town" (*Fangzhicheng*) as symbols of new relationships being forged with Soviet advisors and a skilled workforce brought in from eastern regions. It became clear toward the end of the First Five Year Plan, however, that the state's single-minded focus on industry came at the cost of agricultural productivity. In particular, critics within the Party worried that rural migrants pouring into the city for temporary work were straining the urban food supplies and expansive factories were encroaching on the surrounding farmland. In response, officials began to send hundreds of thousands of disaster victims, temporary laborers, students, and demoted cadres back to their villages to engage in agricultural production, beginning in the fall of 1957.

### *The Producer City*

After wresting control of the northwestern provinces from the Guomindang in 1949, Communist forces led by Peng Dehuai laid the institutional groundwork for governing the region's twenty million people. Communist troops drove the

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<sup>2</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 92; Carl Riskin, *China's Political Economy: The Quest for Development since 1949* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 58-59; Nicholas R. Lardy, "Economic Recovery and the 1<sup>st</sup> Five-Year Plan," in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *The Cambridge History of China: Vol. 14, The People's Republic, Part I: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1949-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 175; Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 66.

Guomindang general Hu Zongnan out of Shaanxi and occupied Xi'an on May 20, 1949. They then marched westward over the summer to defeat the local Hui Muslim rulers Ma Bufang and Ma Hongkui and take control of Gansu, Qinghai, and Ningxia. Soon afterwards, Guomindang commander Tao Shiyue and the governor Burhan Shahidi (Bao Erhan) of Xinjiang wired the Communist leadership to offer their surrender in late September, marking the so-called "peaceful liberation" of that province. In the following months, the People's Liberation Army entered Xinjiang, reorganized local armies, and then moved into southern Gansu and Shaanxi to drive out any remaining political rivals. By year's end, the Northwest was entirely under Communist control.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1950, the Communist Party established a forty-one person Northwest Military Administrative Commission (西北軍政委員會 Xibei junzheng weiyuanhui), based in Xi'an, to ensure political stability and economic recovery in the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. As one of six greater administrative regions the Northwest, a place that had long been defined in the cultural imagination, had its boundaries fixed for the first time as an official unit of political economy. As chairman of the commission, Peng Dehuai declared that the

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<sup>3</sup> Peng Dehuai, "Guanyu Xibei gongzuo qingxing de baogao (Report on the state of work in the Northwest)," *Huadong, Huanan, Xibei, Xinan sida xingzhengqu gongzuo qingkuang ji gongzuo renwu (The state of work and duties in the four great administrative regions of eastern China, southern China, the Northwest, and the Southwest)* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1950), 47-50; for an account of the Communist takeover of Xinjiang, see Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 231-234.

immediate goal for the region was to reverse the downward spiral that its economy had taken during the war.<sup>4</sup>

The Northwest Military Administrative Commission proceeded in line with the national goal of “three years of recovery, then ten years of development.”<sup>5</sup> Within the mixed economy of New Democracy, which permitted capitalism to develop under state control, the central government sought to restore production in all major sectors to pre-war levels before commencing a Stalinist program of rapid industrialization.<sup>6</sup> To resuscitate the region, the Northwest commission set out to reduce local government deficits strained by one million civil servants and soldiers, stabilize commodity prices after a long period of runaway inflation, begin land reform in Han areas, grant autonomy in minority areas to quell Han chauvinism (“big nationalism” 大民族主義 *da minzu zhuyi*) and ethnic separatism (“narrow nationalism” 狹隘民族主義 *xia'ai minzu zhuyi*), reopen trade with the Soviet Union, extend major transportation arteries, especially the Tianshui-Lanzhou section of the Longhai railroad, and root out Guomindang spies and any remaining “counterrevolutionaries.” The commission focused its work on agriculture and animal husbandry, the sources of livelihood for the overwhelming majority of people in the region. In Peng Dehuai’s estimation, the economy of the Northwest in 1949 comprised 75% agriculture, 20%

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<sup>4</sup> Peng, “Guanyu Xibei gongzuo qingxing de baogao,” 47-50; and Peng Dehuai, “Guanyu muqian Xibei diqu de gongzuo renwu (Duties at the present time in the Northwest region),” in *Huadong, Huanan, Xibei, Xinan sida xingzhengqu gongzuo qingkuang ji gongzuo renwu (The state of work and duties in the four great administrative regions of eastern China, southern China, the Northwest, and the Southwest)* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1950), 51-55.

<sup>5</sup> Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 87; Riskin, *China's Political Economy*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Riskin, *China's Political Economy*, 53.

animal husbandry, and 5% industry.<sup>7</sup> The state's focus on agriculture would ensure its ability to extract an agricultural surplus, a condition of rapid industrialization.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the weak presence of factories, only two percent of the nation's total, Peng Dehuai envisioned the region's reserves of petroleum, coal, and precious metals as well as opportunities for hydroelectricity in the upper reaches of the Yellow River eventually having a key role in the industrial growth of a New China. He believed the Northwest was especially suited for the development of defense industries because it was located far from the coast and adjacent to the nation's Soviet ally.<sup>9</sup>

Xi'an was placed directly under the control of the Northwest Commission. The Northwest commission needed to rebuild a city that had suffered from more than ten years of wartime destruction so that its residents could lead the rest of the region into an industrial future. The new regime was quick to recognize the economic significance of Xi'an – the most industrialized place in the Northwest, a major transportation hub on the Longhai, the financial center of the Northwest, and the heart of a rich wheat and cotton producing region.<sup>10</sup> Guomindang armies, however, had damaged key industries and infrastructure during their retreat. The Communists accused Hu Zongnan, the general who had overseen Shaanxi for thirteen years following the Xi'an Incident in 1936, of blowing up the generator at the city's power

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<sup>7</sup> Peng, "Guanyu Xibei gongzuo qingxing de baogao."

<sup>8</sup> Riskin, *China's Political Economy*, 57; Mark Selden, *The Political Economy of Chinese Development* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 76-78; Alexander Eckstein, *China's Economic Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 113-114.

<sup>9</sup> Peng Dehuai, "Guanyu Xibei gongzuo qingxing de baogao."

<sup>10</sup> Han Shaosu, "Cong jingji guandian kan Xi'an jiefang (The liberation of Xi'an from an economic point of view)," *Renmin ribao*, June 16, 1949, 4.

plant, looting the Dahua cotton mill, and destroying a key bridge along the Longhai railroad while exiting the region.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from industries left in ruins, the Communists also blamed the Guomindang for rampant unemployment that had made the city rife with theft and robbery. Years of work stoppages left factory workers dependent on the already cash-strapped local government and private charities for alms. Rickshaw pullers could no longer support themselves because their customers had disappeared with the economic downturn during the civil war. When the war ended, soldiers disbanded and they too joined the ranks of the destitute.<sup>12</sup> With so few options available for work, many jobless people turned to street peddling, but Communist authorities, like the Guomindang before them, accused street vendors of obstructing transportation, threatening public health, ruining the city image, and evading taxes.<sup>13</sup> One of the new government's priorities was the mobilization of unemployed people to contribute to the "frontlines of production" (生產戰線 *shengchan zhanxian*).<sup>14</sup> In June 1949, Jia Tuofu, the new mayor, declared the need to create a "producer city" (生產城市 *shengchan chengshi*).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Xi'an Dahua shachang xiufu (Xi'an Dahua cotton mill has been restored)," *Renmin ribao*, August 9, 1949, 2; Yao Liwen and Zhang Keren, "Xin Xi'an zai qianjin zhong (A New Xi'an Forging Ahead)," *Renmin ribao*, September 29, 1949, 5.

<sup>12</sup> "Xi'an shi gequ gongzuo zhong de jige wenti (A few problems with work in the districts of Xi'an)," *Dangnei tongxun* No. 30 (1949), 13.

<sup>13</sup> "Xi'an shi disi qu zhengli tanfan jingyan jieshao (An introduction to the experience of reorganizing street vendors in the fourth district of Xi'an)," *Xibei gong'an* (March 31, 1950).

<sup>14</sup> "Xiang jianshe xin Xi'an maijin (Forging ahead with the construction of a New Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, August 7, 1949, 2.

<sup>15</sup> "Xi'an zhigong xuexiao daibiao zuotan shengchan fuke (Representatives from Xi'an workers and schools discuss production and resuming classes)," *Renmin ribao*, June 8, 1949, 3.

The new regime envisioned a city dominated by workers as part of its efforts to correct the unequal relationship that had developed between the city and the countryside. On March 17, 1949, a front-page editorial in the *People's Daily* had announced the need to transform “consumer cities” (消費城市 *xiaofei chengshi*) into “producer cities.” It said that because the Communist revolution had centered on the villages and soviets, the major cities of China had become bulwarks of counterrevolution and parasitically siphoned off the labor of villages, in the form of migrant workers and cheap raw materials. The editorial instead encouraged mutual dependence (相互依存 *xianghu yicun*), based on the fair exchange of industrial and agricultural goods.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the Northwest, the Communists reportedly found a place where the rural population was barely clothed and used flint to light fires, while urban merchants could barely sell off their great storehouses of matches and cloth.<sup>17</sup> After repairing key industries and infrastructure, authorities in Xi'an quickly heralded renewed urban-rural relations made visible in steady flow of agricultural products into the city and manufactured goods sent out to the countryside. Over the summer of 1949, purchases of wheat increased over tenfold (from 849,000 jin to 9.55 million jin) and twice as much machine-woven cloth (from less than 10,000 bolts to more than 20,000 bolts) was shipped out of the city.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Ba xiaofei chengshi biancheng shengchan chengshi (Transform consumer cities into producer cities),” *Renmin ribao*, March 17, 1949, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Lin Wei, “Xi'an siying gongshang ye zhong de jige wenti (A few problems with the privately-owned businesses of Xi'an),” *Renmin ribao*, May 16, 1950, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Yao and Zhang, “Xin Xi'an zai qianjin zhong,” 5.

In the first years of Communist rule, newspaper editorials and commentaries relayed the idea that a technocratic state could function as an agent of economic reason against “irrational” (不合理 *bu heli*) and “reckless” (盲目 *mangmu*, literally blind) behavior among the local populace in Xi’an. Prices in local markets fluctuated wildly, doubling in February 1950, falling one-half by June, and then rising again later in the year amidst economic sanctions imposed on China during the Korean War. Local editorials attributed economic instability to neither inflation nor the lack of supplies, but rather to hoarding practices that had led to overproduction.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the city’s mills produced nearly two and a half times more bags of flour than were consumed in the city. In spite of the exit of Guomindang troops, the mills continued to churn out great quantities of flour because of hoarding by local merchants and other civilians, who preferred to keep their savings in goods rather than cash. Growing stockpiles of flour went unnoticed until supplies finally outpaced demand and prices began to tumble. In an effort to avoid further losses, local sellers flooded the market with flour. Prices fell from 120,000-130,000 yuan per bag down to 40,000 in 1950, but supplies were still not entirely sold off. Yet another example of economic unreason was the import of yarn from Qingdao in spite of ample local supplies. What locals needed instead was machine-woven cloth that remained in short

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<sup>19</sup> Fang Tianbai, “Dangqian wujia wenti (Current price problems),” *Qunzhong ribao*, November 23, 1950, 2; November 24, 1950, 2; Jin Xiuzhen, ed., *Xi’an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji* (Selections of archival materials from socialist-era party history in Xi’an) (Xi’an: Zhonggong Xi’an shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, 2011), 51-52.



supply. But because the price of yarn fell from oversupply, they had to trade more of it in exchange for cloth.<sup>20</sup>

As officials in Beijing consolidated control over fiscal matters (統一財經 *tongyi caijing*) in March 1950 and put an end to wartime inflation, the Northwest Commission attempted to bring order to the local economy by ensuring the proper flow of surplus goods. For officials, its work in commodity exchange (物資交流 *wuzi jiaoliu*) was just as important as economic production in a vast region without transportation networks. State planning, they hoped, would combat deleterious “laissez-faire phenomena” (放任自流現象 *fangren ziliu xianxiang*), such as the opportunism, swindling, and recklessness of private merchants.<sup>21</sup> The provincial officials established agreements with representatives of other cities and provinces, such as Tianjin and Hunan, for local products (土產 *tuchan*), such as flour, sulfur, tung oil, wool, raw lacquer, and wood-ear edible fungus. Officials were sometimes left frustrated, however, when local supplies failed to meet faraway demand and called for increased agricultural production.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lin Wei, “Xi’an siying gongshang ye zhong de jige wenti,” 2.

