

**Big Is Modern: The Making of Wuhan as a Mega-City in Early Twentieth
Century China, 1889-1957**

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Dedication

for my mom and dad

Abstract

My dissertation examines the city making process of Wuhan out of three different towns. The three towns, Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang, located at the confluence of the Yangzi River and its largest tributary, the Han River, were divided by water and the imperial administration. In less than fifty years, the three towns disappeared, and in their place emerged Wuhan, the largest Chinese city in terms of its urban area. The urban integration was so successful that their separate pasts have been left out of current public memory. The goal of my study is to understand why and how Wuhan was made, and what the obsession with the city's big size can tell us about Chinese imagination and experience of modernity in the twentieth century.

In answering these questions, the project is designed to cover three periods from late Qing, the republic, to the early PRC, and to trace modernizing efforts made by successive regimes to create "Great Wuhan." It focuses on five key historical periods—the late Qing reform, the urban self recovery after the 1911 revolution, the modernist planning from 1927-1936, Wuhan as a wartime capital in the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), and the socialist urban reconstruction from 1949 to 1957. The study shows the 1911 revolution as a turning moment when a modern city was designed to depart from its imperial antecedent. It was Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of Republican China, who first proposed the idea of "Great Wuhan." Such a gigantic urban project shows that Sun was thinking "big." I argued that his way of thinking prevailed with the emergence of a strong scientific faith, which primarily placed upon young technologically trained officials and engineers later. Like Sun Yat-sen, they envisioned a total transformation of

modern China through re-engineering urban society and infrastructure construction. This “big” vision of modernity—gigantic and centralized—was promoted by both Chinese Nationalists and Communists and ran across time and ideology in shaping contemporary urban landscape.

I also argue that the creation of Wuhan had been closely tied to the nation-state building in the early twentieth century. Sun’s idea of “Great Wuhan” didn’t gain currency until the late 1920s when the Nationalist party that inherited Sun’s mantle came to power. From then on, efforts to make “Great Wuhan” always intensified at moments of national crisis and political change, through which the state consolidated its power and gained control over local society. The rise of nationalism along the time also contributed the obsession with bigness that fueled the ambitious project of “Great Wuhan.” It is under the CCP regime that the city of Wuhan was finally made. The socialist system and its strong nationalist movements established in the early years of PRC proved to be more effective in carrying out the mega city project.

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Introduction

On December 28th of 2008, the entire city of Wuhan celebrated the completion of the Wuhan Yangzi River Tunnel, China's first road tunnel under the Yangzi River. As one of the largest of its kind ever undertaken in China, the tunnel became the new icon of modernity that the city identifies with. News about the design and construction process of the tunnel had constantly made headlines at both local and national levels since its start in 2004. A series of articles that celebrated "a New Era" brought by the tunnel for the continuing development of Wuhan as the largest city in Central China was published in the major newspaper of the region, *Chutian Metropolis News*.¹ These articles are optimistic about the further urban integration of Wuhan after travel time between its two main areas, Wuchang and Hankou, is shortened. None of the articles, however, ever mentioned the fact that the idea of building such an underwater tunnel of Yangzi was not brand new, nor was it uncontroversial. When the underwater tunnel was first proposed for building "Great Wuhan" by Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Republic of China, nearly a hundred years ago, it was quickly rejected as "unpractical" and "unrealistic." The absence of any mention of Sun and controversy in the current media coverage should not be regarded as a forgotten history. Rather, it is an evidence of how successfully the once questionable plan of building a giant city and overcoming natural barrier has been absorbed into the political imaginary of contemporary China. What is

¹ *Chutian Metropolis News*, November 24, 2006.

really left out of the public memory is the past of the independent localities that constitute Wuhan. Despite the daily inconveniences for many of its residents caused by the obstacle of rivers and the differences in local dialect, culture, and architecture, few people would still question why such a giant urban complex existed in the first place.

The history that people tend to forget is not long ago. In 1910, what we call Wuhan was still three independent towns, Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang that were separated by the Yangzi River, often referred to as “a barrier set by heaven,” and its largest tributary the Han River. The Yangzi was more than 1000 meters wide between Wuchang and Hankou, and about the same width from Wuchang to Hanyang. Since the most common means of transportation was by junks, it usually took a whole day to go between any two of these towns. Not that there was much need for people to make such a daily commute, because the three towns were independent of one another. Hankou, as William Rowe shows, was the largest commercial town of central China and had closer connections to other centers of long distance trade along the Yangzi than with its immediate neighbors.² Wuchang was distinct as the administrative center where the seat of the governor-general of Hubei and Hunan was located. Hanyang was a fledging industrial town. In less than fifty years, the three towns disappeared, and in their place emerged Wuhan, the largest Chinese city in terms of its urban

² William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, Stanford University Press, 1984, p. 32.

area. There were no compelling economic reasons to merge the three towns into a single city, neither was the condition of transportation and communication ready for it. In fact, it was not until 1957 that a bridge was built on the Yangzi to connect Wuchang and Hanyang. Why were these three widely separated and self-sustaining towns merged into a single city? Why did successive Chinese regimes insist on integrating geographically distant areas into a gigantic urban center when the necessary technology was not yet there? How does the story tell us about China's urban modernity?

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore in detail how the city of Wuhan was artificially created to be a mega-city during the first half of the twentieth century. The study identifies five historical periods key to the formation of Wuhan—the late Qing reform, the urban self recovery after the 1911 revolution, the modernist planning from 1927-1936, Wuhan as a wartime capital in the Anti-Japanese War (1937-1945), and the socialist urban reconstruction from 1949 to 1957. I argue that the city making process of Wuhan was closely associated with the national discourse of searching for nation and modernity in twentieth-century China. It was Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of Republican China, who first proposed to build “Great Wuhan” in 1911. Building “Great Wuhan” as a hub of a nation-wide system of water and railway transportation was central to Sun's plan of making modern China. It gained currency in the late 1920s as the Nationalist party that inherited Sun's mantle came to power. From then on, efforts to make “Great Wuhan”

always intensified at moments of national crisis and political change, through which the state consolidated its power and gained control over local society. However, the urban integration did not really succeed during the republican period for the lack of the means of technology and public support. Not until the beginnings of Communist administration in the area did Wuhan as a united municipality come into being, and not until the completion of the famous Yangzi River Bridge (1957) did large-scale intercity mobility become a reality.

Cities have been at the forefront of modern Chinese history for the last two decades, as scholars both within and outside of China shifted their focus from explaining the Communist revolution to understanding modernizing efforts in China. Scholars have investigated a broad range of issues related to urban life in modern China since the 1980s. Studies on the development of new institutions and infrastructure, such as the municipal government, the police, schools, bureaus of public hygiene, banks, and public utility companies, have brought to our attention a whole system of urban administration never previously examined.³ A well-established approach is to treat the city as an organic entity that developed more or less by its own internal dynamics. With its

³ Some examples of the new scholarship are Joseph Esherick, *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity, 1900-1950* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000); Michael Tsin, *Nation, governance, and Modernity in China: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990).

emphasis on the organizations of city dwellers along lines of native place, occupation, and so on, such scholarship has made valuable contributions to our understanding of the politics of urban life in terms of the complex interplay of various social groups. However, this emphasis on studying urban community tends to assume the existence of a “modern” city. This tendency is particularly clear in the field’s over privileging of Shanghai, China’s largest treaty port. As “China’s only real metropolis,” twentieth-century Shanghai has been held up as a yardstick of Chinese modernity.⁴ However, we know little about how Shanghai became such a pinnacle of modernity.

My project takes what is usually taken for granted, that is, the creation of the modern city in China, as its central focus. Cities such as Shanghai and Beijing that have been studied in the existing literature typically existed long before the twentieth century, which in no small way contributed to scholars’ emphasis on modern transformation in the city rather than of the city. The artificial ways that “Wuhan” was forced into being provides us a different angle to examine Chinese urban experience. Fearing that China might disintegrate in the face of a collapsing dynasty and foreign encroachment, officials of the late Qing and reformers, revolutionaries and engineers of the Republic developed an ardent desire and the commitment to rebuild a modern and unified China. In the discourse of the early twentieth century, with vast countryside and a weak

⁴ Frederic Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 3.

central government, the city proved to be a manageable social and political unit for significant modernizing efforts to achieve their goal. To many reformist officials, revolutionaries, and urban planners, the building of Wuhan out of the three separate cities was to create a physical statement for the integrated nation and a technologically modern China. Moreover, as the new kind of social-geographic entity, the city of Wuhan was also seen as a prescription to China's main illness, which in the eyes of Sun Yat-sen and other modernist reformers lies in that fact that people of China were "a plate of sand (*yipan sansha*)."⁵ The integration of Wuhan's cities would metamorphose the allegedly loose sand into concrete blocks to be cemented together.

As the result of urban reconstruction, the lives of people were shaken by the material changes as well as the discursive remapping of their world. The change of spatial consciousness and the sense of "place" in the course of creating "Great Wuhan" is another focus of my dissertation. Spatial consciousness constitutes an important aspect of China's modern experience but hasn't received much attention in the existing scholarship. As many scholars believe, the traditional city is not a functional administrative unit in the imperial China but the capital of an administrative area of at least county level.⁶ In such a

⁵ See, for example, Liang Qichao, "Shizhong dexing xiangfan xiangcheng ye," in *Yinbingshi wenji* (Taipei: 1960), 5:44; Sun Yat-sen, *Sanmin zhuyi* (Taipei, 1953), p. 48.

⁶ William Rowe. *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese city*, (Stanford, 1992), pp. 1-17; G.W. Skinner, ed. *The City in Late Imperial China*, (Stanford, 1977); Yinrong Xu. *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

definition, there is no clear demarcation between the city and its vast neighboring rural areas in terms of jurisdiction. Meanwhile, urban spatial segregation was usually associated primarily with families and clans in imperial China. The modern city is therefore an alien geopolitical concept out of the traditional geopolitical structure of (in descending order) the world or “all under Heaven” (tianxia), “country” (guo), “family” (jia), and person (ren). How did the new urban identity develop along the time? For my study, how was the “Great Wuhan” that went well beyond the daily experience of local residents introduced, contested, and established in the local society. My dissertation shows that as more and more people were mobilized and participated into the extremely ambitious development project of Wuhan, either through mass political campaigns or real urban construction and reorganization, they gradually expanded their notion of belonging beyond the confines of family and community to acquire a new identity of urban citizen.

However, the official attempt to mobilize people and to mold them into a cohesive collective was not always easy. It was inevitable that the state would have to confront the entrenched interests of the existing order. The merchant community in Hankou, for instance, proved to be difficult to deal with. As the largest commercial town of China, Hankou enjoyed a long history of autonomy and merchants had played the leading role in developing their own city.⁷ Not

⁷ William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, Stanford University Press, 1984.

only did merchants resist many of the initiatives of the government out of its own interests, but they also posed a problem in terms of their positioning in the new society. Rejecting any centralized urban plan that ignored regional variation and local practices, the merchant community in Hankou appealed to the community-based and place-centered development plans, which constitute alternatives to the idea of “Great Wuhan.” These independent-minded projects gradually lost their strong holds on local society. The Japanese invasion and increasing nationalism in the early twentieth century brought vitalities to the urban plan of “Great Wuhan.” It was the Communist mass mobilization and urban reconstruction after 1949 that organized the people of the three parts into a cohesive unit.

Studying Wuhan as a new city made in the first half of the twentieth century also allows me to focus on the connection between city creation and modernity. Instead of merely explaining “modern conditions,” my dissertation contributes to the existing scholarship by exploring “why they were/are modern.” Modernity, in this study, is not limited to material modernization expressed in a society’s meeting a set of western criteria for development, such as infrastructure, skyscrapers, or public utilities. It extends beyond these to refer to the prevailing political thought in twentieth century China that believes in modernization through gigantic state-sponsored enterprises and an overarching and concentrated source of power. The story of making a mega city of Wuhan also illustrates China’s collective fascination with technology, modern science,

and mastery over nature in reengineering the society. Both Chinese Nationalists and Communists were remarkably consistent in the “big” vision of modernity—gigantic and centralized, which ran across time and ideology and continues in shaping the contemporary urban landscape. Neither mountains nor rivers could stand in the way of the urban ambition. The Communists’ success in tempering the Yangzi River and molding landscapes in 1957 finally made the urban integration of Wuhan a physical reality. In such a definition of modernity, China was not a site of passive reception of modernity as defined by Western experiences but an active participant in its creation.⁸

The story I tell is more than just history of a locality. The urban ambition in building the mega city of Wuhan has been mirrored in other urban experiences across the nation. Bigness and supersized sprawl has undoubtedly marked the current urban revolution of China. China is now home to the world’s biggest airport and largest shopping mall, as well as some of the planet’s tallest buildings and longest bridges; it boasts the world’s largest automobile showrooms and the biggest gated community; it has built the most expansive golf course on earth and the biggest bowling alley, and even the world’s largest

⁸ A few examples of other scholarship on this issue are Shumei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-Garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Xiaobing Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996); Lydia Liu *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995).

skateboard park. The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangzi River, another mega project that was also proposed by Sun Yat-sen, displaced more than one million people and destroyed nearly a dozen cities.

Besides exploring the history and political culture of the obsession with bigness, the case study on Wuhan will also shed a new light on our understanding on the general discourse of modern China. The study of Chinese cities at this point is a series of local studies that has yet to be integrated into the reevaluation of modern Chinese history. As my project ties the conception and creation of Wuhan closely to nation-state building across different political regimes, it will make an important contribution to putting cities back into national history and help redefine the large picture. The case of Wuhan is particularly important in helping to locate crucial moments of rupture between tradition and modernity. The demise of the Qing dynasty in 1911 has been viewed as a superficial change, while the CCP victory in 1949 is regarded as a profound turning point. However, the story of Wuhan shows that the end of Qing and the beginning of the Republic meant drastic change in the way the modern city was conceptualized. On the other hand, the CCP victory over the Nationalist was not as significant a break as it is believed. After all, it was the PRC that finished what its political enemy had started.

Design and methodology: The dissertation is structured chronologically from 1889 to 1957 and consists of five chapters each having a thematic focus.

Chapter 1 describes the physical setting and the changing relationship of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang in the late Qing. The late Qing reform reinforced the natural boundary set by the rivers and designated Hankou as an official “city.” It facilitated the three cities to continue growing with distinctive urban function and identity: Wuchang as the political and education center, Hankou as the commercial city, and Hanyang as a newly established industrial center. The chapter also analyzes the challenges to the spatial feature and the political role that the traditional imperial city played as interior cities got involved into the foreign trade.

Chapter 2 investigates the contesting views and efforts in rebuilding the three cities during the first fifteen years after the revolution of 1911. The revolution that eventually overthrew the Qing dynasty began with a sudden military coup in Wuchang and spread to the other two cities. As the birthplace of the Republic, the cities faced as many challenges of reconstruction as the new Republic did. The chapter contrasts two rebuilding plans—the direct and total planning on “Great Wuhan” and the localized and privately funded plan on “Great Hankou.” Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of Republican China, called for building Wuhan out of three towns to be China’s “Chicago” in networks of transportation and commerce. “Great Wuhan” was a key part of Sun’s futuristic vision of modern China, a China of railways, modern ports, dams, and industrial enterprises developed by a powerful state. However, Sun’s idea was far beyond social and economic needs that the local society had and therefore was regarded

as unrealistic. The local government and merchants supported the place-based and community-centered urban reconstruction, which led to a golden age of growth in Hankou. The latter was not merely of different built form, but of an alternative society for China—the “confederation of provinces” ensuring the local self-government.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Nanjing decade (1927-1937), the most active ten years for the city building of Wuhan. The idea of “Great Wuhan” gained currency in 1926 as the Nationalists, the party that inherited Sun’s mantle, took national power. The chapter studies how “Great Wuhan” was promoted, implemented and negotiated in two urban planning projects in 1927 and 1936. Through urban theories, laws, regulations and maps, the newly established municipal government produced new knowledge of local geography, in which Wuhan was a scientifically measured and well designed social and geographical unit. Despite the official promotion, the territorial boundaries and the division of administrative functions became the subject of a long drawn-out quarrel between community leaders, municipal officials, and provincial officials. After 1931, the Wuhan municipal government fell apart and three parts remained separate.

Chapter 4 explores the intimate relationship between the creation of a mega-city of Wuhan and nationalism. It focuses on the Anti-Japanese War in 1938, when Wuhan was China’s de facto wartime capital. Through studying the wartime propaganda and the city’s defense, the chapter shows how nationalism

and the wartime experience reshaped the social and cultural life of the three cities and helped to establish “the Wuhan spirit,” a unified cultural identity.

Chapter 5 examines the success of making “Great Wuhan” through building China’s first bridge across the Yangzi River during the first decade of the People’s Republic of China. It analyzes why the CCP, a regime that took power relying on the support of peasants to defeat the Nationalists, was nevertheless determined to complete building Wuhan as a megacity. It also illustrates Chinese modernizers’ collective fascination with technology, modern science, and mastery over nature.

Chapter One:

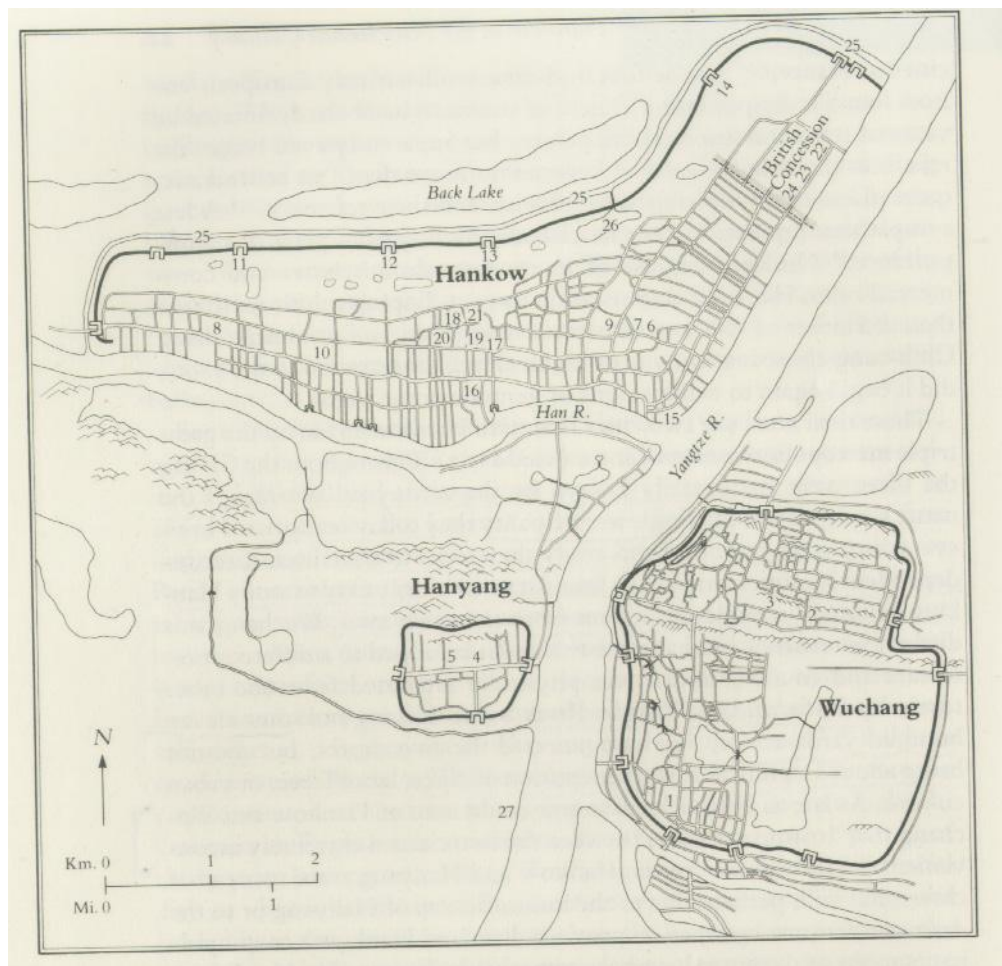
The Remapping of the Cities of Wuhan:

From the Empire's Political Center to the Battle Field of the "Trade War"

What struck most observers, particularly those from the West, about the late imperial Wuhan region were powerful waterways and its vibrant commercial activities. One enthusiastic mid-nineteenth-century European visitor had communicated his impressions in these terms: "I was never weary of contemplating the course of the two rivers, which seem to twine about the three large cities like azure ribbons. The Yangzi is really an inland sea, upon which porpoises disport themselves as on the surface of the ocean, and which bears the largest vessels on its rapid stream. The Han, although not so large as the river into which it flows, is nevertheless a noble stream, with brawling waves like the Durance, where great commotion also prevails."⁹ He exclaimed, with apparent delight, that "the aspect of Wuchang, Hanyang, and Hankou, surrounded by waters, which make the wealth the empire circulate into its very center, is really most imposing....The imagination of a European can easily realize the cities with their curved roofs; the barks perpetually crossing each other, and decorated like our vessels on gala days; the sailors and the populace with plaited hair, and broad bamboo hats: in short, all the minor details of this scene, which is at once

⁹ Joseph-Marie Callery; Melchoir Yvan, *History of the Insurrection in China: With notices of the Christianity, creed, and proclamations of the insurgents*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 65, Cornhill, 1854, p. 183.

comic and picturesque. But what the home-bred sons of our country cannot realize is the enormous plain, watered by rivers as fruitful as the Nile, and covered with trees and houses; and the three twin cities, larger than Marseilles and Lyons, and only separated by a river, which the strongest rowers can only cross after many hours of hard pulling.”¹⁰



Map 1 (three cities of Wuhan)¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid., P. 185.

¹¹ William Rowe, *Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1976-1889*, California: Stanford University Press, 1984, p. 22.

This description sets forth in a lively manner a western traveler's impression of the cities. In his eyes, commerce indeed had always been a hallmark of these Chinese cities. Wuchang, Hanyang, and Hankou, usually referred by contemporary Chinese as a brief term—"Wu-Han," lay at the gateway to the vast plain of Jiangnan, which comprised most of southeast and south central Hubei province and adjacent northern Hunan. The convenient geographic location formed them as the hub of a gigantic drainage system, linking the plain to the mountains and basins more than a thousand miles to the north, west, and south. The two rivers, the Yangzi and the Han, provided convenient water transportation for goods from Sichuan, western Hubei, and uplands of northwest China. Thanks to the geographic location, the Wuhan area, especially Hankou, served as a great port for the collection and sale of commodities in all of the empire. In subsequent years, more foreigners realized the prominent position of the cities in commerce. Japanese observers readily associated Hankou's position in the national commodities market with Chicago.¹² Resident missionaries described summarized the commercial potential of Hankou in these terms: "Commercially considered, Hankou is one of the most important cities of the East. To it, the native merchants, not only from all parts of Hubei province, but from all the surrounding provinces for hundreds of miles, go up. It is the rendezvous of the foreign merchant and the

¹² Kokichi Mizuno, *Kanko: chuo Shina jijo*. Tokyo: Fusanbo, 1907.

native buyer in central China—a wonderful emporium for trade—a Chinese cosmopolitan city.”¹³

Nevertheless, not everyone viewed the urban commerce with such fascination. In fact, commerce was generally left out of Chinese local history and literature in the late imperial era. In the eyes of Chinese emperor and officials, commerce was regarded as parasitic and therefore marginalized. Like its predecessor the Ming dynasty, the Qing emperors continued policies of encouraging agriculture and devaluing commerce. For example, a decree issued by Yongzheng emperor in the 5th year of his reign (1727) promoted farming as “the most valuable” among the four occupations, because “all officials, merchants, and craftsmen have to depend on peasants.”¹⁴ This agricultural value was preserved in imperial ideology that greatly shaped urban governance and local history. It was internalized in the process of forming local culture and history, as officials and Confucian scholars compiled local gazetteers and other historical documents. According to a late-nineteenth-century gazetteer, the cities of Wuchang and Hankou were represented as ideal cities of imperial China, chiefly inhabited by officials and their retainers and keeping a Confucian order

¹³ David Hill. *Hoopeh, China: its Claims and Call*, York, 1881, p1.

¹⁴ Bi Yingda, Liu Chunyin, “Wanqin Shiren Shangzhan Guannian de xingqi (The Origin of the ‘Trade War’ Thought among the Late Qing Literati, 晚清士人商战观念的兴起),” *Changchu xuebao*, Vol.24, no.1, 2005. The four occupations or “four categories of the people” was a hierarchic social class structure developed in ancient China. In descending order, these were the *shi* (gentry scholars), the *nong* (peasant farmers), the *gong* (artisans and craftsmen), and the *shang* (merchants and traders).

of life. “Scholars learned from the ancient time and loved dancing. Though poor, they still desired for Confucian learning and governmental service, ashamed to do other business. Villagers were simple and polite, and did either farming or fishing. Very few were merchants. Women living in the city worked mostly on paper-cut and dyeing, while those living in rural area wove and spun.”¹⁵ Even the unofficial historical documents largely preserved in private writings were clearly influenced by the cultural taste and Confucian way of thinking. *Hankou cong tan*, a gazetteer of Hankou composed by the best known sojourning literatus Fan Kai in 1882, contains the typical information concerning geographic features, local products, customs, astronomies, wars and disasters, local myths and legends, ancient sites, and famous people (mainly officials and scholars), with very little about commercial activities.

The Chinese idea of a city did not emphasize the urban role as a trade market but as a military and political center. The determinant of city status in imperial China was a simple one: to qualify, a locality needed to be the capital of an administrative area of at least county level. Therefore, a “city” did not originate as a natural product of the process of economic exchange, as it largely did in Europe, but rather in the conscious design of imperial rulers. Within this imperial system, Wuchang was the most significant city in the eyes of bureaucracy among the three. It held the highest official rank as the seat of the governor-general, the capital of Hubei *sheng* (province), of Wuchang *fu*

¹⁵ See the section of “local custom” in *Hubei tongzhi* (Taibei: 1967), vol.21.

(prefecture), and of Jiangxia *xian* (county). Hanyang, the second of the three cities in official rank, was the capital of Hanyang prefecture and of Hanyang *xian*. In official eyes, Hankou was never classed as a “city” (*cheng*), but referred as a “town” (*zhen*). Despite its size, national importance, and truly urban density of construction and population, in Chinese eyes (at least official eyes) Hankou was just part of Hanyang *xian*, legally no more than a suburb of Hanyang. The relationship of the three illustrates a highly centralized imperial administration, with different levels of local government, *xian* (country), *zhou* (prefecture), and *sheng* (province), leading up to the court of the Qing.

However, this traditional imperial notion of the “city” started to transform in the late nineteenth century, when the official-reformer Zhang Zhidong, arguably the nineteenth-century Qing Empire’s most influential official, conducted the self-strengthening reform in Hubei province. Along with the change was the emergence of a new city and the transformed city form in the Wuhan area. Zhang’s vigorous reform effort led to Hankou’s registration as an official city with the highest urban status among the three. In *Yinghuan quanzhi* (《瀛环全志》), a geographic textbook compiled by the Qing court in 1903, Hankou enjoyed a prominent position as same as the provincial capital, Wuchang.