<sup>21</sup> “Yingjie qiuhou wangji jiaqiang shangye gongzuo wei jinyibu huoyue chengxiang jingji er nuli (Welcoming the autumn harvest season, strengthening work in commerce, strive to reinvigorate urban and rural economic relations),” *Qunzhong ribao*, October 10, 1952, 1; Zhonggong zhongyang xibei ju (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Northwest Bureau), “Wei jinyibu kaizhan wuzi jiaoliu jiaqiang dui chujishi chichang lingdao de jue ding (A decision to guide primary-level markets in order to promote the flow of goods and materials),” *Qunzhong ribao*, October 10, 1952, 1; “Fang Zhongru shizhang zai Shaanxi sheng Xi’an shi wuzi jiaoliu dahui shang de jianghua (Mayor Fang Zhongru’s talk at the Shaanxi Province Xi’an City Conference on the flow of goods and materials),” *Qunzhong ribao*, October 13, 1952, 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Guli sishang jingying tuchan dali kaizhan wuzi jiaoliu (Urge private businesses to deal in local products vigorously open up the flow of goods and materials),” *Qunzhong ribao*, June 5, 1951, 1; Yang Tiannong, “Kaihao wuzi jiaoliu huiyi (Conference on commodity exchange),” *Qunzhong ribao*, June 5, 1951, 1; “Fang Zhongru shizhang zai Shaanxi sheng Xi’an shi wuzi jiaoliu dahui shang de jianghua,” 2.

In the recovery years, Northwest officials were also attentive to the effects of price fluctuations on commercial trade between the city and the countryside because price planning was the primary tool that the state deployed to stimulate growth in farm output.<sup>23</sup> To combat price scissors (剪刀差額 *jiandao cha'e*) occurring between low-cost agricultural products and expensive manufactured goods, the state trading company set fair rates of exchange so as not to leave villagers impoverished. According to Jia Tuofu, in Xi'an, one bolt of fabric cost farmers 300 *jin* of grain in 1950 as opposed to 500 *jin* before Liberation.<sup>24</sup> In the name of protecting the purchasing power of farmers, the government purposely raised the price of grain during the bumper harvest in 1950.<sup>25</sup> Fang Zhongru, the mayor that succeeded Jia Tuofu, reported that the purchasing power of farmers in the Xi'an suburbs increased by 22% between 1951 and 1952.<sup>26</sup> Pricing measures, however, also allowed the state to extract more surplus. In the case of Shaanxi, the state was able to levy grain taxes totaling 480,000 tons in 1951.<sup>27</sup>

Not only had the Chinese Communist Party risen to power with a rural base of support, but its officials conceptualized the economic well-being of villages as a motor for urban industry. By eliminating exploitative propertied classes through land reform, they hoped to unleash maximum agricultural productivity. Officials argued

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<sup>23</sup> Eckstein, *China's Economic Revolution*, 113-114; Lardy, *Agriculture in China's modern economic development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30-31.

<sup>24</sup> "Wei kaizhan aiguo shengchan yundong jixu hui fu yu fazhan Xibei jingji er douzheng (Continue to the movements to restore patriotic production and strive to develop the Northwest economy)," in Xibei renmin chubanshe, ed., *Yijiuwuyi nian Xin Xibei de sida renwu* (The four duties in the New Northwest for 1951) (Xi'an: Xibei renmin chubanshe, 1951), 39.

<sup>25</sup> Fang, "Dangqian wujia wenti," 2.

<sup>26</sup> "Fang Zhongru shizhang zai Shaanxi sheng Xi'an shi wuzi jiaoliu dahui shang de jianghua," 2.

<sup>27</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 301.

that under the state's protection, villagers would be able to use their income from the sale of crops to buy up manufactured goods from the cities. Otherwise, without rural markets, the urban economy would continue to suffer from crises of overproduction.<sup>28</sup> The state also needed villages to produce cotton that would be turned into cloth for export. Officials exchanged Chinese cloth for Soviet machinery that they used to further develop industries in China.<sup>29</sup>

By 1952, the Northwest Commission reported that 25.25 million people, 83% of the farming population, in the Northwest had undergone land reform. In 7702 villages, the Communists had seized and redistributed 20 million mu of land to 50-80% of farmers and confiscated more than 400,000 plow oxen, 1.68 million homes, 1.72 million dou of grain, and more than 200,000 jin of cotton.<sup>30</sup> There were also 620,000 mutual aid teams and 142 cooperatives founded in 213 counties.<sup>31</sup> By 1951, the harvest of grain in the Northwest had surpassed pre-war levels (1931-1936) by 30%. A drought in Guanzhong had set back cotton yields in 1950 but by 1951, production had exceeded the 1936 levels by 43.8 %.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lin, "Xi'an siying gongshang ye zhong de jige wenti," 2; Yu, "Sannian lai Xibei guoying maoyi de fazhan (The development of state-run trade in the Northwest over the past three years)," in *Zuguo Xibei diqu sannian lai de weida chengjiu* (*Great achievements over the past three years in our ancestral land's Northwest region*) (Xi'an: Xibei renmin chubanshe, 1953), 93-98.

<sup>29</sup> Yang Bo, "Lun chengxiang wuzi jiaoliu yu gongnong yepin de jiaohuan bijia (On commodity exchanges between the cities and the countryside and the rates of exchange between industrial and agricultural products)," *Renmin ribao*, October 7, 1950, 5; "Yingjie qiuhou wangji jiaqiang shangye gongzuo wei jinyibu huoyue chengxiang jingji er nuli," 1; Eyferth, "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949-1980," 376.

<sup>30</sup> Zhonggong zhongyang Xibei ju zhengce yanjiushi (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Northwest Bureau Policy Department), "Sannian lai de Xibei tudi gaige yundong (The land reform movement in the Northwest over the last three years)," in *Zuguo Xibei diqu sannian lai de weida chengjiu* (Xi'an: Xibei renmin chubanshe, 1953), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Jia Tuofu, "Zhunbei zouxiang xin de mubiao (Preparing to move toward a new goal)," in *Zuguo Xibei diqu sannian lai de weida chengjiu* (Xi'an: Xibei renmin chubanshe, 1952), 35-42.

The Northwest commission entrusted private- and state-owned factories to process surplus raw materials. Between January 1950 and July 1952, they took 455 million jin of wheat and 460,000 dan of cotton and produced 8 million bags of flour and 1.74 million bolts of cloth. As a sign of greater purchasing power among villages, the Northwest commission reported that sales of manufactured goods had grown by one half in 1951 and doubled in 1952.<sup>33</sup> While their yields in the Guanzhong region of Shaanxi would continue to grow in the first decade of Communist rule, farmers would find themselves relying largely on their personal reserves of cotton instead of official channels to clothe themselves.<sup>34</sup> Advantageous pricing disappeared in 1953 when the state introduced the system of unified purchase and marketing (統購統銷 *tonggou tongxiao*). The state monopoly would manipulate prices of grain and then cotton to force farmers and emergent collectives to sell cheap and buy dear to finance government projects.<sup>35</sup>

Alongside the economic recovery, Communist officials launched repressive measures against those they deemed to be enemies of the people. Following the takeover of Xi'an, the police searched for possible Guomindang operatives, uncovering 17 clandestine units, 11 transmitter receivers, and 2 mobile units. Officers arrested over one hundred informants.<sup>36</sup> The police were also tasked with putting an end to the crime wave that had emerged amidst wartime disorder. Its officers solved

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<sup>33</sup> Yu, "Sannian lai Xibei guoying maoyi de fazhan," 95-96.

<sup>34</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 241; Eyferth, "Women's Work and the Politics of Homespun in Socialist China, 1949-1980," 376.

<sup>35</sup> Eckstein, *China's Economic Revolution*, 51.

<sup>36</sup> "San ge yue lai Xi'an gong'an gongzuo zongjie (A summary of public security work in Xi'an over the past three months)," *Dangnei tongxun* No. 35 (1949).

60 cases of armed robbery, arrested 221 bandits, executed 5 criminals, and collected 956 firearms. They encouraged residents, who tended not to report crimes or to do so in secret, to openly file complaints.<sup>37</sup>

Once China entered the Korean War in 1950, the local government heightened political terror to effectively bring the urban populace in line with Party ideology and its economic goals. As they proceeded in concert with campaigns across the country,<sup>38</sup> officials often acted in the name of protecting local women. In March 1951, officials outlawed Yiguandao, a salvationist movement that had grown during the War of Resistance, which they regarded as a secret society. Aside from being a remnant of “feudal superstition,” officials accused the society of traitorous behavior in the past and present, corroborating with Japanese imperialism, sheltering Guomintang operatives, and conspiring against China’s efforts in the Korean War. Its leaders were also charged with sexually abusing women. Officials ordered Yiguandao leaders to register with the public security bureau and welcomed followers to come forward to launch complaints against them.<sup>39</sup> Of the 4695 leaders that officials apprehended in the campaign against secret societies, 1739 were members of Yiguandao.<sup>40</sup>

In April 1951, the local press began to criticize the Catholic-run girls’ orphanage for neglect, causing the minors in its care to become pale, gaunt and

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tianjin*; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*, Chapter 12.

<sup>39</sup> Zhonggong Xi’an shiwei xuanchuan buzhi, “Qudi yiguandao xuanchuan dagang,” *Qunzhong ribao*, March 12, 1951, 1; “Qudi yiguandao biaoju kouhao,” *Qunzhong ribao*, March 12, 1951, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Jin, *Xi’an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 2, 177-187.

sickly.<sup>41</sup> In June, the city assumed control over the orphanage and Catholic schools suspected of poisoning the minds of the city's youth. Officials denounced Italian priests for corroborating with the Guomindang and providing intelligence to foreign spies with a secret transmitter.<sup>42</sup> In the same month, the city also closed the city's brothels, apprehending over a thousand owners, prostitutes, dependents, and patrons. Prostitutes were sent to a reformatory to engage in productive labor.<sup>43</sup>

Alongside political terror, Northwest officials, such as Jia Tuofu and Xi Zongxun, sought to discipline the working population with labor competitions and a campaign to "increase production and economize resources."<sup>44</sup> For instance, the local press published reports and images of textile workers in the Northwest following the example of Hao Jianxiu, a Shandong model worker who had become nationally famous for her method of reducing the amount of broken yarn (皮鞣花 *pigunhua*) that mill workers spent time repairing.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dai Renzhong, "Cangan Tianzhujia gunvyuan," *Qunzhong ribao*, April 10, 1951, 2.

<sup>42</sup> "Zuori jieguan Tianzhutang gunvyuan," *Qunzhong ribao*, June 8, 1951, 1; "Zuori jieguan meigui zhong, xiaoxue," *Qunzhong ribao*, June 17, 1951, 1; "Xi'an shi renmin zhengfu mingling jieguan meigui zhong, xiaoxue," *Qunzhong ribao*, June 17, 1951, 1; "Benshi pohuo diguo zhuyi jiandie an," *Qunzhong ribao*, June 20, 1951, 1; "Suqing Tianzhujiao zhong de diguo zhuyi jiandie fenzi," *Qunzhong ribao*, June 20, 1951, 1.

<sup>43</sup> "Xi'an shi renmin zhengfu guanyu dui fengbi jiyuan de baogao," *Xibei gong'an* Vol. 2, No. 9 (1951): 13-14; Jin, *Xi'an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 2-3, 30-31, 165-176.

<sup>44</sup> "Kaizhan zengchan jieyue yundong shi guojia dangqian de zhongxin renwu," *Qunzhong ribao*, November 21, 1951, 1; Jia Tuofu, "Guanyu yinianlai Xibei jingji he caizheng gongzuo qingkuang ji kaizhan zengchan jieyue yundong de baogao," *Qunzhong ribao*, November 28, 1951, 1; "Wei shenme yao kaizhan zengchan jieyue yundong," *Qunzhong ribao*, November 29, 1951, 2; Xi Zhongxun, "Wei kaizhan zengchan jieyue yundong er fendou," *Qunzhong ribao*, November 30, 1951, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Lee, Lily H. H., A D. Stefanowska, and Sue Wiles, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Twentieth Century, 1912-2000* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2003), 198-199.