“Wuchang, on the east bank of the Yangzi, served as the seat of the governor-general of Huguang (Hubei and Hunan). It stood at the confluence of the Yangzi and Han Rivers, opposite from the two cities of

Hankou and Hanyang on the west bank of the river. The cities straddle the river about ten miles wide. Junks are the convenient means of communication among the three. The provincial capital Wuchang is the center of China, a bustling city with population of 250,000 coming from all over the country. There is the bureau of the silver dollar, in which *longyuan* were minted and circulated widely. There are many western style schools built in early years, such as Wubei [a military school], Ziqiang (a foreign language college), and Nongwu (an agricultural institute). When the new education system has been standardized, most of their old names were changed. On the south bank outside weichang gate lay two newly established weaving and silk factories. They are of massive scale and employ about three thousand six hundred workers. Hankou's old name is Xiakou, a famous town. Today it has been promoted to be Xiakou *ting* under the rule of Hanyang prefecture. Because of its location and convenient water communication, business is flourishing. It is very densely populated, about 800,000 residents living there. Before it was opened as a treaty port, it had developed to be a large market town, one of the four most famous towns of China (*si da ming zhen*). Junks clouded and blocked the Yangzi. In the first year of the Tongzhi reign (1856-1875), Chinese and western steamships and boats gathered even more. The foreign concession was located in the north of the town, where broad roads, splendid high buildings, the

maritime customs, companies, and banks were located. Outside the concession lies the Chinese section, where the streets and lanes are narrow and crowded with houses, most easily attacked by fire. The Beijing-Hankou railway on the north and the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway on the south are the center of the area.”¹⁶

The shifting emphasis on the commercial significance of the cities reflected the re-adjustment of the urban governance in the last two decades of the Qing. As the Qing Empire lost the Opium War and hence became deeply involved in the foreign trade after the mid 1800s, the war mentality provided Chinese elites with a central theme for a critique of traditional Chinese urban administration. The notion of “trade war” adopted in Zhang Zhidong’s reform not only altered the urban landscape but more importantly created three new imperial cities with emphasis on commerce and industrialization.

In this chapter, I am primarily concerned with tracing the ways in which the rise of trade pressure and the East-West competitive mentality in the last two decades of the Qing altered the uniformity of the imperial urban form and made three independent cities of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. As will be shown, commercial and economic considerations replaced the traditional political and ideological concerns to command over cities’ physical environment and social practices. At the same time, I wish to explore how the late Qing Confucian officials living within this changing time viewed and designed the “city,” which

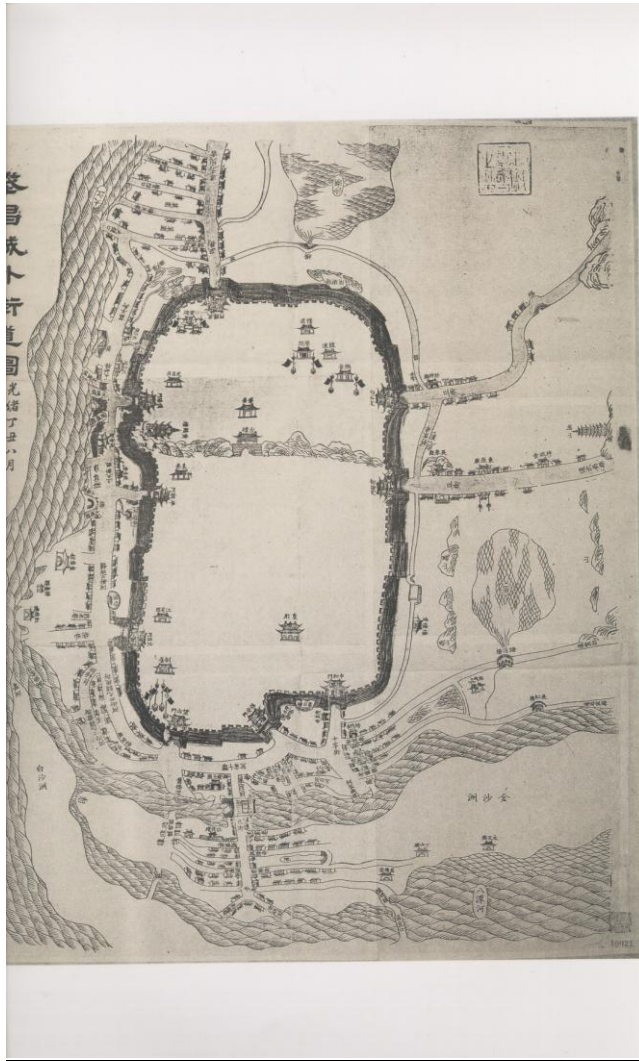
¹⁶ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, Wuhan: Wuhan chuban she, 2006, p. 234.

actively engaged in international trade and industrialization while was still retaining a deeply Chinese and Confucian nature.

The Early Imperial Urban Setting before 1889

When Zhang Zhidong first arrived in Wuchang in 1889, the urban life in the Wuhan area remained largely the same as it had been in the early Qing. Unlike Shanghai and other coastal cities, the interior area had received little western influence. Within the next two decades after Hankou was opened as a treaty port in 1861, the presence of the West had a very limited impact on local urban life. According to the maritime customs report, there were only 374 foreign residents in Hankou in 1892. These foreign officials, missionaries and merchants tended to “treat Hankou as a commercial outpost rather than a home away from home, like Shanghai and many of the other treaty ports.”¹⁷ The western influence was also diminished by the residence pattern. Walls were built to well separate the foreign community from the Chinese section.

¹⁷ William Rowe, *Hankou, Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford, 1984), p. 46.



Map 2: Wuchang (a city map of Wuchang, 1877)¹⁸

What distinguished the spatial landscape of the two official cities—Wuchang and Hanyang—was an imposing presence of the city walls in rectangular shape. The typical urban form indicated the fulfillment of their urban roles as the Empire’s administrative centers. The nine-gate city wall of Wuchang with three thousand meters in circumference was constructed during the Ming

¹⁸ *Wuhan li shi di tu ji*, Beijing: Zhongguo di tu chu ban she, 1998, p. 23.

dynasty (1368-1644).¹⁹ It was built much larger in area than Hanyang, because of its high administrative rank. As the center of four levels of administration—the seat of the governor-general of Huguang (Hubei and Hunan), the capital of Hubei province, Wuchang prefecture, and Wuchang county, Wuchang was a home of officials in the highly centralized administrative system, a prefect, a magistrate, intendants, provincial treasurer, provincial judge, governor, and governor-general. As a Western writer described in 1883, Wuchang city was first and foremost “the residence of provincial officers, the Manchu garrison, and a literary population of influence.”²⁰ Therefore, the government and residents of the political center were always under a closer secure inspection and social control.²¹

On the north side of the Yangzi was the other official city, Hanyang. As a prefectural and county capital, Hanyang held a lower administrative status and thus had a smaller size of the city wall. A three-gate city wall was rebuilt in 1880, after the old one was decimated by the Taiping rebellion.²² The urban area the wall enclosed was less than the old one, indicating the decline of Hanyang’s administration in the post-Taiping era.²³

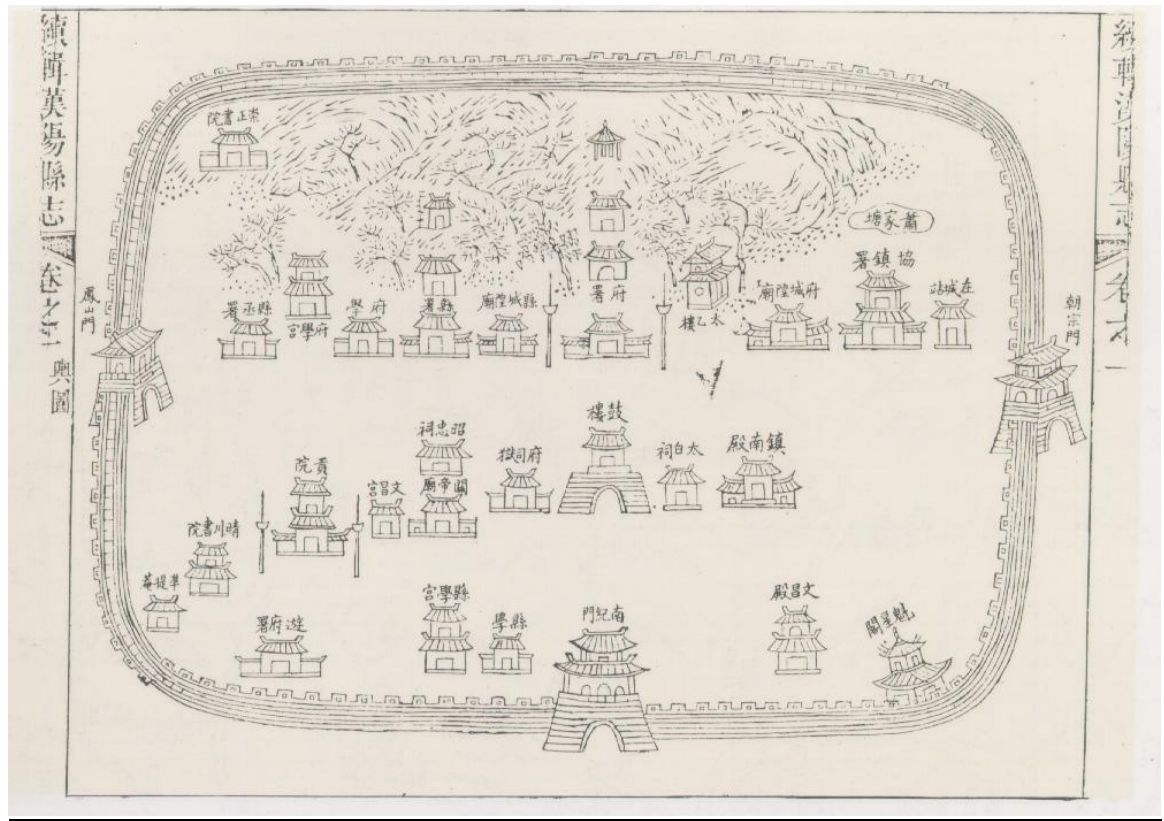
¹⁹ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, Wuhan: Wuhan chu ban she, 2006, p. 5.

²⁰ William Rowe, *Hankou: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, p. 20.

²¹ *Jiangxia xianzhi*, Taipei Shi: Cheng wen chu ban she, 1975 (1881), p. 42.

²² *Hanyang xianzhi*, Taipei Shi: Cheng wen chu ban she, 1975 (1883), p. 49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1881, p. 52.



Map 3: Hanyang (a map of Hanyang city from *Xu hanyang xianzhi*

[Continuation of the Hankou Gazetteer] compiled in 1861.)

Walls have been so central to the Chinese idea of a city that the traditional words for city and wall are identical, the character *cheng* standing for both. Walls were built essentially to protect palaces, temples, granaries, residences, and certain natural resources against barbarian invasion and peasant rebellion. They were the privilege only given to those places with administrative significance, such as imperial and provincial capitals plus prefectural- and

county-level capitals—the *fu*, *zhou*, and *xian* cities. Before the introduction of modern artillery, Chinese city walls were almost indestructible. Their solidarity made any attempt to breach them by mining or bombardment a difficult task and could defend cities from the attack of the largest armies. The history of Wuchang and Hanyang includes many tales of famous sieges and heroic defenses, while Hankou was an un-walled town despite its commercial significance.

A strict spatial order was imposed within the city walls of Wuchang and Hanyang to symbolize imperial rule. The governmental buildings (the *yamen*) and official mansions and associated buildings (including the Confucian temple, the examination hall, the temple of the City God, public offices, and residences of officials) were located near the center of the cities. In Wuchang, the official buildings and religious institutions were mainly located on the highland to the north of the city, clustering around the city's main thoroughfare—*changjie*. (See map 2.) In Hanyang, the prefectural and county official buildings were lined along the major road, *zhengjie*. Also located centrally, at a major crossroads, were the drum tower, from which the hourly watches were sounded, and the bell tower, whose chief function was to warn the populace of approaching hostile troops or bandits. (See map 3.) Besides the government *yamens*, officially sponsored popular temples were another prominent features of the two cities, such as Altar of Land and Grain (社稷坛), and *wenchang* temple (文昌庙).

The physical form and the land use of the two administrative cities illustrate the political consideration and the cultural taste of an agricultural society. As the map shows, large proportions of the total intramural area were given over to cultivation and to lakes, ponds, streams, canals, springs and other bodies of water. The cities' ability to last out a military siege or cut themselves off from rural disorder was greatly enhanced by intramural agriculture and an assured water supply. In the Wuhan area, there were about fourteen big lakes and more than one hundred and thirty small lakes and ponds.²⁴ Cities situated in the Middle Yangzi regions naturally had a large number of internal canals and other waterways within the walls. These lakes also acted as natural reservoirs and helped the cities to keep water during the dry season and release extra when flooded. At the same time, open areas with lakes and ponds were devoted to gardens and parks for private recreational purposes. The city of Hanyang was famous for beautiful privately owned gardens. It was described by a western visitor as "an aristocratic, quiet place, chiefly inhabited by officials and their retainers."²⁵

The strict spatial arrangement prioritized administrative function and limited residence and mercantile activities to the peripheral area. The residence and commercial district of Wuchang was separated from the administrative zone by the Turtle Mountain. Population density was higher in the southern part of

²⁴ *Hubeisheng shuili zhi*, Beijing: shuli shuidian chuban she, 2000, p. 173.

²⁵ William Rowe, *Hankou: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, p. 21.

the city than the central area where official buildings and religious institutions were located. Even in the non-administrative zone of Wuchang and Hanyang, the poor and merchants were often forced out to allow officials to build houses. There were regulations which prohibited the renting of most of the houses in Wuchang.²⁶ The commercial area of Wuchang where clothing stores, tea houses, restaurants, and pawn shops were clustered, was located at the southern corner of the city. In Hanyang, commercial activities were usually limited to the three streets: double street (*shuangjie*), *dongzheng* street, and *xianzhen* street.