Image 14. Learning from Hao Jianxiu  
 Source: *Qunzhong ribao* (November 25, 1951)

*Assisting the Great Northwest*

When the central government announced the First Five Year Plan, Communist officials keen on taking action against “irrational phenomena” turned their attention to the uneven distribution of industry in the nation’s territory. One contradiction that Party commentators pointed out time and again was that the economy of the Northwest lagged far behind all the other regions of China, even though it had some of the country’s richest sources of raw materials and fossil fuels needed for industrial production. In the eyes of the Communist Party, underdevelopment in Northwest China had resulted from decades of imperialist powers single-mindedly investing in coastal areas, and from the policies of the Guomindang, which lacked the conviction and political power to open up this faraway region. Consequently, people would

complain, “You cannot light any kerosene in oil-rich areas and you cannot purchase any fabric in a cotton-growing region.”<sup>46</sup> Because the region lacked the necessary equipment, the vast majority of raw cotton and wool produced in the Northwest had to be shipped all the way to coastal cities, such as Shanghai and Tianjin, in order to be woven. Under the Guomindang, annual raw cotton production in the Northwest had amounted to 1.3 million *dan* (65 million kilograms), one million of which was produced in the Guanzhong region of Shaanxi, but there were only enough spindles and weaving machines to process 300,000 *dan* of cotton. Even in the major cotton mills located between Xi’an and Baoji along the Longhai railroad, also known as the Qin-Bao industrial belt, there were less than a fifth of the 550,000 spindles and less than a tenth of the 15,000 bolt machines the Communists estimated were needed to clothe the twenty million people of the Northwest.<sup>47</sup>

The production of woollens was in no better shape. In Lanzhou, three mills were equipped with only 2200 spindles and less than 100 weaving machines. Economic planners found the circulation of raw materials to the coast and finished products to the interior to be “wasteful” in a country whose energy resources remained largely untapped. After cotton and wool were shipped to coastal factories to be processed, textiles ended up weighing only 40% of their original weight, thereby consuming an unnecessary amount of precious fuel. Machinery and work units, therefore, had to be moved from Shanghai to the Northwest to develop industries near

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<sup>46</sup> Zhang Chao, “Yanzhe zongluxian qianjin de Xibei gongye (The progress of Northwest industry along the general line),” *Renmin ribao*, March 31, 1954, 2.

<sup>47</sup> “Xibei de fangzhi ye (Spinning and weaving industries in the Northwest),” *Renmin ribao*, September 14, 1949, 2; see also, Rui, *Zuguo de da Xibei*.



raw materials.<sup>48</sup> The First Five Year Plan set out to shift the industrial center of gravity away from the coast by committing the majority of industrial investment to inland regions.

Officials saw the economic recovery as merely the start of correcting the “backward appearance” (落後面貌 *luohou mianmao*) of the region and channeled state investment, Soviet advisors, and coastal work units inland. In the Northwest, industrial production had grown from 5% of the regional economy in 1949 to 17% in 1953. Starting in 1953, the central government began to designate 73% of total investment in the region for capital construction, one and a half times more than previous years. To power industrialization, the extraction of fossil fuels and mineral resources had to be expanded so that the Northwest was no longer “rich underground but poor on the surface.” In eastern Gansu, the Tianshan and Qilian mountain ranges, and the Qaidam basin, geological surveys found a “treasure bowl” (聚寶盆 *jubaopen*) of coal, iron, oil, salt, and alkali—deposits that scientists found to be much more abundant than pre-1949 estimates. In Yumen, Gansu, Soviet advisors instructed Chinese officials to ship oil to the Northeast and eastern China in order to reduce the need for foreign imports. With its growing supplies of coal, the central government planned thermal power plants in major cities across the Northwest to increase the production of electricity fivefold. The Communists allocated the vast majority of state investment in light industry (90% in 1953) to spinning and weaving. State planners called for the relocation of cotton mills crowded along the coast to the Northwest,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

with plans for new factories for spinning and weaving as well as dyeing in Xi'an and Xinjiang. By 1953, there was one bolt of cloth produced in the region for every 15 people as compared to one bolt for every 60 people in 1948. As the Communist Party celebrated the record-breaking output of petroleum, coal, electricity, and fabric, the total value of heavy industrial products grew 778% between 1950-1953. The value of light industrial products increased 461% from the poor cotton harvest in 1950 to 1953.<sup>49</sup>



Image 15. One Soviet advisor assisting with installations at the Xi'an No. 2 Power Plant

Sources: "Xingjian zhong de Xibei mou huoli fadianchang," *Qunzhong ribao* (July 17, 1953), 4; "Ganxie Sulian weida wusi de bangzhu," *Qunzhong ribao* (November 7, 1953), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Zhang, "Yanzhe zongluxian qianjin de Xibei gongye," 2; "Zhonghua renmin gongheguo fazhan guomin jingji de diyige wunian jihua (The First Five Year Plan of the National Economy of the People's Republic of China)," *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyao wenxian xinxiu* (*Archives of the Communist Party of China*) (July 30, 1955); Rui, *Zuguo de da Xibei*.

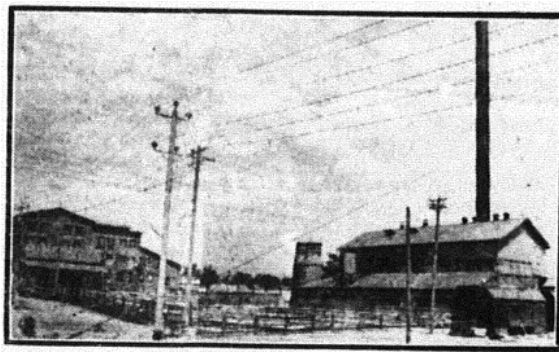
To garner support for the central government's work, the local and national press painted romantic images of national cooperation and communist internationalism that befit the slogan "assisting the Great Northwest" (援助大西北 *yuanzhu da Xibei*/ 支援大西北 *zhiyuan da Xibei*). According to writers, the Northwest was a vast and underdeveloped region short of labor power, especially cadres with technical skills, so the state needed to bring in outside assistance to open up new industrial bases on behalf of the nation.<sup>50</sup> As one of its targets for investment, the central government placed Xi'an, along with twelve other cities, directly under its control in March 1953. Then it began to develop 17 of 156 national Soviet-sponsored industrial projects in Xi'an. One of the most publicized examples of Soviet assistance was the No. 2 Power Plant. Beginning in November 1952, Soviet advisors guided Chinese engineers and workers with their designs and technology to create Northwest China's first coal-fired thermal power plant using five thousand tons of materials. In Xi'an, the local newspaper *Qunzhong ribao* ran full-page photo essays attesting to the "selfless assistance" of the Soviet Union on the power plant and other industrial projects in the region (see images). Published letters written by local workers expressed gratitude to Soviet comrades for imparting technical knowledge and

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<sup>50</sup> Sun Jingwen, "Shiying gongye jianshe xuyao jiaqiang chengshi jianshe gongzuo (Improve urban construction work to suit the needs of industry)," *Renmin ribao*, August 12, 1954, 2; Rui, *Zuguo de da Xibei*; Shao Hua, "Jianshe da Xibei de renmen (The people building up the Northwest)," *Renmin ribao*, August 8, 1956, 4.

cognizance of safety measures. Besides foreign assistance, the central government also mustered the help of a 600-member installation team from the Northeast.<sup>51</sup>

The No. 2 Power Plant became one of the aestheticized industrial spaces that commentators invoked to describe how the city had cast away its “backward appearance.” According to reports, a “beautiful” factory building, “orderly” dormitories, “massive” cooling towers, and “skyscraping” smokestacks emerged on top of a barren tract of land.<sup>52</sup> Textual and visual representations of the No. 2 Power Plant often equated socialist progress with its grandeur. In one instance, editors juxtaposed a panorama of the No. 2 Power Plant with a photograph of its Guomindang-built predecessor, which was more modest and did not require a wide lens (see images).



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<sup>51</sup> “Xi’an dier fadianchang kaishi fadian (Xi’an’s No. 2 power plant has begun generating power),” *Qunzhong ribao*, October 10, 1953; Yuan Bin, “Women jiancheng le yi zuo xiandaihua huoli fadianchang (We have built a modern thermal power plant),” *Qunzhong ribao*, October 10, 1953, 2; “Sulian bangzhu woguo jianshe de xiandaihua fadianchang (The Soviet Union has helped us build a modern power plant),” *Renmin ribao*, October 13, 1953, 1; Li Weidou and Feng Ye, “Xi’an dier fadianchang gongdi shang de Sulian zhuanjiamen (Soviet experts on the site of the Xi’an No. 2 power plant),” *Qunzhong ribao*, November 7, 1953.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

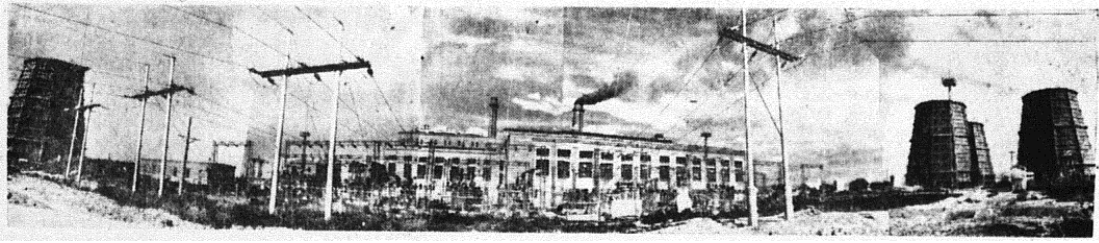


Image 16. “Power Plant inherited from the Guomindang” and “The outer appearance of the Xi’an No. 2 Power Plant after expansion”

Source: *Xi’an ribao* (July 30, 1957)

The new power plant also signaled the start to an age of mechanization (機械化 *jixiehua*) and automation (自動化 *zidonghua*), producing twice as much power with a quarter of the labor as the earlier generator. Reporters trusted that machines would make working conditions less burdensome and less dangerous. Whereas workers previously had been responsible for grueling manual labor, smashing one hundred tons of coal each day and then hauling the pieces to the boiler to be burned, they could now sit comfortably within a properly ventilated and insulated control room. At the press of a button, a conveyor belt brought coal dumped onto an unloading dock to a machine to be ground and then blown into the boiler to be burned. Workers also no longer had to worry about how much coal to feed into the boiler at one time. A built-in scale would automatically weigh coal and transport any excess quantities to storage. Moreover, the new power plant was equipped with automated emergency response systems. If the transformer or water pumps malfunctioned, or if

the steam pressure exceeded safety limits, the system would automatically come to a stop and emergency lights would turn on.<sup>53</sup>

As the state began to relocate skilled labor from eastern regions to Xi'an, it assured a national audience that recent arrivals were adjusting to life in the region, even though it lacked the comforts and convenience of their homes back east. A 1957 *People's Daily* report featured scenes of workers that had arrived from Shanghai and the Northeast celebrating their first Spring Festival celebration in Xi'an. Among the 83,000 people who had come to the city in 1956 were the chief engineers and section heads of energy planning. While they had given up their homes and cars in Shanghai, they were still able to observe their New Year's tradition of drinking sweet tea brewed from jujube and longan and babaofan, a glutinous rice dessert. At another celebration, a rambunctious installation team from the Northeast, who were dubbed "magical soldiers" (神兵 *shenbing*) by locals after they surpassed their quota by 40 machines, crowded into a room to make dumplings through the night. In the Spinning and Weaving Town, Yao Xiufang, one of the thousands of women workers that had arrived from Shanghai to work in the new cotton mills, and her husband Zhang Dingyi celebrated their first Spring Festival after getting married by dancing until late in the night and then watching a movie the next day. At the new Jiaotong University campus in Xi'an, physics professor Zhao Fuxin opened up a New Year's greeting from his promising students. Lastly, Yu Zhizeng, a tailor from Shanghai, talked until

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<sup>53</sup> Feng Ye, "Qianjin de kaiduan (The start of progress)," *Qunzhong ribao*, October 10, 1953; "Xibei gongye de xindongli (New power for Northwest industry)," *Renmin ribao*, October 14, 1953, 2.

late at night with guests over stir-fried winter bamboo shoots paired with some Xifeng liquor.<sup>54</sup>

Press reports often limited discussions of the challenges difficulties faced by uprooted workers and their families to the realm of material culture, thereby excluding any meaningful social relationships they had given up back east. Reporters suggested that so long as these migrants were committed to working alongside their comrades in the Northwest, then any inconveniences they experienced would be temporary. Economic development would eventually produce the material conditions that would allow them to recreate their former lives in Xi'an. As it propagated the idea that one of the hallmarks of a modern state is its power to move populations, the press reported dutiful patriots were eager to permanently resettle in the region, with some of them declaring, "The Great Northwest is our second hometown."<sup>55</sup>

In spite of these romantic images of dutiful patriots, the central government's relocation strategies were also a source of discord, especially in the case of Jiaotong University. In 1955, the central government decided to relocate Jiaotong University from Shanghai to Xi'an in order to train a new generation of scientists and technicians in the region. Communist leaders sought to expand educational opportunities and vocational training in the interior cities as part of the First Five Year Plan's goal of reaching 208 institutions of higher learning by 1957. In addition to the relocation of Jiaotong University, officials planned a new Xi'an Architecture and Engineering

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<sup>54</sup> "Tamen zai Xi'an duguo diyige chunjie (They are spending their first Spring festival in Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, February 4, 1957, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Rui, *Zuguo de da Xibei*.