Outside city gates, the relaxation of urban control led to the growth of suburban markets where unofficial commercial functions aggregated. Since gates channeled all traffic to and from a sector of the city's hinterland, the areas immediately outside them were favored sites for markets and businesses serving the rural populace. One of the suburban markets was located on Parrot Island (*yingwu zhou*) in Wuchang's harbor, where, by the Song dynasty, large-scale merchants from six or more provinces were said to congregate. This island of sand had completely eroded by the late Ming. Another sandbank that surfaced at the Hanyang shore around 1769 and later served as a regional timber market, was also named Parrot Island. Apparently even larger was Wuchang's commercial suburb South Market (*nanshi*), which claimed to host merchants from nine provinces and described in the Song History as the site of tens of

²⁶ *Wuhan wenshi ziliao wenku*, Wuhan: Wuhan chuban she., vol. 3, (The Industry and Economy Section), 1999, pp. 503-504

thousands of commercial houses.²⁷ During the Ming dynasty, South Market was overridden by the rise of Hankou.

Hankou, west of the Yangzi and north of the Han, was a newly emerged commercial market in the early Ming dynasty and soon replaced the previous markets. Its appearance was the result of a sudden act of nature. In the Ming Chenghua reign (1465-1487), the Han River suddenly shifted its lower course and came to enter the Yangzi at a point just north of Hanyang city. For such a reason, the Han River was less turbulent and joined the Yangzi river more peacefully. It made the Han's new northern bank a safer and more attractive commercial harbor. Gradually more people and merchants moved there and a commercial market grew up in the area.²⁸ The new market quickly became a flourishing center of interregional trade. By the late Ming, it became the center for the gathering and distributing of bulk domestic goods. By the sixteenth century, Hankou's "tens of thousands of households" made it larger than the provincial capital, and indeed the largest city in Hubei province.²⁹ It was placed in the company of the other three major commercial towns as the so-called "four great *zhen*," including Jingde in jingxi, zhuxian in Henan, and fushan in Guangdong.

²⁷ Fan Kai, *Hankou congtao* (Hankou compendium), 1822. Repr. Taipei, 1975. 1. 16 and 3.1; Wang Baoxin, *Xu Hankou congtao* (Continuation of the Hankou Compendium), 1916; repr. Wuhan, 2002. 1. 5.

²⁸ Fan Kai, *Hankou congtao*. 3.1.

²⁹ Wang Baoxin, *Xu Hankou congtao*, 1.5 and 1.8.

As a commercial town that was not officially planned, Hankou sets a contrast to its neighbors—administrative cities of Wuchang and Hanyang. Far from being the orderly square grid of a planned administrative city, the town perched on a liver-shaped stretch of sand, bounded all sides by waters. The Han lay to the south and the Yangzi lay to the east, whereas in its landward side the town was belted by the Yudai river, a heavily diked canal and tributary of the lower Han. Architecturally, the town lacked a city-god temple, which was the focus of community life, common to all county seats. Moreover, for most of its history Hankou lacked a city wall, a fact that had not only deep ritual significance but drastic effect on the military vulnerability of the town and regional officials' willingness to expend their energies in its defense. The street layout of Hankou also had suggested little official design but was marked by pragmatic irregularity. The whole urban landscape indicates the primacy of commerce rather than administration. The most prominent buildings of Hankou were not city walls nor government yamens, but those commercial structures, such guildhalls, warehouses, and mercantile emporia, which were occasionally multistory.³⁰ The handsome, broad main avenues belonged to trade, particularly to the city's great wholesale warehouses; while the government offices remained squat, humble affairs hidden away on back streets.

³⁰See *Shinain haiguan baogao (Ten Year Maritime Customs report)*, Hongkong, chengtian shuju, 1989, p. 27

Merchants rather than officials were the master of the town. According to William Rowe's research, Hankou was the most densely populated city in the world with a population of close to a million by around 1890.³¹ Nine out of ten urban inhabitants were immigrants. Merchants from various parts of the empire competed with each other to buy or sell agricultural produce such as beans, hemp, tea, sugar, and vegetable wax. The regional trade also attracted poor peasants from the neighboring rural area, who worked as coolies to carry the commodities in harbors. The commercially orientated life can be best illustrated by Hankou's famous all-night market near the river confluence of the Yangzi and the Han, where most of the town's wine shops, opium dens, bathhouses, restaurants, and teahouses were located. In the eyes of a guest merchant in Hankou, the market was delightfully mixed with a cacophony of local speeches, itinerant peddlers announcing their wares by characteristic drums, the noisy mah-jongg parlors into which people of all classes seemed crowded until all hours of the night.³² As one would expect, this sort of life-style was condemned by official-scholars, who noted the jarring contrast with Confucian prescriptions for frugality and simplicity. Literati and officials continually deplored Hankou

³¹It is impossible to arrive at reliable population figures for nineteenth-century Hankou. The problem has to do with the fact that population was subject to great seasonal fluctuations between periods of high and low market activity. Also, Chinese official figures in periodic *piao-jia* enrollments based on farming households gave us little idea of the absolute totals of the town's population.

³² Xu Huandou, *Hanyang fuzhi* (hanyang prefecture gazetteer), *Hankou Xiaozhi*, 1915, repr. Nanjing, 2001, p. 17

merchants' "cunning" (jiaohua, 狡猾) and narrow-minded "profiteering" (shili, 势力). As we can see, Hankou was geographically, economically as well as culturally a separate place differing from its two neighboring administrative cities.

Though the Qing administration failed to admit Hankou into its hierarchy of administrative central places, it hardly ignored the town or the problem of governing it. Since its sudden creation, Hankou was put into the jurisdiction of Hanyang County. The entire county of Hanyang was divided into eight districts, or wards (fang, 坊), four of which lay within Hankou. With the rapid economic and population growth, the solution adopted for Hankou was an expedient one, which simply added the number of officials on the scene. From the late Ming, two sub-magistrates were assigned to help the Hanyang magistrate govern the increasingly complex urban affairs in Hankou, with each supervising two of the four wards, from east to west, juren(居仁), youyi (由义), xunli (巡礼), dazhi (大智). The sub-magistrate's duties included supervising local bao-jia matters, controlling influxes of refugees from the countryside, arresting and interrogating criminal suspects, investigating land title disputes, hearing litigation, and other affairs requiring an intimate familiarity with the population and territory they governed.³³ In the tenth year of Yongzheng reign (1732), a higher rank official, Hankou tongzhi, who was the Hanyang prefect's subordinator, resided in

³³ Fan Kai, *hankou congtan*, p. 87.

Hankou. The Hankou tongzhi was charged with bigger and more complicated issues that need cooperation among different counties, such as food supply, arresting criminal suspects, Yangzi river defense, and the river construction works.³⁴ During the late Qing, the foreign presence brought about another change. A new figure, Han Huang de dao (汉黄德道) was introduced to the administration at Hankou. For a long time, it was the most senior official not only in the town but in the county and indeed the prefecture of Hanyang. The administration contented itself with a series of improvisations. By the late Qing, the town of Hankou was administered by a plethora of overlapping, centrally appointed bureaucratic functionaries.

To sum up, the urban setting and the comparison of Wuchang, Hanyang and Hankou illustrate the long-term development of the Chinese notion of the imperial “city” embedded in the Qing bureaucracy—a administrative and military center with the adversarial attitude to commerce shaped by Confucian mentality and governing a vast territory with relatively less strict social control. Chinese imperial city assumes more symbolic significance and is far from a real social and political entity like the European counterpart. A wall stands for the imperial rule rather than a demarcation separating city from its rural areas. As many scholars acknowledged, the urban-rural continuum in traditional China rests upon evidence from styles in architecture and dress, from evidence about

³⁴ Pi Mingxiu, *Hankou wubainian*, [The Five Hundred Year History of Hankou], Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p.15.

urban and rural attitudes in elite and popular psychology, from the structure and character of cultural activities, and even from some glimpses into the pattern of economic life.³⁵ The magistrate, as the chief executive of a county or a prefecture, was expected to be familiar not only with intramural area but with all aspects of the local situation and to assume the responsibility for everything within the whole territory under his jurisdiction. With only roughly 400 magistrates to rule a population of millions, it was impossible for “the one person government” to hold tight social control over the local society. In most time, magistrates could only work merely as a “taxing and policing agent” and a representative of the centralized state.³⁶ A great deal of administration at the level below the centrally appointed bureaucrats was dealt through gentry-elite mediation, guilds, volunteer fire-fighting and militia corps, charities, and labor gangs.

Cities as the battle field of the “trade war”

The traditional notion of an imperial city faced great challenge, as the Wuhan area was further absorbed into international trade after 1890. This process began with the opening of Hankou as a treaty port in 1861. In the first two decades, western influence exerted limited impact on local life, due to the

³⁵ William Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977 p. 119.

³⁶ See in Ch’u Tung-tzu, *Local Government in China under the Qing* (Cambridge, 1962); William Rowe, *Hankou: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*.

small size of the foreign community and separate residence pattern. Until 1892, there was only one concession established by the British and about 374 foreign residents lived there.³⁷ These foreign inhabitants, primarily officials, missionaries and merchants, tended to “treat Hankou as a commercial outpost rather than a home away from home, like Shanghai and many of the other treaty ports.”³⁸ In addition to the small size of the settlement, western influence was further diminished by the fact that it was separated from the Chinese section by walls. Not only were Chinese prohibited from entering or doing businesses in the foreign concession, foreigners could not visit the Chinese section and needed to have permission to enter the city of Wuchang.³⁹

The following fifty years witnessed the increased foreign trade expansion into the interior area of China. The Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 following China’s humiliating defeat by Japan forced the Qing court to allow foreigners to set up factories and travel freely into inland China. The lift of the ban gave an impetus for western countries to establish more concessions in Hankou. Starting from 1895 to 1898, four more foreign concessions were established, first German, then Russian, French, and the last Japanese. The five concessions were laid side by side, together building a 3,600 meter long river road. Russia was the first one who set up its own factory in Hankou and was

³⁷ Pi Mingxiu ed., *Wuhan tongzhi*, p. 125.

³⁸ William Rowe, *Hankou: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889*, p. 46.

³⁹ William Mesny, *Mesny’s Chinese Miscellany* (Shanghai, 1905), v.3, p. 20.

followed by Britain, German, Japan, and America respectively. All of the foreign factories took advantage of the low-priced labor and rich raw materials in Hubei, Hunan, An’hui, and Jiangxi provinces, and invested primarily on food processing, such as tea, egg, bean oil, meat.⁴⁰

Deeply involved into the foreign trade, Hankou became a center for collecting and processing native goods and an outlet for western industrial commodities. The westerners simply “plugged in” to an existing system of trade at Hankou and transformed it into part of the large foreign trade network. The products that were largely demanded by the international market replaced official salt to dominate trade in Hankou.⁴¹ For instance, tea, which used to play a far more modest role in domestic trade, emerged to be the most important item of trade. For most western observers in late nineteenth century, the mention of Hankou immediately calls to mind the trade in “China Tea.” Besides tea, foreign merchants also controlled other major items of trade. The British merchants took the leading role in egg and red tea trade. Large proportions of fur, oil and cotton were exported to Germany and Japan. At the same time, a large number of western merchandised commodities flooded into the Wuhan area, like cotton textiles, wool textiles, hardware, western medicine, and food products. By the

⁴⁰ Su Yunfeng, *Zhongguo xiandaihua de quyuan yanjiu, Hubei, 1860-1916*, [The study of Chinese Regional Modernization, Hubei, 1860-1916], Taipei: zhongyang yanjiuyuan jingdaishi yanjiu suo, p. 119.

⁴¹ The salt accounted for a huge percentage of the total trade in Hankou. In China, the importance of salt as a dietary requirement and a food preservative made it a major item of interregional trade. The Wuhan area had long hosted a salt depot of the first importance in China.

late nineteenth century, Hankou was no longer a stable domestic regional market but was affected by ups and downs of the volatile international market.

It is under such circumstances that Zhang Zhidong, the newly appointed Huguang governor-general launched the unprecedented economic, educational, and military institutional reform as a response to the western expansion. From his palatial *yamen* he wielded direct political authority over three provinces and had influence throughout central China as the highest-ranking official in the region. By the time of his appointment, Zhang's self-strengthening reform agenda was a well-known national model, best summarized in his phrase "Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning for practical development (zhong xue wei ti xi xue wei yong, 中学为体, 西学为用)."⁴² He was one of the most vocal advocates for strengthening China through learning Western technology, military and industry in order to meet western powers as an equal, while deeply cherishing Confucian learning as the essence of Chinese culture. His career had followed the classic bureaucratic pattern, beginning with winning the top *jinshi* degree through passing the top level civil service exam, elevating to the Imperial Academy, and serving for more than one decade as a governor before he came to Wuchang. In 1887 when he served as a governor-general of Liangguang (Guangdong and Guangxi provinces), the war with France had convinced him--despite his xenophobic tendencies--of the need of borrowing

⁴²Daniel Bays, *China Enters the Twentieth Century: Chang Chih-tung and Issues of a New Age, 1895-1909*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1978.

from the West. Zhang's most far-reaching attempts to modernize China occurred during his eighteen year tenure as governor-general of Hunan and Hubei Provinces, where he gained the reputation as a modernizer and political reformer even while retaining a devotion to the Qing traditional order.⁴³

Zhang Zhidong possessed great drive and imagination as a provincial administrator. Central to his efforts to strengthen the Qing empire was his advocating to adopt the idea—“trade war (shangzhan, 商战),” which was first raised by Zeng Guofan, the governor-general of *liangjiang* in 1862 shortly after China’s defeat in the second opium war.⁴⁴ By the late 1890s, the term of “trade war” gained currency among a group of urban-based elite and merchants, who were ever more frustrated to see the loss of China’s rights and sovereignty after the Sino-Japanese war. Zhang drafted a series of important memorials to the emperor (for action by the Empress Dowager Cixi) on the need to develop commerce. He repeatedly suggests the rationale for why the West became so powerful and why such “war mentality” might be called for. As he argued,

⁴³ The governor-general of Lianghu (Hunan and Hubei provinces) was the longest administrative post that Zhang Zhidong ever had in his life.

⁴⁴ According to the research done by Wang Er’ming, the term “trade war” was first seen in Zeng Guofan’s letter to Mao Hongbing, a Hunan governor. In the letter, Zeng compared “trade war” with the old term “farming war” promoted by a famous legalist, Shang Yang, who saw agriculture as the foundation of Qin dynasty. Zeng argued that Western countries would fall apart eventually just like the Qin dynasty. However, Zeng also urged China to learn about international trade and prepared for a “trade war” with the West, since “they [the westerners] had succeeded [in trade] since their arrival, despite the tariff restriction and inspection on China’s side.” See Zeng guofan, *Zengwenzhengong shuzha* (曾文正公书札), Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 2002, vol. 17, p.44.

“[T]he western countries placed trade first so that their power extended to the world as their commerce expanded.”⁴⁵ He believed that the Qing Empire could only regain its power and sovereignty through winning in the battlefield of the “trade war.” He even warned conservative officials “[H]ow could China only survive through the military force without considering trade factor (看以后实势，中国岂能以兵存，乃以商存)?”⁴⁶

Zhang’s most far-reaching attempts to strengthen China in the “trade war” took place in Wuhan’s three towns, where he established many leading industrial enterprises. In Wuchang, he established cotton mills, silk factories, ceramic-tile works, and tanneries. The enterprises at Hanyang that Zhang Zhidong had started included the Hanyeping Iron and Steel Works, the brick factory, and the wire and nail factory. In Hankou, Chang initiated railroad and telegraph construction, and the Peking-Hankou Railway was completed largely as a result of his extended efforts from 1889 to 1906. Sitting at the apex of China’s domestic trade and close to the seat of Hubei governor and the governor-general of Huguang, the Wuhan area provide Zhang a great geographic location to realize his ambitious reform plans.

However, the transformed urban environment turned out to be a mixed blessing. What particularly hampered Zhang’s progress of reform was the

⁴⁵ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwenxiangong QuANJI* (The Collected Edition of Zhang Zhidong’s Literature), Taipei: Wen hai chu ban she, 1970, vol.3, p.1326.

⁴⁶ Zhang Jixu, *Zhang wenxiang gong zhi ‘e ji* (The History of Zhang Zhidong in Governing Hubei), Taipei: Taiwan kan ming shudian, 1966, p.83.

gradual losing control of the Qing empire over land and even people at the lower level of the urban society. In the Wuhan area, this trend began with the establishment of the British concession, which was originally designed in 1861 to be a settlements reserved exclusively for Westerners. Except for a handful of farmers already living there at the time the settlement was created, Chinese were banned from purchasing and renting land within the boundaries of the settlement either for residential or commercial purposes. The site of the British concession was located along the Yangzi River, north of the densely populated Chinese town. This area covered an area from the Yangzi River in the east to Boundary Road in the west, and from *hualou* street in the south to *ganlu* temple in the north, a total area of about 458 Chinese *mu* (76 acres). In 1865, British settlers constructed a river bund for flood protection. Since then, the concession grew fast and attracted merchants of more than twenty countries.

According to the traditional Confucian notion that “all the lands under heaven belong to the emperor; all people under Heaven are subjects of the emperor (普天之下，莫非王土；率土之滨，莫非王臣),” foreigners were in theory not allowed to purchase land within the area but were permitted to permanently rent real property there. This is an early example of how the Qing ruler saved face while granting privileges to foreigners. Meanwhile, the land regulations prohibited Chinese from purchasing and renting property and land within the boundaries of the settlement either for residential or commercial purposes. Chinese inhabitants in the area of the foreign settlement were

gradually evacuated. This system of residential segregation was a mechanism that the Qing authorities adopted to limit foreign influence and minimize disputes between local people and the “barbarians.” The word “*yi* (foreign or uncivilized)” that was used by Qing authorities to refer to the West demonstrates the moral and cultural superiority critical to the classical conception of governance in the late imperial era. The power for the bureaucratic state to hold the empire together, as Yu Yingshi points out, lies in not only the external regulation through institutionalized government or laws but more importantly the internal self-regulation based on Confucian ethical principles.⁴⁷ According to this model of governance, the ways in which a good local magistrate controlled the people and land under his charge were not through a tight and direct social control but through “teaching the people” (*jiaomin*), promulgating the norms of the classical culture by instructing the people in the rites, and “enriching the people” (*fumin*) with efforts in lightening tax burdens; extending agricultural acreage and irrigation system, managing flood control, famine relief and civil construction projects.⁴⁸

However, the rapid growth of the foreign concession greatly challenged the absolute sovereignty claimed by the Qing authorities. The westerners’

⁴⁷ Yu Yingshi, “Handai xunli yu wenhua chuanbuo” (The Model Officials of the Han Period and Its Cultural Propagation), in Yu ed., *Shi yu zhongguo wenhua* (The Literati and Chinese Culture), Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987, pp. 129-216.

⁴⁸ William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 327.

demand for more lands increased dramatically after 1895, as China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war and the treaty of Shimonoseki allowed foreigners to set up business and factories in interior China. Hankou witnessed the expansion of the five foreign concessions from 1895 to 1898. They lay side by side and built a 3,600 meter long river Bund together. Through pressing political negotiation with the Qing government and illegally purchasing private lands from Chinese merchants and peasants, the British concession successfully added one third of its original size and became the largest foreign settlement in Hankou. Four years later, the French consul, Chassain de Marcilly, was not happy with the fact that France had no easy access to the newly built railway as the British concession had and made a request for extension. The official boundary was resettled in November 1902 by Chassain de Marcilly and Huangde *daotai* Qin Fuzhuang. The new concession extended into the Chinese section and even forced the Qing government to dismantle part of the separating wall. Followed French foot step of spreading, the Japanese officials and merchants secretly purchased or rented a vast amount of land in the north. The "growth" of the settlement was later used by the Japanese consul Mizuno Kokichi as a fact to prove that the original size of the area could not meet the need for accommodation. On February 9th 1907, Japanese concession acquired a land of 375 Chinese *mu* and ranked second in terms of area.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Yuan Jicheng, *Hankou zuijie zhi* Wuhan: Wuhan chuban she, 2003, p. 239.

country	Date Established	Area (<i>mu</i>)	Date Expanded	Area added (<i>mu</i>)	Total area (<i>mu</i>)
Britain	March, 1861	458.33	Aug., 1898	337.05	795.4
Germany	Oct., 1895	600			600
Russia	June, 1896	414			414.65
France	June, 1896	187	Nov., 1902	305	492
Japan	July, 1898	247	Feb., 1907	375.25	622.75

(Source: Yuan Jicheng, *Hankou zujue zhi*. Wuhan: Wuhan chuban she, 2003)

What further complicated the land ownership and the underlying social relations in the Wuhan area was the increasing collusion of foreign merchants and Chinese residents to illegally purchase and sell private lands. The land actually used by foreigners increased fivefold in merely nine years from 1892 to 1901.⁵⁰ Most of the land was gained through illegal purchase and rent. Stimulated by the potential profits that could be made through real estate and railway transportation, foreign merchants encroached on lands on the northern outskirts of Hankou, close to the Peking-Hankou railway. The landscape was dominated by cotton and rice fields, as well as uncultivated fields of reeds.⁵¹ The

⁵⁰ *Shinain haiguan baogao (Ten Year Maritime Customs report)*, p. 32

⁵¹ Ye Diaoyuan, *Hankou Zu zhi ci jiaozhu*, repr. Wuhan, 1985, p. 35.

foreigners usually hired Chinese merchants to negotiate with natives by offering them a much higher price than normal. In 1898, the situation got worse to a point that shocked the Jiangnan *daotai*, the most senior official who “supervised matters of trade with foreigners.” He was angry and worried after learning that much of the land near the Wusheng city gate was taken by westerners. In his memorial to the governor-general, he ordered the magistrate of Jiangxia County to investigate the fraud. At the same time he sent letters to all foreign consuls asking for cooperation for the return of the illegal land contracts to the Chinese government. Despite the local government’s efforts, things did not improve much in Hankou. The illegal land purchase practices continued to be one of major concerns in the governor-general’s reports in 1899. Driven by commercial profits, more Chinese got involved, such as local bullies, compradors, and even governmental runners. They were always condemned by local officials as a group of “cunning people” who conspired with foreigners and took the advantage of administrative loopholes.⁵²

One painful lesson that the late Qing officials learned about the urban based East-West competition was through a ten-year land dispute with Belgium. This small country of northwest Europe was entrusted by the Qing court with providing loans for the construction of the Beijing-Hankou railroad in the late nineteenth century. Belgium took the opportunity to establish its own settlement with a land of more than 600 *mu* (one *mu* equals to 0.0667 hectares) through

⁵² Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang wenxianggong quanji*, vol. 2, p. 1863.

purchasing from local residents at a price as low as 10 taels per *mu*.⁵³ In 1898, the Belgian consul decided to make it an official “Belgian Settlement.” This request was refused by Zhang Zhidong, who insisted that “the Belgians only had right to rent and live in the area of the railway company.”⁵⁴ Zhang even forced all the Belgians to move out after the construction was completed. The land dispute between the Hubei provincial government and the Belgian government lasted for ten years. Eventually, the provincial government made a compromise to buy the land back at a price that was 136 times more than the original price.

Besides land, a further and related problem was the Qing Empire’s losing control over its people. This was especially true in Hankou. With its increasing involvement in the treaty port system, more and more Chinese merchants in Hankou were absorbed into the new economy controlled by the West. A group of special merchants, called *maiban*, became local tycoons, who made good fortunes in commissions by arranging deals for the westerners. As for the old trading elite and small merchants, their business was more or less dependent on the foreign trade. It even became a common practice for Chinese merchants in Hankou to register bogus “foreign firms” under a foreign principal owner. In doing so, merchants were able to enjoy the duty exemption at the liken stations when transporting goods between Hankou and other interior markets. Moreover, a large number of labor workers and coolies in Hankou relied on foreign

⁵³ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, (the late Qing part I), p. 112.

⁵⁴ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwexianggong quanji*, vol. 2, p.1364.

factories and businesses to earn a livelihood. For example, the number of Chinese workers in Russian tea-brick factory in Hankou alone had already reached about 2,000.⁵⁵

A frugal and humble conduct intrinsic to the model of Confucian life was less cherished in local people's daily life. By the late nineteenth century, the clothing made of foreign fabric was preferable to Chinese cotton as the first choice for people in the Wuhan area to wear in visiting friends during holiday.⁵⁶ As for food, western alcohol, like whisky, champagne, and beer, were the most popular drink in parties hosted even by middle class families.⁵⁷ Chinese residents were encouraged to consume cheap western industrial commodities, things like pencils, umbrellas, and soap, easily available at local stores.⁵⁸

The urban-based "trade war" presented late imperial rulers with an administrative dilemma that the traditional governance was not fully able to resolve. With sound knowledge of local conditions and the dedication to China's self-strengthening through new programs of reform, Zhang Zhidong worked most diligently to refine the urban bureaucratic governance, this process entailing institutional innovations and a compromise of Confucian principles with the urgency of the "trade war." Central to Zhang's efforts to regain the

⁵⁵ Xu Huandou, *Hankou xiaozhi*, p.73.

⁵⁶ "Hankou zhibu", in *dongxi shangbao*, vol. 60, 1900, pp.10, 18.

⁵⁷ Zeng Zhaoxiang, Zhu jinyan, ed., *Hubei jindai jingji maoyi shiliao xueji* (The Selected Historical Sources on Economy and Trade of Hubei), no. 4, p. 80.

⁵⁸ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (late Qing part I), p. 161.

control over land and people “under the heaven” was remapping Hankou into the Empire’s reconstructed urban system.

Zhang’s most comprehensive, and very likely most practical, contribution to integrate Hankou into a new urban commercial system came in a memorial he presented to the Empress Dowager Cixi in July of 1898. His most urgent recommendation in the memorial was to establish a new commercial institution—Commerce Bureau (*shangwu chu*) in both Hankou and Shanghai, directly supervised by high ranking officials with commercial skill and knowledge.⁵⁹ The bureau (*chu*) was a type of functionally specific management unit, which began to appear in many areas of urban governance in the post-rebellion decades, such as Telegraph Bureau (1885). In Zhang’s view, the establishment of the Commerce Bureau in two most important treaty ports would help the Qing emperor to oversee the commercial activities and regain the control over the trade route of the Yangzi River between Shanghai and Hankou.

He went further, arguing above all for the strategic position Hankou had in the “trade war.” Zhang’s point of departure was the familiar reference to the need for China to produce its own commodities and the consequent necessity to develop natural resources richly preserved in inland China. Before 1850, Hankou was already one of the largest and most sophisticated trading centers of China, a center mainly for the gathering and distributing of native commodities. Therefore, Hankou provided access to the wealthy natural resources.

⁵⁹ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwenxiangong quanji*, vol. 3, p. 1426.

Meanwhile, unlike Shanghai and other coastal cities, Hankou was an interior town and therefore most of the distribution channels for native goods were in fact still undertaken by Chinese merchants. Moreover, as Zhang suggested in the memorial, Hankou provided a much better site to build industrial factories than other places. He compared Hankou with other places with rich natural resources like Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou and pointed out that Hankou seized much more convenient location attracting financial and technology support.⁶⁰

In the summer of 1898, the Qing court granted permission to set up the Commerce Bureau in Hankou. Zhang Zhidong chose Wang Bing'en, the Guangdong expectant *daotai*, and Chen Luoyi, the Jiangsu expectant *daotai*, two men of strong commercial learning, to organize it. Later, twenty-four wealthy and well informed merchants were selected as board members and thirty-six men represented local commercial associations as committee members.⁶¹ As a governmental organ, the bureau was financed by Hubei brokerage-license receipts and dedicated to “the encouragement and stimulation of industry and trade in Hubei.” Its establishment indicated a shift in local government from acting purely as a “taxing and policy agent” to taking an active role in commerce and industrialization. It wielded a commanding power over major populous commercial organizations and guilds at the local level.