College (西安建築工程大學 *Xi'an jianzhu gongcheng xueyuan*) by merging the Northeast College of Engineering, Qingdao College of Engineering, Zhejiang University, Sunan Industrial Polytechnic School, and Northwest College of Engineering.<sup>56</sup> Relocation strategies, which had been spurred by the Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1955, would only gain further support after Mao Zedong's talk on April 25, 1956 on the "Ten Cardinal Relationships" (十大關係 *shida guanxi*), which reiterated the need to build up industry in the interior and attend to the needs of national defense.<sup>57</sup> Over the summer of 1956, thousands of instructors, their dependents, and first-year students from Jiaotong University began to arrive in Xi'an via rail before the start of the school year.<sup>58</sup> In September, four thousand students participated in an opening ceremony on the Xi'an campus of 160,000 square meters.<sup>59</sup>

The relocation plan soon became mired in controversy as members of the academic community began to debate its merits. In October 1956, the *People's Daily* published a complaint written by eight students on the new campus in Xi'an. While many newspaper reports touted the brand new facilities in Xi'an, students were extremely dissatisfied by their drab appearance and poor design. All of the classroom buildings, dormitories, dining halls, and even the central building that stood at 30,000 square meters were uniformly outfitted with a green brick and red roof façade.

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<sup>56</sup> "Guojia zai neidi jiang xinjian yipi gaodeng xuexiao (The state will build new colleges and universities in the interior)," *Renmin ribao*, September 4, 1955.

<sup>57</sup> Mao Zedong, "Lun shida guanxi (On the ten cardinal relationships) (April 25, 1956)," *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyao wenxian xinxiu* (Archives of the Communist Party of China).

<sup>58</sup> "Jiaotong daxue qi yue zhongxun kaishi qianwang Xi'an (Jiaotong University will begin moving to Xi'an in the middle of July)," *Renmin ribao*, July 7, 1956, 7; "Jiaotong daxue Xi'an xinxiu jiji choubei kaixue (Jiaotong University actively preparing to open up its new campus)," *Renmin ribao*, August 16, 1956, 7.

<sup>59</sup> *Xinhuashe*, "Jiaotong daxue zai Xi'an kaixue," *Renmin ribao*, September 12, 1956, 1.



Besides the overall lack of character, classrooms were extremely dark, even on a sunny day, entrances and stairwells were too narrow, buildings leaked from rainfall and bad plumbing, and roads were already in disrepair. Drawing on the slogans “economize” (節約 *jieryue*) and “accelerating the pace of development” (加快建設速度 *jiakuai jianshe sudu*), students argued these structures were examples of wasteful, perfunctory work and unfit for long-term use.<sup>60</sup>

The faculty of Jiaotong University soon chimed in and expressed their concerns with the relocation plan’s effects on the quality of their research and teaching. Critics believed it was detrimental for the university to break off its long-standing connections with businesses and factories in Shanghai and move to a place that was only in the beginning stages of industrial development. In response, supporters admitted that instructors would indeed have to temper themselves in the first years because Xi’an was only beginning to develop into one of China’s industrial bases. Yet, they argued, the buried wealth and natural conditions of the Northwest made the prospects for future industrial development much more favorable than Shanghai. If the university were to work alongside industrial projects, such as the Sanmenxia hydroelectric plant, then it would benefit both the national economy and the school.<sup>61</sup> In June 1957, Zhou Enlai even convened a discussion in the State Council (國務院 *Guowuyuan*) on the future of the university and laid out three

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<sup>60</sup> Jiaotong daxue baming xuesheng (Eight Jiaotong University students), “Qianxiao yougan (Feelings about the university relocation),” *Renmin ribao*, October 6, 1956, 2.

<sup>61</sup> “Jiaoda gaibugai qianlai Xi’an (Should Jiaotong University move to Xi’an),” *Shaanxi ribao*, May 15, 1957, 1.

options: proceed with the full relocation, move faculty and students in Xi'an back east, or maintain two campuses.<sup>62</sup>

In Xi'an, newspapers featured local workers and farmers appealing to the university community to honor their labor and sacrifices. The city had appropriated land from farmers and hired up to 4000 workers at one point to build a campus that was twice as large as its Shanghai counterpart in little over a year.<sup>63</sup> Having expended such a great amount of their resources, local officials, such as Mayor Liu Geng and former mayor Fang Zhongru, urged the university to proceed with the relocation of the entire university community in order to fulfill its duty of assisting the Northwest.<sup>64</sup> At one meeting convened between construction workers, engineers, and technicians, one supervisor described their hardships building the university. Because of the short timeline, workers worked tirelessly day and night after receiving orders in September 1955, braving the winter cold and rainy days. Early on, they had to live in shacks made out of mats and walk seven *li* to another worksite for meals. Workers also described their work caring for displaced students in their new surroundings. When the first batch of students arrived and found their dormitories too cold, the workers quickly installed heaters to ensure that these "southerners" had

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<sup>62</sup> "Gaodeng jiaoyubu buzhang Yang Xiufeng zai Shanghai tan Zhou Zongli dui Jiaoda qianxiao wenti de yijian (Minister of Higher Education Yang Xiufeng in Shanghai discussing Premier Zhou's thoughts about the question of Jiaotong University's relocation)," *Renmin ribao*, June 19, 1957, 6.

<sup>63</sup> "Ni zhidao Jiaotong daxue shi zenyang jiancheng de (Do you know how Jiaotong University was built)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 28, 1957, 2.

<sup>64</sup> "Cong zhiyuan Xibei gongye jianshe zhaoyan kaolu qianxiao wenti (Considering the question of university relocation from the perspective of assisting Northwest industrial construction)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 28, 1957, 3; also, "Recheng huanying jiaoda quanbu qianlai Xi'an (Cordially welcome Jiaotong University to completely relocate to Xi'an)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 22, 1957, 3; "Jiaoda qian Xi'an liduo bishao (Many advantages and few disadvantages in Jiaotong University's move to Xi'an)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 25, 1957, 1; "Jiaoda yinggai erqie keyi quanbu qianlai Xi'an (Jiaotong University can and should completely relocate to Xi'an)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 26, 1957, 3.

enough warmth to survive the winter. Some workers also shared their own experiences moving to Xi'an from eastern China with students who remained dissatisfied with living conditions in the new campus, reassuring them that the future of the China rested in the interior and warning them that it would be a great loss for the country if the university were to tear down all the work that they had done over the past two years just to move back to Shanghai.<sup>65</sup>

Local farmers, who had sacrificed land gained from land reform to the project, were also upset with the prospect of Jiaotong University heading back to Shanghai. Hu Fengchun, director of the agricultural cooperative in Lejuchang village, had worked with cadres to convince villagers to give up a total of 800 mu for the university, promising them that this university was not like other schools as it would teach their children to make machines and railroads. He told them, "Only by building this university will we have a future." Even though their harvests dwindled from 328 to 79 jin of grain (they were reportedly happy to see tall buildings and students on their land. Having made plans to increase output and provide the university with meat and vegetables, Hu had no idea how to face the villagers now that the students wanted to move back to Shanghai. Villagers, such as sixty-seven year old Wu Zuodong, approached Hu, asking how the university could move back to Shanghai when all the buildings were already erected on their land. They wondered, "Are the students at

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<sup>65</sup> "Women xinku jian xiaoshe xiwang jiaoda quanban Xi'an (We who have painstakingly built the school buildings hope Jiaotong University will completely move to Xi'an)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 26, 1957, 2.

Jiaotong University thinking of us?”<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in Beishapo village, sixty-two-year-old Rao Hancheng pointed to a strip of land and said, “On those two mu, Jiaotong University built a dining hall. I will never in my lifetime forget how Chairman Mao gave me those two mu. I really loved those two mu. It was such good land. In a single year, it would yield two good harvests... I was not willing to part with it.” Rao eventually gave up his land to help cultivate talent in the country, so he was frustrated when he heard that the university would not be settling there after all.<sup>67</sup>

On July 12, 1957, university officials decided to keep two campuses under a single system and unified leadership in order to meet the industrial needs of both Xi’an and Shanghai, a decision that was ratified two months later by the State Council.<sup>68</sup> In Xi’an, it had seemed that university students and teachers now unanimously wanted to stay. At a meeting on June 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, attendees who had previously wavered or voiced their opposition reportedly changed their minds. According to reports, local engineers, factory tours, new laboratories, and promises of generous support from Zhou Enlai and Yang Xiufeng, head of higher education,

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<sup>66</sup> Shicun, “Kanzhe women de tudi Jiaoda ye ying liuzai Xi’an (Look at our land, Jiaotong University should stay in Xi’an),” *Shaanxi ribao*, July 4, 1957.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> “Jiaotong daxue qianxiao fang’an jue ding (Decision made for the relocation of Jiaotong University),” *Xi’an ribao*, July 13, 1957, 1; “Jiaoda jue ding fenshe Xi’an Shanghai tongyi lingdao (Jiaotong University will set up separate campuses in Xi’an and Shanghai under a single leadership),” *Shaanxi ribao*, July 13, 1957, 1; “Fenshe Xi’an Shanghai shixing tongyi lingdao Jiaotong daxue queding qianxiao xin fang’an (Set up separate campuses in Xi’an and Shanghai, implement a single leadership, Jiaotong University has confirmed a new plan for relocation),” *Renmin ribao*, July 15, 1957, 1; “Shiying gongye fazhan peiyang xin de jianshe rencai Xi’an Shanghai bufen gongye yuanxiao jinxing tiaozheng (Adjusting industrial colleges in Xi’an and Shanghai to suit industrial development and the cultivation of new talent for construction),” *Renmin ribao*, September 14, 1957, 4.

convinced them that their work would not suffer in the new location.<sup>69</sup> But dissent may have also been silenced for fear of the anti-rightist campaign fueled by Mao's speech "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People," which *Shaanxi ribao* published in full less than a week earlier on June 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>70</sup> Later, those faculty members in Shanghai and Xi'an who had vocalized their opposition to the relocation plan would be denounced as rightists.<sup>71</sup> In 1959, the State Council officially separated the campuses and established Shanghai Jiaotong University and Xi'an Jiaotong University.<sup>72</sup>

### *Rethinking Soviet Aesthetics*

During the First Five Year Plan, when commentators described how Xi'an had transformed from a consumer city into a producer city, they discussed urban growth driven by state-led industrialization. In contrast to the Guomindang, the Communists saw the perfect conditions for an industrial city in the landscape. They looked to the cotton and wheat of the central valley, the coal north of the Wei river, the petroleum

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<sup>69</sup> "Xi'an jiaoda shisheng dabufenren renwei Jiaotong daxue yinggai quanbu bandao Xi'an (Most of Xi'an Jiaotong University's instructors and students believe Jiaotong University should completely move to Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, June 28, 1957, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Mao Zedong, "Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti (On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the people)," *Shaanxi ribao*, June 19, 1957, 1

<sup>71</sup> "Jiaotong daxue qianxiao wenti weihe zu'ai zhongzhong (Why the question of relocating Jiaotong University was obstructed)," *Renmin ribao*, August 18, 1957, 2; "Jiaoda qianxiao wenti wei shenme xianqi yichang fengbo (Why did the question of relocating Jiaotong University set off a crisis)" *Xi'an ribao*, September 18 1957, 3.