⁶⁰ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwenxiangong wenji*, vol. 2, p. 896.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

In another memorial, Zhang Zhidong discussed the key functions that the commerce bureau could serve, which can be best summarized into the three main functions— “inspiration,” “cooperation,” and “protection.”⁶² The first and foremost function of the new institution was to promote the western commercial knowledge and encourage the information exchange among merchants from different regions and guilds. By the late nineteenth century, Hankou’s commerce was generally divided into the “eight great trades” (八大行), usually identified as grain, salt, tea, oils, medicinal herbs, hides and furs, cotton, and Cantonese and Fujianese miscellaneous goods.⁶³ Within the “eight great trades,” there were about two hundred different commercial associations whose members were more than half of the adult males in Hankou. The Commerce Bureau was set to break the division of the location and trades and to strengthen Chinese merchants in the “trade war.” To better fulfill this goal, commercial schools were set up to teach merchants the knowledge of the trade. The commerce bureau also initiated officially sponsored journals on commerce, reviewing markets for native goods, introducing successful industrial enterprises in China and western knowledge of management and commerce.⁶⁴

The second function was to help build a modern industrial economy in Central China. Zhang Zhidong emphasized the government’s initiating role in

⁶²Ibid, vol. 3, p.1326-1329.

⁶³ Xu Huandou, *Hankou xiaozhi* (commerce), p. 17

⁶⁴ See *Hankou xiaozhi* and Zhang jixu, *Zhangxiangong zhi E ji*, p. 87

Chinese industrialization.⁶⁵ The financial resources and technological support needed for starting up an industrial enterprise was usually beyond the reach of most Chinese merchants. Therefore, the efforts to develop China's industrial economy were often first led by provincial officials and then taken over by elite merchants. The officially sponsored industrial enterprises in Hubei were primarily located in Hanyang and Wuchang, the two political centers of the region. The first ambitious official project was the Hanyang steel mill. It began construction in August of 1891 and started operation in 1894. Within two years, after an investment of 5.6 million taels in official funds, the company fell into the hands of Sheng Xuanhuai, China's leading bureaucratic-capitalist. Under Sheng, the steel works at Hanyang, the iron mines of Daye and the coal mines of Pingxiang achieved full integration. Later on, with more heavy industrial enterprises, like the Hanyang Arsenal, were built in Hanyang, the city of Hanyang became the largest industrial center in the whole China. Compared with Wuchang, Hanyang has more spatial land outside the city wall that can be developed into an industrial zone. Compared with Hankou, the local government could have a close inspection on the factories in Hanyang. In Wuchang, the provincial government established the weaving, silk, hemp, and spinning mills jointly known as the Wuchang Textile Bureau, which was turned over to two

⁶⁵ Zhang jixu, *Zhangxiangong zhi E ji*, p. 72.

Cantonese merchants in 1902 and later to the Jiangsu industrialist Zhang Jian in 1911.⁶⁶

The third goal that the Commerce Bureau tried to achieve was to protect Chinese merchants and improve the competitive power of Chinese industrial commodities. The unequal treaty gave the foreign merchants the privilege to pay lower tariff (about 5%) and duty (2.5%).⁶⁷ Chinese merchants faced strict checks and had to pay higher taxes at the various liken stations along the Yangzi River. The Commerce Bureau worked hard to protect native commodities, especially those that could compete with foreign goods, by lowering taxes.⁶⁸ At the same time, it provided quality management service to supervise the production process. In the late nineteenth century, the quality of native commodities became a serious problem and started to hurt both the government's revenue and profits of merchants. As Zhang Zhidong noticed, "Chinese merchants tended to pursuit small profits and few would like to take trouble to improve the quality."⁶⁹

One good example on how the Commerce Bureau increased the competitive power of Chinese goods in the trade can be seen in Hankou's tea market in 1890s. In the late nineteenth century, China's tea lost the dominant position in

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 78-83.

⁶⁷ *Hankou zujie zhi*, Wuhan: Wuhan chuban she, 2003, p. 58.

⁶⁸ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangzhidong quanji*, vol 49, p. 1328.

⁶⁹ Zhang jixu, *Zhangxianggong zhi'e ji*, p. 83

the world market with the proportion dropping from 86% in the 1870s to 25% in the 1880s.⁷⁰ As a consequence, the tea trade of Hankou thoroughly deteriorated. Before the 1880s, Russia, Britain, Germany and Japan all purchased tea from Hankou. In the 1890s, foreign merchants, like British and American, started turning to Indian and Japanese tea. According to a marine customs report, the change was because the unstable quality and relatively high price of Chinese tea forced more foreigner merchants to seek for substitutes. The agriculture was mostly carried out on small landholdings and therefore could not process great quantities of tea. Meanwhile, the manufacture of tea was usually done in small workshops without machines and proper technology. In order to change the situation, the provincial government supported Chinese merchants to build their own tea factories. The first one was “Commercial Machine-made Tea Company (商办机器培茶公司),” founded in 1898 in Hankou. At the same time, with the support of the Commerce Bureau, Chinese tea association, a quasigovernmental organization, was established to promote the tea in Hankou. With all these efforts, the tea trade in Hankou “miraculously came back to life.”⁷¹

Remapping the Imperial City

As the “trade war” mentality gradually shifted the focus of local administration, it also pushed the limits of the conventionally accepted notion of

⁷⁰ *Shinain haiguan baogao (Ten Year Maritime Customs report)*, p. 78.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 78. Words from the inspector of Jiangnan Customs.

a “city.” The imperial city was no longer purely a political center but more importantly a battle field of the “trade war” between China and the western powers. The first bold step toward the administrative adjustment came in 1898, when Zhang Zhidong submitted a memorial stating the need to have the portion of Hanyang County north of the Han River declared a separate administrative unit with Hankou as its capital. Based his sound knowledge of local conditions, he carefully explained how the traditional way of governing had harmed, and could further harm the efficiency of the Qing bureaucratic state. As he put it,

“The town of Hankou, part of Hanyang County in Hubei, which used to be called *Xiakou* was the thoroughfare of nine provinces; therefore the business has been always comprehensive and prosperous. Since it has been opened as a treaty port during the *xianfeng* reign, Chinese and foreigners gather together, which made the situation even more complicated and troublesome. In recent years, the expansion of Russian, French, British and Japanese concession added more burden of diplomatic negotiation. I am ordered by the imperial court to construct two railways: the Beijing-Hankou railway and the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway. The first one was well under construction, while the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway was still in preparation stage. In the future, with the new means of transportation, Hankou will grow even faster. The more prosperous it becomes, the more complicated the administration is. However, the county capital city Hanyang was set apart from Hankou by the Han River. In case of emergency, messages could not be passed in a timely way. It usually takes about one day to transmit a message between Hankou and Hanyang.

Meanwhile, the rural area immediately outside the Tongji gate down to Niekou of Huangpi County has a sign of becoming a booming market after the completion of the Beijing-Hankou railway. By then, the local government will need to deal with more conflicts and diplomatic affairs. In addition to the thriving business, Hankou's increasing legal disputes and the bandit problem, the law enforcement and public security all have become critical problem of governing that the local government has to solve."⁷²

By contextualizing the administrative problem of Hankou in its history since the opening as a treaty port, Zhang Zhidong highlighted the urgency to solve this administrative morass. His plan was originally to designate a separate county in Hankou. However, since there was no established custom of establishing a new county in the history of the Qing, Zhang's proposal could not be approved by the group of high ranking officials, including the provincial treasurer, the provincial judge, and Han-Huang-De daotai. The alternative solution suggested by some of these officials was to move the county capital from Hanyang to Hankou. This idea was also rejected as an unsound one for Zhang Zhidong thought "it was to attend one thing and lose another."⁷³ Zhang pointed out that the city of Hanyang itself also experienced great change and needed a strong government to deal with the increasing administration, not to mention its responsibility of ruling its vast neighboring rural area. Therefore,

⁷² Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwenxiangong quanji*, vol. 2, p. 900

⁷³ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (the late Qing II), p. 36.

Zhang insisted that the only possible way to solve the problem was to separate Hankou from Hanyang County and set up an independent government body.

Eventually, Zhang successfully found a way to solve the administrative dilemma, that is, to designate a separate administrative unit, Xiakou ting. A *ting* was generally designed as a transitional administrative unit that substituted for the formation of a new county. There were quite a few existing cases as reference for Zhang Zhidong, such as Xichuan *ting* in Henan province and Xiaoyi *ting* and foping *ting* in Shanxi province.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, *ting* works extremely well as a substitute at the preliminary stage, because its transitional status helps to avoid the much trouble of going through all the formal administrative procedure, like “applying for adding more officers and funds (增设奏拨).”⁷⁵ For the purpose of convenience, everything conformed to the principle of simplicity. Hankou tongzhi, the previous sub-magistrate of Hankou was renamed to be Xiakou fumin tongzhi, whose official rank was equal to that of the Hanyang magistrate. The Xiakou magistrate was required to assume administrative authority over Hankou and its surrounding countryside, a vast land to the north of the Han River, about 120 miles long and 30-40 miles wide.⁷⁶ Except that the Hanyang prefecture still reserved the right to examine the legal, food and monetary issues of Xiakou, Xiakou *ting* worked no differently than the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 37.

other counties of the prefecture. The full county status of Xiakou indeed followed very quickly, being conferred in August 1900.

With its assumption of formal administrative rank, Hankou became for the first time in its history a legitimate “city” in the eyes of the bureaucracy. The drafting of Hankou onto the urban administration system of the Qing Empire reflects the transformed official view of the city. The standardized urban morphological feature and spatial arrangement was no longer strictly followed after the designation of Hankou as a city. Hankou’s lacking of some crucial elements of the imperial city planning tradition, such as the Confucian temple, a city god temple, and proper governmental buildings, by no means disqualified it to be the capital of a county (*ting*). The expedient solution suggested by Zhang and was generally agreed by most of the officials was to have Hankou share official temples or buildings with the city of Hanyang. The less strictly following the traditional urban form provides a good example that the strategic position of Hankou in commerce surpassed other political and ideological considerations to be the ultimate concern for the Qing government. Xiakou *ting* was graded as the most important administrative unit in the late Qing system of “post designations” for evaluating the difficulty of a governing official’s billet. There were four Chinese characters “Chong (thoroughfare, frequented),” “Fan (troublesome, abundant),” “Pi (fatiguing, wearisome)” “Nan (difficult,

vexatious).” The xiakou *ting* was designed with the four, while Hanyang County only had three.⁷⁷

Two years after the designation of Hankou as the capital of xiaokou *ting*, Zhang Zhidong proposed another even more radical urban plan for the capital city Wuchang. On October 8th of 1900, Zhang submitted another memorial stating his vision of the benefits a self opening trade port (*zi kai kou an*) in Wuchang could bring to the Qing Empire. With the permission of the Qing court, Zhang Zhidong started to look for a site of the port in the riverbank of the Yangzi River that is immediately outside the city wall.

If the administrative adjustment in Hankou can be seen more as a result for bureaucratic convenience, the self-opening trade port of Wuchang makes a stronger evidence of a transformed official concept of the “city.” During the late Qing, the “trade war” thinking had become the determining factor in the official design for Chinese imperial cities. Given the many virtues that Zhang Zhidong ascribed to commerce and the leading role that the government should play in trade, it should be less surprising that he accorded trade an honored place of Wuchang, the political center of Central China.

Zhang’s radical plan came with a sophisticated understanding of the situation after 1880. He saw that a Chinese trade port in Wuchang would be a strong competitor to the treaty port of Hankou and therefore could be used to restrict the commercial expansion of the western powers. In a memorial he

⁷⁷ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangwenxianggong quanji*, vol.3, p. 1843.

drafted in the early 1890s, Zhang had already foreseen the threats that permitting the westerners to do business in inland China would bring to the city and the imperial rule.

“Recently I saw the provisional articles within the treaty articulated by the western countries. One article that allows foreign trade in inland China will be imperative under the situation. There is a piece of land on the riverbank outside the city of Wuchang, about 6-7 miles long, across which is the harbor of the Beijing-Hankou railway. When Americans helped with the construction of the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway last year, they had decided to make this area another railway harbor. In the future, the commerce will grow rapidly around there. There are already many foreigners who secretly bought land under name of Chinese. If more foreign trade would be allowed in inland China, this area will definitely forced to be opened as another treaty port as well. This would disturb the Empire’s military defense and make it difficult to enforce the law, as getting too close to the capital of Hubei province. ”⁷⁸

To further justify his plan of building a Chinese owned trade port city, Zhang referred to the established case of Yuezhou. Yuezhou was a riverine market town along the *Xiang* River in Hunan province, a neighboring province of Hubei. After denying the western request to build a treaty port, the local government set up its own trade port. The self opening trade port was organized in a way similar to foreign concessions, such as providing police force, maintaining public facilities, putting commercial buildings and plazas out to

⁷⁸ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhangzhidong quanji*, vol. 52, p. 1387.

lease, and collecting rents. The Chinese-owned trade port gave the local government full control over the land and the conduct of commerce, and helped to increase the local revenue as well. This successful example made Zhang Zhidong believe that more self-opening trade ports should be designed so the Qing empire could regain political authority and protect Chinese own economic rights that it had lost gradually.

The real challenge to Zhang's building of the trade port in Wuchang was to solve the flooding problem caused by the Yangzi River. Hubei was notorious for its flooding problem and was known popularly as "ze guo (the marshy kingdom, 泽国)." Wuchang, on the east bank of Yangzi, was subjected to annual flooding. Every summer, a vast amount of land along the river with hundreds of thousands *mu* was all under water. Only the area within the city wall of Wuchang was protected from the flood by the wall. The opening of Wuchang to be a trade port in reality meant that the actual city proper under the control of the government would extend outside the city wall. What made the urban plan even more difficult was that the selected site for the port gradually became a flood discharging area after the protective dike built before was abandoned. It was an area full of small or big ponds even during the dry season.

In 1899, Zhang Zhidong decided to reconstruct the dike along the Yangzi River. Though maintenance and construction of major water control projects used to be an important function of the Qing state, officials did not usually undertake large projects on their own; they commonly relied on the cooperation

of local elites and landowners. However, this time officials from governor-general Zhang Zhidong down to the prefect of Wuchang prefecture and the district magistrate and his assistants took full responsibility for overall planning and supervision of waterworks. The entire dike, starting from the city of Wuchang to Qingshan in the north and Jingkou in the south, in total as long as 82 miles, became the most massive governmental works for years since the Qing government lost the Opium war and became burdened with huge war compensation after 1840s. The works started in the autumn of the year, when the water level was low. It lasted for more than one year and the cost was about 108,000 silver taels.⁷⁹

Zhang's water construction was usually celebrated in local history later as a deed that fulfilled the typical Confucian governmental role to benefit the agricultural economy.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, the major goal that Zhang wanted to achieve was to gain as much official land as possible so that he could build a "trade port" as he planned. This idea gave Zhang, the pioneer reformer, the impetus to bear heavy fiscal burdens to conduct the conventional works, when "all of Zhang's industrial enterprises were grievously under-capitalized, and

⁷⁹ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (the late Qing I), p. 16.

⁸⁰ *The Selected Archives on the 1931 flood in Hubei*, Wuhan: Hubei Archive, 1999. As a republican gazetteer records, "people living within the dike harvest every year and hardly know what is a flood."

were sustained only by a process of financial juggling which often amounted to robbing Peter to pay Paul.”⁸¹

The dike construction did help the provincial government to regain control over the urban land outside the city wall. After the dike was completed, more than 60,000 *mu* of land came out of water. A bureaucratic agency was quickly established to scrutinize the ownership of the land, drawing boundaries for private or official property, and estimating the land prices. Zhang Zhidong also invited British engineers to map the selected site, a stretch of land outside the walled city of Wuchang and draft a comprehensive plan for developing Wuchang’s “trade port.” Much of the untitled lands that drained out water were automatically registered as officially owned land. As for private land with identified ownership, the provincial government spent totally up to 230,000 silver taels to purchase about 3000 *mu* of private land. With this heavy financial burden, Hubei provincial government had to borrow more than two thirds of the money from local elite merchants and the western companies.⁸²

Zhang Zhidong was quite optimistic about his plan of building the self-opening trade port and believed it worth the large investment the government made in purchasing the private land. His hope was that the land price after the opening of the trade port would jump rapidly so that the income through renting

⁸¹ Esherick, Joseph, *Reform and Revolution in China: the 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1976, p. 69

⁸² Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang zhidong quanji* , Shang jiazhuang: Hebei renmin chuban she, 1998, vol. 56, p. 1480.

or selling the lands would help to pay off the debt easily. In his letter communicating with Han-Huang-De daotai, he tried to persuade other officials that the future return of the investment would be appreciable. As Zhang argued, “Wuchang is located at a transition point of the Yangzi connecting the lower river of the east with the upper reaches in the west. It also provides the meeting place for railways from the south and the north. Once Wuchang is opened as a new market, we shall wait to see the rise of the land price.”⁸³ Comparing with the successful case in Shanghai, Zhang believe that the land price in Wuchang would easily grow hundreds of times more, after the building of the “trade port” and the completion of the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway.⁸⁴ According to his calculation, after paying off the debt, the local government would be able to earn twenty million silver taels through leasing and selling the land. This amount of money could be used by the local government to build harbors, to maintain the dikes and even to finance the police force, all of which were necessary for the prospering of Wuchang’s trade port. Put in Zhang’s own words, the costly project of building a self-opening trade port was “a plan considering for the future not for money.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid, 1483.

⁸⁴ *Wuhan wenshi ziliao ku*, vol. 3, p. 529.

⁸⁵ Zhang Zhidong, *zhang zhidong quanji*, vol. 56, p. 1481.

By the early twentieth century, Wuchang and Hankou began to forge a symbiotic relationship in pursuit of economic growth. Domestic and foreign trade at Hankou jumped up after the designation of xiaokou *ting*. As the result of the support of the local government in trade, customs receipts indicate a tripling of foreign trade between 1890 and 1910, to 135 million taels a year.⁸⁶ The strategic importance of Hankou in domestic commodity trade also increased in 1905. Across the river, Zhang Zhidong's bureaucratic stewardship of reforms in Wuchang encouraged the rise of an environment genial to commerce, which created opportunities for aggressive Chinese entrepreneurs. At the same time, the existing heavy-industry complex at Hanyang prospered.

The emergence of the three separate cities of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang in the last two decades of the Qing indicates a shift of the imperial governance which pushed the limits of the conventionally accepted notion of a "city." The changing notion of the "city," like many other important geopolitical terms, like "tianxia (under heaven)" and "guojia (state)," is an interesting but less-studied aspect of China's modern experience. The official notion of the "city" reflects the ways in which the empire imagined and designed China in a modern era. By the late nineteenth century, in the eyes of reformist officials Chinese cities were seen as a battlefield of the "trade war" between China and western powers. The imperial city was no longer uniform as a political and

⁸⁶ Chang Keming, "A Study of the Import and Export Trade of Hankou," in *Hankou shang ye yue kan* (汉口商业月刊), vol 2, no. 2, 1935, pp. 293-294.

military fortification, but transformed at comparable levels of economic and technological development.

Compared with the high-modernist urban plan of the republican period that tried to break from the imperial tradition, the course of the urban development of the three cities in the late Qing represents a different urban experience, which is neither an indigenous growth nor a wholesale imitation of western models. This process entailed a compromise with Confucian principles long embedded in the imperial urban tradition with the commercial pressure brought by the arrival of the West. We see this in Zhang Zhidong's concern with the compatibility with tradition in his attempts to designate Hankou as an official city and to build a self-opening trade port in Wuchang. His reform agenda in many ways was still deeply Chinese and Confucian in nature. His intention to revive the Qing Empire and practice in accord with the traditional governmental role was closely associated with the discursive tradition of the late imperial statecraft (*jingshi*) in China, a view of the state as a pervasive, efficient, and highly integrated institutional structure, which was most willing to absorb institutional innovations and worked to perfect itself.

Chapter Two

Alternative Visions of the “modern City,” 1911-1925

Before the vigorous late Qing reform was able to save the empire from a latent economic and sovereignty crisis, it caused another unexpected but even more dangerous problem in the rapidly changed urban society—the thriving idea of revolution.⁸⁷ With the growth of commerce and officially sponsored industrialization, a group of new urban-based elite and merchants came into power, who obtained an increasing power in urban affairs. Their demands for local self-governing and autonomy brought about a broader movement that led to the development of “local self-government” institutions at every level (province, *xian*, and city) and throughout China. On January 18, 1909, the imperial court, beset on all sides by demands for reform, published the Regulations for the Local Self-government of Cities, Towns, and Rural Communities (*cheng-zhen-xiang difang zizhi zhangcheng*). Despite the various concessions made by the imperial court in the last days of the dynasty, discontent continued to grow in the country. In October 1911, the revolution that eventually overthrew the Qing dynasty began with a sudden military coup in

⁸⁷ Su, Yunfeng, *Zhongguo xiandaihua de quyuan yanjiu*, Hubei. Taipei Shi: Zhong yang yan jiu yuan jin dai shi yan jiu suo , p. 234.

Wuchang, spreading to the other two cities, Hankou and Hanyang, and very quickly led to the independence of fourteen provinces from the Qing dynasty.

As the birthplace of the Republic, the three cities of Wuhan received nationwide attention. The physical deconstruction of Wuhan's cities in the 1911 revolution required an immediate reconstruction. The revolution that overthrew the imperial system also liberated the imagination of cities with new forms and constructs.⁸⁸ Caught in the whirlpool of uncertainties and political upheaval, the gentry-merchants organized themselves to restore the order of the cities and contributed to the urban recovery after the decline of imperial authority. This period was charged with new significance, for it saw the local elites and merchants, of their own accord, assuming responsibilities of urban modernization hitherto monopolized by the Qing Empire. With their modernizing efforts, Hankou soon recovered from war damage and experienced the fast urban growth from 1911 to 1925.

For some nationalist modernizers, the urban reconstruction of Wuhan's three cities was the first major project for building modern China and hence contained much symbolic meaning. Fearing that China might fall apart in a time of a collapsed dynasty and foreign encroachment, nationalist modernizers, whose most visible and forceful spokesperson was Sun Yat-sen, the founding father the Republic, began to perceive the mission to construct from the ruins a modern, unified, and cohesive society-and-nation. Inspired by the vision of

⁸⁸ *Shinain haiguan baogao (Ten Year Maritime Customs report)*, p. 46

unity, Sun Yat-sen proposed a comprehensive urban plan to integrate the three cities into “Great Wuhan.” Sun’s effort to transform the cities was not simply a construction of a rational and well-ordered modern city through integrating the urban space. Behind his ambition to unify the urban space regardless of physical barriers was the unified China with a strong and centralized state.

The urban reconstruction of Wuhan’s cities became an important arena in which two modern political possibilities for the Republic encountered each other: the centralized state with a unified command and the “confederation of provinces” that ensured local self-government.⁸⁹ Sun’s comprehensive urban planning of “Great Wuhan” entailed a larger spatial awareness that took the entire city of Wuhan as a reference. The rationale of the new spatial awareness privileged the interests of the state not only at the level of the imagination or the symbolic, but demanding a powerful central government that had direct control over local society. Competing with this geopolitical ideal of Sun was the rise of a potent provincialism, a development that was especially troubling to Sun and his goal of a stronger centralized government. The revolution had taken the shape of individual provinces declaring their independence from the Qing dynasty. When the republic was established, a strong sense of loyalty to province continued. It is not that this provincialism was necessarily antithetical to the unity of Chinese “nation”; they could coexist; one could show allegiance

⁸⁹ Ernest P. Young, “Politics in the Aftermath of Revolution: The Era of Yuan Shih-K’ai, 1912-1916” in Fairbank, Ed. *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 12, Part 1, p. 213.

to both province and nation. In addition, one's native province, and that all-important sense of native place, was a closer-to-home way of thinking about politics and reconstruction. The spatial awareness that local people developed in daily life was largely organized into communities and neighborhoods.

This chapter will study how several major interest groups—the central government, the provincial government, local merchants, compradors, entrepreneurs and warlords—struggled over the urban planning and reconstruction in the fifteen years following the 1911 revolution. It investigates how the two different ideals and political concepts were used by different groups of people to justify their rebuilding efforts and how the operation and interaction of different political and commercial forces in reality reinforced the identity of “Great Hankou” (*da hankou*), a community-based and place-centered spatial awareness.

The contesting views and efforts of urban reconstruction

The initial request for urban rebuilding in Wuhan area was first made by local anxious merchants in Hankou, whose lives and wealth were closely associated with the fate of the city. On January 25th, 1912, the Hankou Chamber of Commerce held a meeting to discuss issues related to rebuilding of Hankou's market. A six-article proposal was drafted in the meeting and submitted to Li

Yuanhong, the military governor of Hubei provincial government.⁹⁰ In the absence of a central government after the collapse of Qing court, Hubei province took to governing itself and legislating at will. Li's Hubei provincial government, whose existence indicated the rise of a potent provincialism, rested upon an alliance between the army and the urban-based gentry-merchants. In November of 1911, the provincial assembly (*hubei ziyiju*) adopted a set of regulations, based in larger part on the regulations promulgated by the empire in 1909, concerning "provisional organization of the cities and towns of Hubei" (*Hubei zanxing shi xiang zhi*). According to these regulations, Hankou was to be divided into local self-government zones. An Urban Self-Government Bureau was set up to undertake urban construction works.

From 1912 to 1914, a series of rebuilding plans were carried out with the support of the provincial government. Almost all of these reconstruction efforts were concentrated on the city of Hankou. One obvious reason is that the destructive violence mainly occurred in Hankou. Though the fighting between Qing dynasty units and mutineers, self-proclaimed republican rebel forces, began with the capture of Wuchang, the city and its scholar-bureaucrats managed to remain safe and unscathed behind its high walls by siding with the "revolution." As an un-walled city, Hankou was burned to the ground by Qing troops advancing down the railway from the north. It reportedly burned for four

⁹⁰ *Xinhai gemin ziliao*, Beijing : Zhonghua shu ju : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo, 1961, p. 625.

days and four nights.⁹¹ The only large structures left standing in the smoldering ruins outside the foreign-concession areas were the racetrack and the water tower. Meanwhile, the priority of Hankou in urban rebuilding had a lot to do with economic considerations. In the late Qing and early Republican period, Hankou's commerce constituted the chief source of revenue for the Hubei government.⁹² Therefore, Hankou's recovery from the war damage was the most urgent task for local authority.

In 1912, the Office for the Preparation of Hankou's Market and Street Construction (汉口市街建筑筹办处) was founded by the provincial government. The rebuilding plan was an ambitious one and designed to build a modern city modeled after western cities, like London, Paris, Berlin or New York.⁹³ With limited sources, the works mainly focused on road reconstruction. The urban plan took the opportunity to alter the old notorious look of Hankou's streets, that is, "narrow," "winding" and "dirty."⁹⁴ The officials determined to standardize all the major roads in Hankou into two types, 50 feet and 100 feet wide, including tree-lined boulevards, pedestrian walks, sewage and related

⁹¹ *Wuhan zhinan*, Hankou: Hankou guangyi shuju, 1933, p. 11. According to the source, only one third of the buildings in Hankou remained standing and hundreds of thousands of people were rendered homeless.