<sup>72</sup> "Guowuyuan guanyu tongyi jiang Jiaotong daxue Shanghai, Xi'an liangge bufen fenbie chengli Shanghai jiaotong daxue he Xi'an jiaotong daxue gei Jiaoyubu de pifu (The State Council reply to the Ministry of Education regarding approval of the separation of Jiaotong University's Shanghai and Xi'an campuses to establish Shanghai Jiaotong University and Xi'an Jiaotong University)," *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo Guowuyuan gongbao (Bulletin of the State Council of the People's Republic of China)* (July 31, 1959), 342.

of Yanchang, and the iron and lumber of the Qinling and Bashan mountains.<sup>73</sup>

Between 1953 and 1957, state planners conceived of Xi'an as a major center for the production of electrical equipment, machines, and cotton textiles. They designated new industrial zones on large tracts of agricultural land in the suburbs.<sup>74</sup> The surface area of the city quadrupled from 13.2 to 71 square kilometers, expanding to the point that the Big Goose Pagoda, long isolated in the southern suburbs, was now located on the edge of the city. The urban population nearly doubled from 710,000 in 1949 to 1.4 million in 1957.<sup>75</sup>

Urban planning in Xi'an, however, would come under national scrutiny in the spring of 1957. As the rectification campaign encouraged state personnel to expose waste, the sprawling city became a cautionary tale. Party reports and the national press called for the sparing use of land for construction (節約用地 *jietyue yongdi*).<sup>76</sup> In particular, the State Council criticized the fact that vast tracts of land in Xi'an were being used inefficiently by new industries. Over the course of the First Five Year Plan, the state had appropriated 76,918 mu of land from rural communities in the

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<sup>73</sup> Wu Sicheng, "Xi'an zai jianshe zhong (Xi'an in the midst of construction)," *Renmin ribao*, May 9, 1955, 2.

<sup>74</sup> "Xi'an shi difang gongye you xin de fazhan (New developments for local industry in Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, March 22, 1955, 1; Wu, "Xi'an zai jianshe zhong," 2; "Xi'an shi yijing baituo le luohou mianmao (Xi'an has already shed its backward appearance)," *Shaanxi ribao*, September 10, 1957, 3; Jin, *Xi'an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 415-416, 429.

<sup>75</sup> "Xi'an shi yijing baituo le luohou mianmao," 3; "Shaanxi yipi gucheng biancheng xin gongye chengshi (A group of ancient cities in Shaanxi have transformed into new industrial cities)," *Shaanxi ribao*, September 22, 1957, 2.

<sup>76</sup> "Zai jiben jianshe zhong jieyue yongdi (Conserve land during capital construction)," *Renmin ribao*, March 31, 1957, 1; "Chengshi jianshe bixu fuhe jieyue yuanze (Urban construction must accord with the principle of economization)," *Renmin ribao*, May 24, 1957, 1; "Jieyue jiben jianshe yongdi (Conserve land for capital construction)," *Renmin ribao*, August 6, 1957, 5.

surrounding suburbs, about 10% of the cultivatable area in 1952.<sup>77</sup> On May 1<sup>st</sup>, after visiting Xi'an and Chengdu, Li Fuchun and Bo Yibo of the State Council issued a report to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on “irrational phenomena” that now were arising within state planning. While acknowledging the pace of industrial progress in these inland cities, they took issue with the way state planners had set aside 7200 hectares for capital construction in Xi'an, only to build factories hundreds of meters apart from one another and from residential areas in the name of civil air defense (人防 *renfang*). Factories typically occupied only a quarter of industrial plots, with the rest of the acquired land comprising green belts and space reserved for future growth. The most appalling case was the nation's Second Ministry of Machine Industry (第二機械工業部 *Di'er jixie gongye bu*) that had left half of its land in Xi'an unused. For a country with a great population and little arable land, Li and Bo argued that unnecessary encroachment onto surrounding villages harmed agricultural production and only stirred dissent among farmers, who characterized industrial work units as “cleavers” slicing up the land.<sup>78</sup>

Aside from land use, Li Fuchun and Bo Yibo also criticized numerous standards and practices that wasted state resources. In their view, Chinese planners mesmerized by foreign designs had set building heights set much too tall (no less than 6 meters) and had made living areas and factory floors much too grand. Factories also

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<sup>77</sup> Jin, *Xi'an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 424.

<sup>78</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang pizhuan Li Fuchun Bo Yibo ‘Guanyu jiejie muqian jingji jianshe he wenhua jianshe fangmian cunzai de yixie wenti de yijian’ (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party endorse Li Fuchun and Bo Yibo’s ‘Suggestions on Solving a Few Problems with Economic and Cultural Development’),” *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyao wenxian xinxiu* (Archives of the Communist Party of China).

had purchased a lot of unnecessary equipment, such as a 160,000 yuan grinding machine at the Xi'an Aviation Motors factory that workers used only a handful of times each year. Similarly, each factory of the Second Ministry of Machine Industry in Xi'an was equipped with a 70,000-square-meter woodshop that was not being fully utilized. Li and Bo calculated that each of the thirty-eight technical schools in Xi'an required on average 10 hectares, 4 million yuan of investment, and 100 machines. They believed the state was also spending too much on workers' quarters that were being overcrowded by dependents from the countryside. Nearly half of the 51,000 temporary workers employed by the Xi'an Department of Construction and Engineering had brought their families to live with them at construction sites, often long before any work had been broken. Lastly, they believed the five thousand workers at two aviation factories in Xi'an, who were mostly primary school graduates, lacked the technical know-how and experience to work in facilities that were so advanced, even by Soviet standards.<sup>79</sup>

To solve the contradiction that had developed between construction work units (建設單位 *jianshe danwei*) and farming populations, officials took measures to economize land use and reduce wasteful practices. The State Council and Central Committee of the CCP advised industrial work units to give back any unused land to farmers. As per these instructions, the machine industry, which had occupied 18% of all land slated for construction in Xi'an, returned 269 hectares to farmers for

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



cultivation.<sup>80</sup> Local newspapers advised capital construction work units to “cherish every inch of land” because it was “unforgiveable” to requisition more land than was being used (徵多用少 *zhengduo yongshao*) or requisition land earlier than it was needed (早徵晚用 *zaozheng wanyong*). Unneeded infrastructure would take away land of farmers and increase the fees paid by urban residents.<sup>81</sup>

Officials were also compelled to rethink the building of industrial cities, which had become too “dogmatic” and “formalistic” under the “blind” pursuit of Soviet models, to meet the actual needs of urban industries and residents. In an April 1957 speech to Xi’an cadres, Deng Xiaoping argued that the state had to confront the realities of China’s economy instead of dogmatically clinging to Soviet precedent. Practicality, he admitted, would need to trump aesthetics. In the case of Xi’an, Deng believed urban planners had focused too much on the form of the city (“the bones”) rather than the needs of the masses (“the meat”). Deng pointed to the fact that workers could not watch movies or opera in expansive and crowded industrial districts while theaters in the city center were hardly attended. Because existing plans had proposed an impractical spatial division of labor within the city that required

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<sup>80</sup> “Zailun jiben jianshe zhong jieyue yongdi de wenti (Discussing once again the question of conserving land in capital construction),” *Renmin ribao*, May 8, 1957, 1; “Xi’an diqu jijian danwei ying jieyue yongdi (Xi’an capital construction work units should conserve land),” *Shaanxi ribao*, May 9, 1957, 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, “Xi’an chengshi jianshe guihua pianda tuoli shiji (Xi’an urban construction planning tends to be too big and out of touch with reality),” *Shaanxi ribao*, May 13, 1957, 1.

workers to travel long distances for purchases and other needs, Deng called for the development of more mixed-use spaces within monolithic industrial expanses.<sup>82</sup>

Once central government officials began to criticize how the “socialist standards” (社會主義標準 *shehui zhuyi biao zhun*) of Soviet planning were too “ostentatious” for a country of too many people and too little land, density became the order of the day.<sup>83</sup> Local officials attacked the existing city plan that laid out projected urban growth from 1953 to 1972 for designating so much communal space that they projected future density to be 76 square meters per person. They also criticized expansive green space as an impediment to the needs of the city and advised factories in the suburbs to reduce their afforested plots of land. The central government suggested that the city’s boundaries be fixed for the next 5-10 years and that any new buildings be erected in low-density areas within the existing city.<sup>84</sup>

The state also espoused cost-cutting measures using the slogans “building up the country through thrift and hard work” (勤儉建國 *qinjian jianguo*) and “crude but simple methods” (因陋就簡 *yinlou jiujian*). Officials encouraged planners, power plants, and factories to use domestic materials and equipment. For example, planners of the Xi’an No. 3 Power Plant replaced imported magnesium carbonate refractory bricks for heating with diatomite and foamed concrete, saving the state one million yuan. Also, for the city’s drainage system, city planners began to replace cement

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<sup>82</sup> Deng Xiaoping, “Jinhou de zhuyao renwu shi gao jianshe (Construction is the major duty hereafter) (April 8, 1957),” *Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyao wenxian xinxiu* (*Archives of the Communist Party of China*).

<sup>83</sup> “Zai jiben jianshe zhong jieyue yongdi,” 1.

<sup>84</sup> “Xi’an chengshi jianshe guihua pianda tuoli shiji,” 1.

pipes with cheaper ones made in brick kilns, though they now had to additionally guard against leaking.<sup>85</sup>

### *Agricultural Crisis*

The controversy over industries encroaching on villages in Xi'an occurred as agricultural production, which had been subordinated to the state's goals in industrialization, fell in 1957. In Xi'an, the agricultural sector received only 0.32% of the amount the central government had allocated for capital construction (4.47 million yuan).<sup>86</sup> Over the course of the First Five Year Plan, land that was available for agricultural cultivation in Xi'an fell by 200,000 mu, mostly dry land.<sup>87</sup> Between 1956 and 1957, the annual production of grain in Xi'an fell by more than 200,000 tons, from 842,555 to 616,148 tons.<sup>88</sup> More than half of this loss was in wheat production, which fell from 371,994 to 257,147 tons.<sup>89</sup> Corn production was also reduced by 50,000 tons, from 209,532 to 156,407.<sup>90</sup> The production of cotton, the major cash crop, barely grew at this time.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Li Xi, "Jinjin shouzhe jiben jianshe de diyiguan Xi'an de sheji danwei jieyue le daliang zijin he jianzhu cailiao (Closely guard the key to capital construction Xi'an planning work unit has conserved a great amount of funds and building materials)," *Renmin ribao*, July 26, 1957, 5; Li Jide, "Guanyu benshi daolu paishui he luhua wenti (Concerning our city's roads, drainage, and greening problems)," *Xi'an ribao*, July 26, 1957, 2; "Xi'an diangongcheng zhengzai jiaojin jianshe zhong 25 ge changfang cangku yi jiaogong yanshou (25 factory buildings and warehouses completed and verified as Xi'an's Electric Engineering Town speeds up construction)," *Xi'an ribao*, July 28, 1957, 2.

<sup>86</sup> Jin, *Xi'an shehuizhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 428, 440.

<sup>87</sup> *Xi'an shizhi*, 567.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 616.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 618.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 626.

In response, officials began to take measures to allay rural hunger and reduce urban consumption. Over the summer of 1957, they permitted collectives to borrow grain from state reserves but farmers were banned from selling off their shares on the black market and growing cash crops in the place of grain. Farmers would pay back the state by November at the end of the year's harvest, with as much of their best grain as possible.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, they extended their efforts at economization in the city to grain consumption, calling on residents to "eat just enough and not waste" (夠吃不浪費 *gouchi bulangfei*). The Xi'an Sugar and Pastry Company cut its usage down of flour by 21,832 jin in July.<sup>93</sup> In Xincheng and Yanta district, tens of thousands of residents reportedly volunteered to reduce their rations and offered up their extra grain and food coupons.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, the state cut cloth rations in urban areas. In September 1957, the State Council announced that national supplies of cotton cloth were at a low because harvests across the country had been affected by natural disasters in the previous year. The central government instructed leaders in cotton-growing regions to press farmers to give up more of the cotton that they retained for their own use, leaving them with only 1.25 kg per capita.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, Xi'an officials cut the

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<sup>92</sup> "Shi liangshi ju jue ding bo qiuliang jiegei nongmin (Urban grain bureau decided to allocate autumn grain crops to lend to farmers)," *Xi'an ribao*, July 28, 1957, 2.

<sup>93</sup> "Xi'an shi tangye gaodian gongsi gonchang wei guojia jieyue liangshi liangwan duo jin (Xi'an city sugar industry and pastry companies and factories saved the state over 20,000 jin of grain)," *Xi'an ribao*, August 27, 1957, 2.

<sup>94</sup> "Xinchengqu jumin qinjian chijia jieyue liangshi (New City District residents running households economically and conserving grain)," *Xi'an ribao*, August 27, 1957, 2; "Jumin fenfen jiaoxiao yuliang (Residents handing in extra grain)," *Xi'an ribao*, August 27, 1957, 2.

<sup>95</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang Guowuyuan guanyu ben niandu mianhua tonggou gongzuo de zhishi (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and State Council directives for the unified

cloth rations of cadres, workers, and students; officials claimed they were bringing the 14 *shichi* (4.67 meters) per person that the urban population had enjoyed closer to 10 *shichi* (3.33 meters) that was standard in the countryside.<sup>96</sup> Editors of *Xi'an ribao* published letters and reports that encouraged workers to repair old garments so that they could be worn as long as possible and return any unused ration coupons.<sup>97</sup> One writer suggested that factories refrain from rewarding model workers with bedsheets and clothing.<sup>98</sup> Another suggested that factories take care in distributing cotton gloves and masks because workers had begun to accumulate personal collections.<sup>99</sup> The grain storehouse company reported that it collected over a million old sacks that had been used to hold flour, saving the state over four million chi of cotton fabric, or an equivalent of 300,000 sets of unlined garments.<sup>100</sup>

In the fall of 1957, the local government planned to send a hundred thousand people to the countryside over the course of four months in an effort to reduce the urban population and increase agricultural productivity. The building of new housing had failed to keep up with population growth, so residents now had less space per

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purchase of cotton this year),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 9, 1957, 2; Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 354.

<sup>96</sup> Mu Shengju, “Cong duo fangmian xiang banfa lai jieyue mianbu (Think of different ways to economize cotton),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2.

<sup>97</sup> “Jinliang chuan jiuyi duoduo jieyue bu (Wear old clothing as long as possible to save more and more cloth),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2; “Qunian fa de bupiao meiyongwan jinnian tuihuan guojia bu zaomai (Did not use all of the cloth rations from last year, return them to the state this year and do not buy),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2.

<sup>98</sup> “Jianyi buyong yishan zuo jiangpin (A proposal to not use clothing as prizes),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2.

<sup>99</sup> “Fafang gongzuo fu shoutao deng bixu zhuyi jieyue (Attend to economization when providing work gloves),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2.

<sup>100</sup> “Liangshi cangchu gongsi dali huishou miandai (Grain storehouse company vigorously recycle cotton bags),” *Xi'an ribao*, September 1, 1957, 2.

capita (about 2.6 square meters) than they had had before Liberation.<sup>101</sup> Seizing on the anti-rightist campaign's attack on bureaucracy, the municipal party committee decided on October 18<sup>th</sup> to demote twenty thousand cadres to manual labor in the countryside, a reduction of 30-40% of the cadre workforce.<sup>102</sup> These cadres and their dependents were originally from the countryside but they had apparently "floated" into the city to become a dependent population.<sup>103</sup> Once they were sent to the countryside to engage in productive labor, these cadres suddenly transformed into model workers. After being demoted, Xue Ziyong, a propaganda cadre, returned to his native village in Chang'an county to work on the agricultural cooperative. While the cooperative had stuck to old methods of cultivation, he introduced the two-wheeled double-shared plow to assist in dry farming.<sup>104</sup>



<sup>101</sup> "Xi'an chengshi jianshe guihua pianda tuoli shiji," 1; Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 103, 105.

<sup>102</sup> "Xi'an shi jiang xiafang ganbu liang wan duo ren (Xi'an city will demote twenty thousand cadres)," *Shaanxi ribao*, October 18, 1957, 1.

<sup>103</sup> "Xi'an shi jiang qiansong shi wan ren huinongcun shengchan (Xi'an city will send one hundred thousand people to the villages for production)," *Shaanxi ribao*, November 15, 1957.

<sup>104</sup> "Xiafang dao laodong zhanxian shang de ren (People on the frontlines of labor after demotion)," *Shaanxi ribao*, November 16, 1957.

Image 17. “Farewell comrades!”  
Source: *Shaanxi ribao* (December 22, 1957), 3.

Officials also targeted an estimated 60,000 rural migrants and disaster victims from Shandong, Jiangsu, Anhui, Henan, Hebei, who had “blindly entered the cities” (盲目流入城市 *mangmu liuru chengshi*) over the preceding year. While reducing the labor power available in villages, these migrants consumed approximately 216 million *jin* of grain a year in Xi’an. Some migrants relied on the support of relatives and friends and others had found temporary positions to make a living. In the eyes of the local government, however, these rootless individuals that lacked a household registration and a fixed residence were also guilty of begging, gambling, peddling, and robbery. Municipal and district committees worked with public security to register and send thousands of migrants, beggars, vagrants, and disaster victims to the villages so that they could engage in agricultural production. The state also sought to strengthen ideological work in villages, especially those along the railroads, to dissuade farmers from migrating to the city.<sup>105</sup> By spring 1958, local officials had relocated 130,000 people out of the city, which would ironically lead to a labor shortage later that year for Great Leap Forward construction projects.<sup>106</sup>

Food shortages from the Great Leap famine effectively brought the urban growth of the 1950s to an end.<sup>107</sup> While Xi’an and the Guanzhong region did not

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<sup>105</sup> “Xi’an shi jiang qiansong shi wan ren huinongcun shengchan”; “Guanyu zhizhi nongcun renkou mangmu wailiu de zhishi (Directives for reventing farming populations from blindly entering the city),” *Shaanxi ribao*, December 19, 1957, 1; Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 99-100.

<sup>106</sup> Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 100.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

suffer as much as other regions in China, the production of grain fell nearly 300,000 tons after rebounding in 1958, dropping from 784,035 to a low of 488,957 tons in 1961.<sup>108</sup> Even though the urban population had grown dramatically, farm output was hardly greater in the early 1960s than the first years of Communist rule. Only in 1965 did total grain production (908,788 tons or 25 kilograms per mu) return to 1956 levels.<sup>109</sup> The recovery in agriculture would pave the way for the Third Front campaign launched in 1965.

In response to the American military escalation in Vietnam and rapidly deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union in the mid-1960s, the central government began to invest heavily into the construction of defense-related industries and transportation in inland China, which brought another wave of industrial growth to Xi'an and its environs.<sup>110</sup> Shaanxi province received about one third of all Third Front projects in the 1960s and 1970s, with the majority located in Xi'an or nearby counties along the Qinling mountains.<sup>111</sup> As in the case of the First Five Year Plan, the state began moving tens of thousands of people and industrial machinery from eastern cities, such as Shenyang, Changchun, Beijing, and Shanghai to Xi'an in 1965.<sup>112</sup> Light industrial production in Xi'an declined as the state focused investment into the production of machines, including metallurgy and mining equipment, automobiles, and sewing machines, as well as aviation and aerospace bases in

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<sup>108</sup> *Xi'an shizhi*, 616; see also, Zhu, *Shaanxi nongye, jiegou*, 174-175.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Naughton, "The Third Front."

<sup>111</sup> Jin, *Xi'an shehui zhuyi shiqi dangshi ziliao zhuanji*, 796, 1125-1126.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 786.



adjacent counties.<sup>113</sup> In addition, the state invested vast resources in the building of railroads and highways. In 1971, the state mobilized twenty thousand elementary and middle school graduates in Xi'an to participate in the construction of the Xiangyu railway running from Xiangyang in Hubei through southern Shaanxi to Chongqing in Sichuan.<sup>114</sup>

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, the Third Front strategy guaranteed a steady flow of state investment into Xi'an, but it was cast aside amidst the reversals of the reform-era. Along with the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, the Party rejected the Third Front's excessive emphasis on national defense. Reform-era officials claimed the principle of building factories in "mountainous, dispersed, and concealed" (靠山 *kaoshan* 分散 *fensan* 隱蔽 *yinbi*) areas ran contrary to rational and efficient economic organization. Moreover, they found the hurried pace of industrial construction in those decades give way to poor quality products, sinking foundations, and crumbling walls.<sup>115</sup> In 1983, the state began to set up committees to reorganize Third Front factories. At the same time, officials in Xi'an began to look for other economic strategies, particularly tourism.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 792, 816-817. Vermeer, *Economic Development in Provincial China*, 111-112.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 787.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 798-799, 818-820.

## Epilogue

In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping unveiled his proposal for a “Silk Road Economic Belt” (絲綢之路經濟帶 *sichou zhilu jingji dai*) that would herald a new era of cooperation among the billions of people living along the historic route. In a speech at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan on September 7th, Xi pointed to the long-standing tradition of trade and cultural exchange between China and its Central Asian neighbors, in order to call for free trade agreements, the circulation of currency, shipping networks stretching from the Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, and joint security measures against the “three evils” (三股勢力 *sangu shili*) of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.<sup>1</sup> During his trip to Indonesia the following month, Xi would expand his vision beyond the Eurasian continent to include ASEAN countries into a maritime Silk Road.<sup>2</sup> Since then, to deepen regional cooperation and exchange, the Chinese state has established a \$40 billion Silk Road Infrastructure Fund and a \$50 billion Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to support the building of pipelines, roads, high-speed railways, and trading ports linking China and neighboring countries.<sup>3</sup>

Xi’s signature foreign policy is the latest instance of the Chinese state mobilizing the cultural imagination in order to extend its strategies of accumulation

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<sup>1</sup> Du Shangze, Ding Wei, Huang Wendi, and Wang Ye, “Hongyang renmin youyi gongtong jianshe sichouzhilu jingjidai (Promote Friendship among the People, Build the Silk Road Economic Belt together),” *Renmin ribao*, September 8, 2013, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Zhuang Xueya, Liu Hui, Li Ning, Sun Guangyong, and Li Xuedan, “Hezuo gongying zengqiang diqu huoli (Work together for mutual benefit, increase region’s vigor),” *Renmin ribao*, October 4, 2013, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Page, “China Sees Itself at Center of New Asian Order,” *Wall Street Journal* (November 9, 2014).

into economic frontiers, albeit with new goals in mind. Like Guomindang leaders before him, Xi Jinping has invoked a bygone era to call for a return to historical norms. In the 1930s, right-wing thinkers such as Dai Jitao argued that coastal Chinese, who had fallen victim to the world capitalist economy, cultural cosmopolitanism, and territorial encroachment, should head to their ancient homeland in Northwest China where they could shield themselves from foreign influence and enjoy a national revival. In 1934, Guomindang conservatives began to pay homage to Han Wudi, the emperor that had ended the policy of appeasement toward the Xiongnu, to remind a forgetful nation of its past glory and inspire their compatriots to stage a resistance to foreign invasion. By contrast, in the twenty-first century, the Chinese state has discarded Han Wudi for Zhang Qian, the envoy that the emperor sent west to establish an alliance with the Tochari (Yuezhi) against the Xiongnu. In the hopes of expanding Chinese strategies of accumulation beyond the nation's borders, Xi's speeches have celebrated Zhang Qian for first laying the foundation for the Silk Road trade routes.<sup>4</sup> Zhao Zhengyong, the Communist Party chief of Shaanxi province, even credited Zhang Qian's westward journey as the moment in which China became one of the great nations of the world.<sup>5</sup> From earlier appeals for economic and cultural self-reliance, Chinese leaders now invoke past glory on behalf of the neoliberal vision of the state as a guarantor of freely circulating capitalism. According to Zhao,

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<sup>4</sup> Du, et. al, "Hongyang renmin youyi gongtong jianshe sichouzhilu jingjidai," 1.

<sup>5</sup> Zhao Zhengyong, "Xiang xi kaifang: Xibu da fazhan de xin jiyu (Open up to the west: a new opportunity for the great development of the west)," *Renmin ribao*, October 29, 2013, 7.

“Openness is the forerunner of progress. Confinement is the source of backwardness.”<sup>6</sup>

The Silk Road Economic Belt may appear new to many observers, but for the residents of Xi’an, it draws on a very familiar cultural fantasy of a shared history between the West and the East that was crucial to remaking the city from a regional industrial center in Maoist China into a world famous tourist destination in the reform era. Within the ideological displacements of postsocialism, novelists and filmmakers discarded revolutionary motifs for the empty and timeless landscapes of Northwest China. Both “roots seeking” (*xungen*) literature and Fifth Generation film began to locate a mythologized and dehistoricized Chinese past in the loess plateau in the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> The Silk Road, which had rarely been mentioned by the Chinese state under the Guomindang or Mao, also emerged as a subject of cultural production at the start of reforms. The Lanzhou Song and Dance Company began staging the dance drama “Rain of Flowers on the Silk Road” (1979), inspired by the frescoes at Dunhuang. In addition, Japanese and Chinese film crews jointly produced a documentary series called “Silk Road” (1980).<sup>8</sup> Xi’an officials tried to use the romantic image of the ancient corridor to their economic advantage as the central government abandoned Maoist concerns with correcting regional disparities and focused reforms and

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<sup>6</sup> Zhao, “Xiang xi kaifang: Xibu da fazhan de xin jiyu,” 7.

<sup>7</sup> See Zhong Xueping, *Masculinity Besieged?: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), and Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (New York: Verso, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Zhang Fengbo, “Dianshipian ‘Sichou zhilu’ zai Riben (The television series Silk Road in Japan),” *Renmin ribao*, March 7, 1981, 8; Huike Wen, *Television and the Modernization Ideal in 1980s China: Dazzling the Eyes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 69-71.

preferential policies on special economic zones along the coast.<sup>9</sup> In a national economy now conceived of regional comparative advantage, central and provincial authorities began investing tens of millions of yuan into archaeological excavation and historic preservation of Silk Road relics unique to the Northwest.<sup>10</sup>

Reform-era officials began to reorder the urban fabric around historic sites now imbued with not only national but also world historical significance. Whereas Xi'an officials had praised massive factories built in the 1950s with Soviet guidance as symbols of the world socialist bloc, their embrace of the capitalist world in the reform era led them to reconceive cosmopolitanism to be shaped by the flows of foreign tourists. The city's most popular attraction became the Terracotta Army, the funerary statues found in the tomb of the First Emperor Qin Shi Huang (259-210 BCE). The press proclaimed that its discovery in 1974 "shook the world" and had been featured in the American magazine *National Geographic* in 1978. The growth of international visitors to the city convinced the tourism industry to feature the city prominently on the most popular itinerary for foreigners: Beijing-Xi'an-Shanghai.<sup>11</sup> Soon, commentators remarked that "if you come to China and you don't go to Xi'an,

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Dali Yang, "Patterns of China's Regional Development Strategy," *The China Quarterly* Vol. 122 (June 1990): 230-257; David S.G. Goodman, "The Politics of Regionalism: Economic Development, conflict and negotiation," in David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism* (New York: Routledge, 1994); C. Cindy Fan, "Uneven Development and Beyond: Regional Development Theory in Post-Mao China," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1997): 620-639; Dali Yang, *Beyond Beijing: Liberalization and the regions in China* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Bu Zhaowen and Wang Zhaolin, "Xi'an diqu riye xingcheng yi ge juyou lishi tese de shijie luyou shengdi (Xi'an area increasingly becoming a world travel destination with historical characteristics)," *Renmin ribao*, January 5, 1982, 4; Wang Zhaolin and Bu Zhaowen, "Waibin shengzan Xi'an de guji wenwu (Foreign guests praise highly Xi'an's historical sites and relics)," *Renmin ribao*, January 5, 1982, 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

then you haven't really been to China."<sup>12</sup> Local officials attempted to use the influx of tourist spending as a vehicle for economic restructuring in Xi'an, encouraging people living in the suburbs to abandon farming to set up inns, restaurants and other eateries, transportation services, film processing stores, spas utilizing hot springs, and souvenir shops.<sup>13</sup> In November 1983, State Council ratified a city plan for Xi'an that would curb the growth of polluting industries, which had begun to take a toll on the local environment, and focus its work instead on cultivating the appearance of an ancient capital (古都風貌 *gudu fengmao*).<sup>14</sup> By 1985, there were thirteen times more foreign visitors (over 200,000) and 23 times more domestic tourists (nearly 10 million) than at the start of reform in 1978.<sup>15</sup>

Officials revived beautification measures around the city to improve local charm and draw visitors to other marketable sites. In particular, they expanded the building of green spaces that had been curbed in the 1950s for being too extravagant. Between 1983 and 1986, the local government mobilized 800,000 volunteers to work on Huancheng Gongyuan (環城公園), a 3.6 square kilometer park encircling the city that included the wall, moat, and afforested area. After the walls of Beijing and Nanjing had been dismantled in Republican and Maoist China (to the dismay of

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<sup>12</sup> Pu Yuping and Yuan Shouqin, "Bulai Xi'an jiu busuan daole Zhongguo waiguoren shengzan Xian (If you have not come to Xi'an, then you have not been to China, foreigners praise Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, September 1, 1984, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Hu Kezheng, "Xi'an shijiao nongmin ban luyouye (Farmers in Xi'an suburbs engage in tourism)," *Renmin ribao*, August 8, 1985, 2; Jing Xianfeng, "Xinjian de Xi'an huochezhan zhulou touru shiyong (Newly-built main building of the Xi'an railway station put to use)," *Renmin ribao*, January 1, 1986, 2.

<sup>14</sup> "Guowuyuan pizhun Xi'an chengshi zongti guihua (State Council ratify master city plan for Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, November 25, 1983, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Meng Xi'an, "Fahui tianran bowuguan de youshi (Display the advantage of a natural museum)," *Renmin ribao*, March 10, 1986, 2.

architects such as Liang Sicheng), Xi'an was now home to the largest complete set of city walls in the country. Officials claimed these Ming dynasty fortifications would lend themselves to tourism, as well as patriotic education in historical materialism, as examples of feudal architecture. The local government began repairing collapsed and broken sections so that visitors could ascend the walls where they could take in a panoramic view (盡收眼底 *jinshou yandi*) of the city. Officials also cleaned up the unsightly moat that was teeming with flies and mosquitoes and overflowing with so much garbage, silt, and sewage that people began referring to it as the local version of Beijing's Longxugou (Dragon Whisker Creek), a heavily polluted waterway that was famously redeveloped in the 1950s.<sup>16</sup> Beautification transformed the walls and moat from "stocks and chains" holding back the city's development into a "green necklace" and "wreath" to decorate the ancient city.<sup>17</sup>

The local emphasis on commercial tourism as a motor of economic growth soon produced new problems. Newspaper commentators began to express resentment about how foreign tourists received preferential treatment at museums and how some shops catered exclusively to them because they were traveling with foreign currency.<sup>18</sup> Local tour guides for the China Travel Service took kickbacks and commissions from factory, shop, and restaurant owners, and they bought and sold

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<sup>16</sup> Yomi Braester, *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Chapter One.

<sup>17</sup> "Xi'an zhengxiu gu chengyuan (Xi'an repairing ancient city wall)," *Renmin ribao*, March 10, 1983, 3; Bu Zhaowen, "Wei qiannian gucheng zhuangshi lüse 'xianglian' (Decorate the thousand-year-old city with a green 'necklace')," *Renmin ribao*, July 20, 1983, 2; Yu Zhangrui and Wang Zhaolin, "Gudu 'huahuan' (Ancient capital's 'garland')," *Renmin ribao*, October 10, 1986, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Qiong Zhiguang, "You Xi'an de yihan (Regrets from travels in Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, April 7, 1984, 5; Xu Ying, "Wei shenme guoren buxu runei (Why are compatriots not allowed to enter)," *Renmin ribao*, September 19, 1987, 1.

foreign currency on the side.<sup>19</sup> In 1986, the Shaanxi provincial government discovered 295 cases of businesses in tourist areas illegally selling historic artifacts and confiscated over 30,000 objects.<sup>20</sup> Food stands selling local Shaanxi specialties were often unsanitary, lacking access to clean, running water and unable to properly disinfect plates and utensils.<sup>21</sup> Tourists frequently fell victim to rampant pickpocketing, especially on public transportation, and harassment by illegal guides (伴遊 *banyou*).<sup>22</sup> The unceasing sound of construction at thousands of work sites frustrated locals, who lodged noise pollution complaints with the local department of environmental protection.<sup>23</sup> The municipal government had to stop construction on twenty-three high-end hotels because they exceeded demand.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1990s, officials began to use the discourse of *suzhi* (quality), a keyword that had been typically used to discipline agricultural populations into subjects of development,<sup>25</sup> to fault Xi'an residents for lacking the cultural refinement and moral standards necessary to support local economic growth. Their appeals to spiritual

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<sup>19</sup> Jiang Maosheng, "Guoji lüxingshe Xi'an fenshe jiuzheng hangye buzhenzhifeng (China International Travel Service Xi'an branch corrects unhealthy trends in the industry)," *Renmin ribao*, July 6, 1986, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Huangyan, "Shaanxi zhengdun wenwu shichang daji wenwu zousi (Shaanxi rectifies cultural relic markets dealing a blow to smuggling)," *Renmin ribao*, September 8, 1986, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang Da, "Xi'an yinshi tedian duo kexi weisheng zhuangkuang cha (Xi'an has many food vendors, a pity that hygiene is lacking)," *Renmin ribao*, November 2, 1986, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Shang Yingbin and Wu Qincai, "Xi'an gongan jiguan yanzheng pashou (Xi'an public security bureau severely punishes pickpockets)," *Renmin ribao*, March 24, 1994, 3; Wu Qincai, Liu Boping, and Qiu Ling, "Xi'an fanpa weimin chuhai (Xi'an combats pickpockets to eliminate a public scourge)," *Renmin ribao*, June 7, 1994; Zheng Shaozhong, "Xi'an yan cha hei banyou (Xi'an investigating strictly illegal guides)," *Renmin ribao*, August 23, 2002, 9.

<sup>23</sup> "Xi'an jumin toushu su jijian zaoyin gaorao ku (Xi'an residents submit noise complaints about infrastructure)," *Renmin ribao*, August 18, 1986, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Liu Erning, "Xi'an you tingjian yi pi loutang guansuo (Xi'an halts building of another guesthouse)," *Renmin ribao*, August 21, 1988, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Yan Hairong, *New Masters, New Servants: Migration, Development, and Women Workers in China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).



civilization (精神文明 *jingshen wenming*) were radically different from that of 1930s conservatives, who pitted the spiritual civilization of the “pure” Northwest against the material civilization that had corrupted the Southeast. Reform-era officials understood spiritual civilization instead as a means to help create a favorable environment for foreign investment. During his tour of the Northwest in 1993, Jiang Zemin proposed that Xi’an become an export-oriented city (外向型城市 *waixiangxing chengshi*), with an economy based on the high-tech industry and tourism. Soon afterwards, officials declared the need to raise the *suzhi* of local people and present a cleaner and more attractive outer appearance.<sup>26</sup> They invested 110,000,000 yuan into the greening measures in the name of transforming the harsh continental environment.<sup>27</sup>

The residents of Xi’an soon found their city at the forefront of yet another developmental campaign. Starting in the late 1980s, discontented leaders of inland provinces began criticizing uneven regional development policy. They revived earlier discussions of price scissors between the city and the countryside to describe how western regions were being impoverished through unequal rates of exchange with eastern regions. Also, the reform-era regime had cast aside a Maoist emphasis on local self-sufficiency to set up a national division of labor in which western regions would send raw materials and primary products to the seaboard. Inland provinces resorted to local protectionism, setting up enterprises to compete in foreign trade and

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<sup>26</sup> Li Du, “Yiren weiben suzao gucheng xin xingxiang Xi’an shishi jingshen wenming jianshe ba xiang gongcheng (Molding the ancient capital to have a new people-oriented appearance Xi’an implementing eight projects for the construction of spiritual civilization),” *Renmin ribao*, August 20, 1996, 4; “Xi’an: cong gulao zouxian nianqing (Xi’an: from age-old to youthful),” *Renmin ribao*, September 6, 1999, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Cui Lintao, “Gaishan gudu de rongmao (Improving the ancient capital’s appearance),” *Renmin ribao*, May 21, 1999, 5.

restricting the flow of resources.<sup>28</sup> In 2000, Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji announced the “Open Up the West” (西部大開發 *Xibu da kaifa*) campaign to offset the economic advantages enjoyed by coastal areas in the first decades of reform. To address regional disparities, central authorities broadly defined a “backward” region targeted for infrastructural development and foreign investment to encompass the entire western half of China. As in the case of the Northwest Question of the Republican era, commentators have compared this state-led development campaign to frontier expansion in the American West.<sup>29</sup> As scholars have noted, however, the provinces and special administrative regions that have been designated as part of this western economic frontier are not equally disadvantaged and the Chinese state’s goals are different in each case, especially in minority-occupied areas.<sup>30</sup>

In the case of Xi’an, the Open Up the West campaign has financed urban renewal that has actually bolstered the traditional city image officials had been crafting for Silk Road tourism. In recent decades, within the context of full-throttle marketization and capital accumulation in the urban arena, cities have become the place where collective memory has been cultivated. In the 1990s, a new generation of filmmakers took as their subjects the psychological confusions, moral dilemmas, and spatial disorientations set within vanishing cityscapes.<sup>31</sup> Widespread demolition and

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<sup>28</sup> C. Cindy Fan, “Uneven Development and Beyond: Regional Development Theory in Post-Mao China,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1997): 629.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Ren Zhongping, “Zhongguo xiandaihua jianshe de ‘xin zhidian’ (The new fulcrum of China’s modernization),” *Renmin Ribao*, July 5, 2010, 1.

<sup>30</sup> David S. G. Goodman, “The Campaign to ‘Open Up the West’: National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives,” *The China Quarterly* Vol. 178 (June 2004): 317-334.

<sup>31</sup> Dai Jinhua, “Imagined Nostalgia,” in Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, *Postmodernism & China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 215; Zhang Zhen, ed. *The Urban Generation: Chinese*

the advent of postmodern skyscrapers have compounded the desire to preserve a unique sense of place and distinct built environments, such as the *shikumen* townhouses of “Old Shanghai” or the narrow *hutong* alleys of “Old Beijing.” Instead of vernacular architecture, Xi’an officials have channeled nostalgia for urban pasts into their 2005 plan to “revive the Tang imperial capital” (唐皇城復興計劃 *Tang huangcheng fuxing jihua*). The local government inaugurated its strategy with a 1.3 billion yuan theme park, Tang Paradise (大唐芙蓉園 *Datang furongyuan*), located south of the walled city, which would give visitors a taste of Tang poetry, music, dance, and architecture.<sup>32</sup> Since then, the construction of commercial, residential, and public spaces has often taken the “Neo-Tang” (*xin Tang feng*) style to maintain these new aesthetic sensibilities. Most recently, on October 1, 2010, officials opened up the much-anticipated Daming Palace National Heritage Park. This fourteen-billion-yuan project showcasing the ruins of a Tang royal palace and rebuilt imperial gates was underwritten by the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2006-2010) in the hopes that it would become another one of the city’s UNESCO world heritage sites.<sup>33</sup> Even though the construction of this three-square-kilometer park required the tearing down of slums and the relocation of over 100,000 inhabitants, officials celebrated how they had

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*Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Meng Xi’an and Wang Yuewen, “Xi’an guihua huifu gudu fengmao (Xi’an planning restores the style of the ancient capital),” *Renmin ribao*, April 12, 2005, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Li Fang, “Jiaru shiqu lishi ni huibuhui konghuang (If you lost your history, would you panic),” *Renmin ribao*, October 22, 2010, 17.

transformed a poor and crime-infested area into a monument of Chinese civilization, and, in the process, increased property values in the area.<sup>34</sup>

Alongside these symbols of Chinese civilization, the municipal government has built an ecological district covering over one thousand acres to showcase natural charm and scientific progress. Beginning in 2004, local officials and planners set out to remake one thousand acres of sewage, trash heaps, and sand pits along the shores of the Chan and Ba rivers into parks and wetlands. In a region prone to natural disasters, the press compared ecological restoration at two of the eight historic rivers that encircled to ancient Chang'an to the contributions of Yu the Great, the legendary ruler who introduced irrigation systems. In Xi'an's scramble for "international branding" (國際化品牌 *guojihua pinpai*), the ecological district became the venue for the biennial Euro Asian Economic Forum, the Formula One powerboat championship in 2007, and the 2011 International Horticultural Exposition. From April to October 2011, officials inculcated visitors to the expo in the necessity of building a greener future for the Northwest as they imagined themselves becoming cosmopolitan by visiting foreign-themed gardens. Exhibits made of recycled materials encouraged sightseers to part ways with the single-minded focus on GDP that came at the cost of ecology and introduced them to a new age of eco-capitalism that combined economic development and environmental sensibilities. The city and nature, it was said, could

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<sup>34</sup> Maurizio Forte, "Virtual worlds, virtual heritage and immersive reality: the case of the Daming Palace at Xi'an, China," in Ilde Rizzo and Anna Mignosa, *Handbook on the Economics of Cultural Heritage* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2013); "Chai chu yige da yizhi qian de yipian xin shenghuo," *Zhongguo wenhua yichan* (China Cultural Heritage) No. 4 (2009): 126-130; "A model of restoration," *China Daily European Edition*, May 17, 2013.

now develop harmoniously through green technology, renewable energy, water recycling, and sustainable landscape designs. The ecological district has since become home to the Chanba Finance and Commercial District in Xi'an.<sup>35</sup>

Aside from world heritage sites and international events, officials envision Xi'an becoming a world-class city through urban growth. Earlier regimes had sought to limit the scale of cities because they threatened the nation's spiritual and agricultural foundations. By contrast, reform-era officials consider urbanization to be crucial to the process of capitalist accumulation. As part of the Open Up the West campaign, the central government has invested billions of yuan into highways and railways connecting the city to other regions and provinces.<sup>36</sup> In 2010, the Shaanxi provincial government passed a resolution to integrate Xi'an and its neighboring city Xianyang into what officials preferred to call "an internationalized metropolis" (國際化大都市 *guojihua dadushi*). Officials pledged three trillion yuan into urban construction over the next ten years so that, by 2020, Xi'an would have a population of over 10 million and a surface area of 800 square kilometers.<sup>37</sup> Officials are planning the Xixian New Area connecting the two jurisdictions as a garden city that

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<sup>35</sup> Wang Ke, "Kexue fazhan tuoqi shengtai wenming xin Chanba (Scientific development supporting ecological civilization in a new Chanba)," *Renmin ribao*, November 7, 2007, 14; "Hongyang shiyuan jingshen jiakuai guojihua dadushi jianshe (Promote the Spirit of the International Horticultural Exposition Speed up the building of an internationalized metropolis)," *Renmin ribao*, March 21, 2012, 7; Wang Yuewen and Xing Xianghui, "Xi'an Chanba: dazao Guanzhong Tianshui jingjiqu lüse shengtai shifan xincheng (Forging a model green ecological city in the Guanzhong-Tianshui economic zone)," *Renmin ribao*, March 13, 2013, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Eduard B. Vermeer, "Shaanxi: Building a Future on State Support," *The China Quarterly* Vol. 178 (June 2004): 400-425.

<sup>37</sup> "Ancient Capital Aims to Expand into Megacity" <http://english.cri.cn/6909/2010/03/03/1821s553871.htm>; Wang Yuewen, "Xi'an yizuo gudu de wenhua ditu (Xi'an: the cultural map of an ancient capital)," *Renmin ribao*, August 2, 2010, 15.

would maintain two-thirds farmland and a “sponge city” (*haimian chengshi*) that would collect and store rainfall from roofs and greenbelts.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Greater Xi’an would become part of the Guanzhong-Tianshui economic zone stretching over nearly 80,000 square kilometers between Shaanxi and Gansu, which is supposed to rival the Yangzi river delta, the Pearl river delta, and the Greater Beijing area.<sup>39</sup>

As this dissertation has shown, uneven development has served as a common springboard for the different regimes of modern China to extend state power and accumulation strategies into peripheries in times of crisis. During the Great Recession of 2008, China’s export-oriented industries were hit hard by the economic slowdown overseas. In response to the threat of massive unemployment, the Chinese state bolstered the economy through a stimulus package that funded infrastructure projects, especially in less developed western regions.<sup>40</sup> At the 2009 Euro Asian Economic Forum in Xi’an, then vice-president Xi Jinping called for greater ties to China’s western neighbors to stem the effects of the global economic crisis. The revival of old Silk Road relationships would simply extend of the previous ten years of state-

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<sup>38</sup> Wang Yuewen, Jiang Feng, and Fang Min, “Lüse chengshi huigui ziran (Green cities returning to nature),” *Renmin ribao*, December 30, 2014, 6; Wang Ziyu, “Zuo hui huxi de haimian chengshi (Making a breathing sponge city),” *Renmin ribao*, January 27, 2015, 13; Liu Yubin, “Jianshe haimian chengshi changdao shengtai wenming (Building a sponge city advocate ecological civilization),” *Renmin ribao*, January 27, 2015, 13; He Ying and Guan Jin, “Zou xiang chengshi fazhan jiaoxiangyue (Performing the urban development symphony),” *Renmin ribao*, March 13, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> G. Bin Zhao, “Road to riches,” *South China Morning Post*, October 30, 2013, 11.

<sup>40</sup> R. Bin Wong, “Chinese Political Economy and the International Economy: Linking Global, Regional, and Domestic Possibilities,” in Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derlugian, eds., *Aftermath: A New Global Economic Order?* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 156; David Harvey, “The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis this Time,” in Craig Calhoun and Georgi Derlugian, eds., *Business as Usual: The Roots of the Global Financial Meltdown* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 105.

building in western China.<sup>41</sup> For the Chinese state, regional integration under the contemporary Silk Road Economic Belt has only become more urgent with challenges posed by ethnic unrest and the U.S. pivot to East Asia.<sup>42</sup> From being a place of underdevelopment, Xi'an may soon have a more prominent place in the China's economy as not only the historical starting point of the Silk Road, but as the hometown of Xi and his Shaanxi clique.<sup>43</sup> What we will continue to need, however, are accounts that capture the uneven effects of development campaigns in Northwest China and the stories that are excluded from official narratives.

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<sup>41</sup> Xi Jinping, "Shenhua quyu hezuo gongcu jingji fusu (Strengthen regional cooperation promote economic recovery together), November 16, 2009," *Lingdaoren huodong baodao ku (Leaders Activities, Archives of the Communist Party of China)*; "Disan jie ouya jingji luntan zai Xi'an juxing (Third Euro Asia Economic Forum held in Xi'an)," *Renmin ribao*, November 17, 2009, 3.

<sup>42</sup> <http://thediplomat.com/2014/11/chinas-prescription-for-troubled-xinjiang-the-new-silk-road/>

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Zhao, "Xiang xi kaifa," 7; Wei Minzhou Dong Jun, and Li Ming, "Zhengdang gongjian sichouzhilu jingjidai de paitoubing kaichuang (Vie to become the trailblazer of the jointly sponsored Silk Road Economic Belt)," *Renmin ribao*, September 25, 2013, 13.

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