⁹² Su Yunfeng, *xiandaihua de quyuan yanjiu, Hubei*, (Taipei, 1987), p. 211.

⁹³ *Shibao*, June 5th, 1913.

⁹⁴ Su Yunfeng, p. 523.

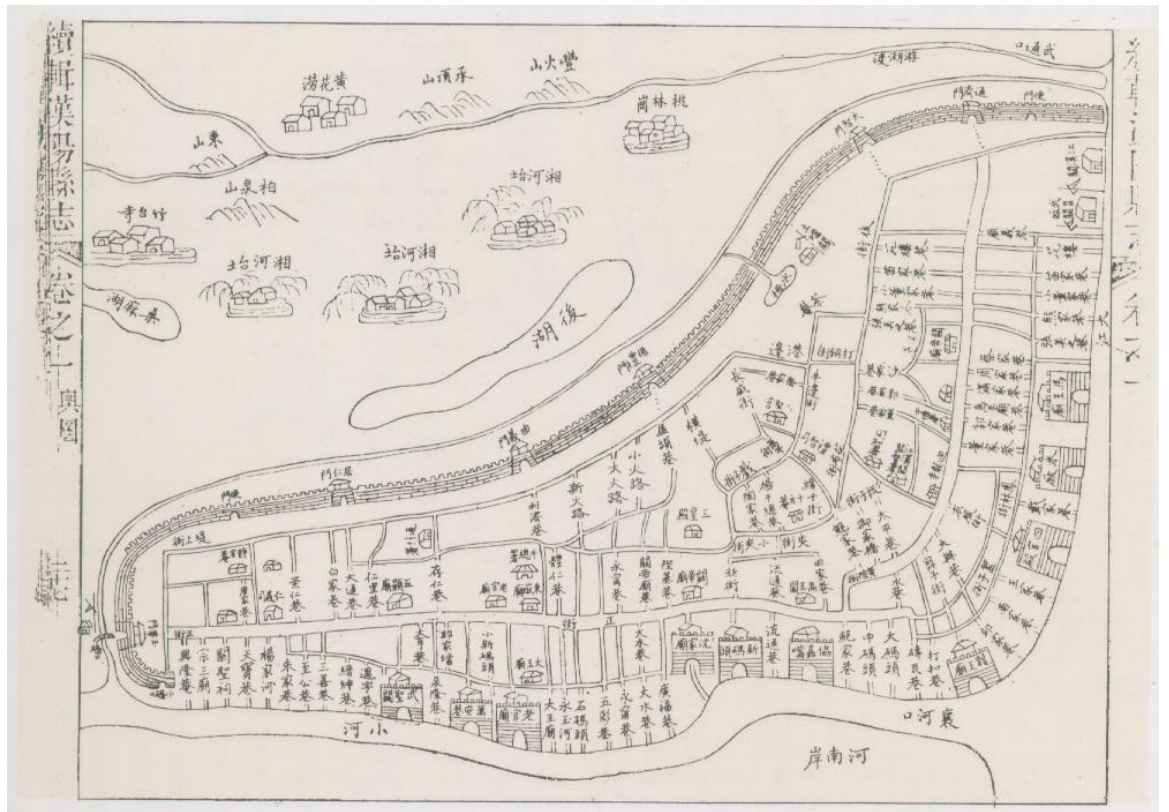
public facilities.⁹⁵ At the same time, a team of technicians was organized to measure the whole city with the western technology. Believing that a detailed map was the basis for modern urban development, the officials in the office completed a topographic map in 1912.

It is one of the first “modern” maps that China had of a city. Unlike the pictographic map drawn in the Qing, the city of Hankou in the map of 1912 was defined for the first time as an entity with a clear-cut border.⁹⁶ From the map, we see the clear demarcation that separates the city from its neighboring area. In addition, the city appears in the map as abstract space plotted on a standardized spatial grid that could be freely measured, erased, planned, and rebuilt. Together with the map, officials also conducted a survey and collected statistical information about the urban area and population of Hankou—age profiles, occupation, fertility, literacy, property ownership, which allowed the government to investigate and control.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ *Shibao*, September 12th, 1912.

⁹⁶ In Tang Zhenlong’s urban plan in 1913, the city proper of Hankou was measured to be as large as 430,440 *fang* (方). This is the first time that Hankou’s city proper was measured separately from the rural area of Xiakou County.

⁹⁷ Xu Huandou, Wang Kuiqing, *Hankou xiao zhi*, Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she, 1915, p. 32.



A map of Hankou (1868) from *xuji hanyang xianzhi*



A map of Hankou (1912) from *Wuhan lishi lishi ditu ji: the historical atlas of Wuhan* (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chuban she), 1998.

Despite the success in producing modern geographic knowledge on the city, the urban reconstruction projects were grievously under-capitalized. In order to implement the plan, the provincial government needed about 4 million silver dollars for road construction and more than 20 million silver dollars for house construction. In order to raise the money, the Hubei provincial government borrowed about 3.5 million pounds (about 25 million silver dollars) with a 40-year loan from an American company. Unfortunately, the deal was never able to be settled because of the opposition from the local elite and

merchants. Many of them were not satisfied with the right that the American company had to obtain all the contracts of the major urban construction projects, such as the work of laying tramcar track in Hankou.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the provincial assembly had its own concern with the condition of the loan through which the American company would still reserve the right to supervise the ways the Hubei government spent money.⁹⁹

Meager financial resources limited the achievements of urban rebuilding in Hankou. Later on, the provincial government's urban reconstruction project had to rely on domestic funds, largely depending on the support of local society. In October 1912, Hubei government announced the sale of *Hankou construction bonds* (汉口建筑公债票)—more than 10 million silver dollars value stocks. The local merchants kept their distance from a project that left the local population no scope for overseeing the administration.

To regain the support of the local merchants and gentry, the Hubei government established a new administrative body, General Board of Roads and Public Works (马路工程局). Although this was not a private initiative, its existence indicated the increasing autonomous local government in Hankou. However, its function of the negotiation over local matters turned out to be disappointingly limited. In 1913, another official plan was carried out by the

⁹⁸ Zhu Jiefan, "lianyatang ji gaizao wuchang shiqu de da guoxiang (连雅堂记改造武昌市区的大构想)," in *Hubei wen xian*, no. 32, p. 6.

⁹⁹ *Shibao*, August 19, 1912.

Hubei government to pave the way for new, Western-style boulevards. It met with great resistance from house owners whose places or buildings happened to stand in the way. Failing to negotiate and persuade the local people, the General Board of Roads and Public Works only completed three roads in the end.¹⁰⁰

Realizing the limited control that it could have over local affairs, the provincial government finally replaced the Association of Hankou's Market and Road Construction (汉口建筑市场马路工程联合会). Compared with the General Board of Roads and Public Works, this semi-official organization was primarily controlled by local gentry-merchants, composed of the Chamber of Commerce, Hankou Self-Governing Council, the Homeowners' Association, and etc. Conditions gradually pushed toward the local self-government and the new organ provided an opportunity for community or resident participation in decision-making of urban rebuilding.

Due to financial shortages, the official attempts to rebuild Hankou from 1912 to 1914 ended making little progress. The town's physical layout was still marked by a pragmatic asymmetry and irregularity.¹⁰¹ The local government was criticized by foreigners as missing the opportunity to modernize Hankou.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the official modernizing effort was not in vain. In the rebuilding process, new administrative bodies were created to accommodate the new

¹⁰⁰ *Shibao*, December 9th, 1915

¹⁰¹ *Shinain haiguan baogao* (Hongkong, 1989), p. 56.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

administrative needs, which were generally absent in the traditional administration. Within the traditional administrative system, the magistrate of Xiakou County was the one with authority to take care of the local issues. Though he had jurisdiction over the city proper and deal with foreign affairs occasionally, the magistrate was hardly ever directly involved with the urban planning and construction.¹⁰³ The early republican era witnessed the growth of new governmental or semi-governmental institutions that assumed responsibility of urban construction. The two active institutes—“Hankou Self-Government Bureau (汉口自治公所)” and “Hankou Municipal Council (汉口市政会)” started to operate actively in the republican era, which gave local merchants and gentry right of access to official representatives in negotiations over local matters. Later on, more administrative bodies were set up with the focus on city proper of Hankou, including the ones I mention before, like the Office for the Preparation of Hankou’s Market and Street Construction (汉口市街建筑筹办处), General Board of Roads and Public Works (马路工程局), and the Association of Hankou’s Market and Road Construction (汉口建筑市场马路工程联合会).

The political upheaval in 1911 and ensuing struggle prevented effective official endeavor in reconstructing the three cities of Wuhan. The urban development of Wuchang and Hanyang came to a standstill and they even shrank in size because of the war damage. During this period, the only major

¹⁰³ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Zhidong quanji*, Hebei renmin chuban she, 1998, vol. 49, p.15-16.

construction works done by local government in the city of Wuchang was to repair the Wuchang road, the major thoroughfare that ran through the city. The road was important to the city, which connected the two parts—the commercial area in the south and the residential area in the north, divided by Snake Hill. It was seriously damaged during the 1911 uprising so that the communication between south and north was blocked. In 1912, the Hubei military government ordered the reconstruction bureau to charge the road repairing works. After the road construction was finished in 1913, there was little reconstruction effort made by the local government in Wuhan.

Besides the provincial government, the newly established central provisional government also showed great interest in the urban reconstruction of Wuhan's cities. At the beginning of November of 1911, when fourteen provinces had already seceded, the establishment of a central government became a matter of urgency, to prevent the development of regional rivalries and to preserve an appearance of national unity to the foreign presence. In the end, Nanjing was chosen as the seat of the provisional government. The central government consisted of forty-four members and represented seventeen provinces. However, the central government did not have much control over what was going on in the provinces. The newly elected president of the Republic, Sun Yat-sen, whose name was more than any other associated by historians with the revolution of 1911, in fact played little direct part in it. Before his return to China in December of 1911, Sun Yat-sen travelled in the

United States and Europe in quest of funds for the Chinese revolution. In order to justify his revolutionary nature and consolidate the power as well, it was important for Sun to connect himself with the Wuhan area, the birthplace of the Republic.

In February 1912, Sun Yat-sen gave a national speech to express his support to the urban reconstruction initiated by Hankou's merchants. He urged the Bureau of Internal Affairs to take charge of urban construction and aimed to "turn the place of the revolution to an exemplary city (首交之区, 变成模范之市)." ¹⁰⁴ Two months later, Sun Yat-sen made a public trip to Wuhan's three cities. In his trip, Sun put emphasis on the need to recover the trade of Hankou by addressing the political and economic significance of commerce. As he argues, "commerce was the key to national polity; therefore it was important to recover it, especially at the founding moment [of the Republic] (民国肇基, 商务为实业要政之一, 亟宜恢复)." However, as for how to carry out the reconstruction, Sun held a different idea from Hankou's merchants. He reminded people in Hankou to be "very cautious" as they started to rebuild the city and insisted the need to "draft a long-standing plan rather than an expedient solution. (须立永远之计, 勿为权宜之策)." ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Sun Yat-sen, *Sun zhongshan quanji*, Beijing: renminchu banshe, 1983, vol 2, p. 69.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 58.

Then, what is Sun Yat-sen's long-standing plan? In the book *Outline of National Construction*, Sun charted out a national reconstruction plan for China's modernization. In this futuristic vision of China, Sun privileged national unity and aimed to save China from the evils of division through building up the national communication infrastructure. As the title of this document indicates, Sun saw infrastructure construction as indispensable for building a strong Chinese nation. He believed that modern transportation was crucial both for economic growth and for promoting the sense of a national community among Chinese.

The document shows that Sun was **thinking big**, because it is full of gigantic construction projects. It included proposals for an extensive nation-wide railroad network that included 40 major railway lines, plans for building two great seaports in the northern and central parts of Chinese coast, and a project to dredge the Three Gorges to allow large steamship to sail up stream into the inland province of Sichuan.¹⁰⁶

It was in this grand plan for nation building that Sun Yat-sen presented the idea of creating a "Great Wuhan" by merging the three existing cities of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. In contrast to the Qing administrative approach of segregated, localized management, Sun applied an overarching, comprehensive view of the city, a spatial vision largely alien to the experience of local people. In the eyes of Sun, the three cities of Wuhan were no longer

¹⁰⁶ Sun Yat-Sen, *Jian guo fang lue*, Shanghai: min zhi shu ju, 1925, pp. 181, 233.

three separate localities but was a geopolitical unit central to a centralized transportation system of China.

This city of “Great Wuhan” occupied a central position in Sun Yet-sen’s overall plan for nation building. It was to be the hub of a national network of river and railroad transportation. In fact, 24 of the 40 railway lines he planned would have Wuhan as their destination, such as; the Nanjing-Hankou railway, the Xi’an-Hankou railway, the Northern Port-Hankou railway, the Yellow River port-Hankou railway, the Hanzhou-Hankou railway, and the Zhiban-Hankou railway.¹⁰⁷

Besides the railway construction, Wuhan’s three cities also acquired a unique position in the Yangzi river transportation. The demands for water transportation increased dramatically. In the early days the port of Hankou was served by a few small steamers, whereas in the year of 1922 there were 58 river steamers regularly engaged in the Hankou trade and some 300 steam launches on the river for local traffic.¹⁰⁸ Many large ocean-going steamers of large tonnage visited Hankou during the high-water season and thus provided direct communication between inland China and abroad. Sun saw the paramount importance of improving water communications in the Wuhan region and the

¹⁰⁷ Sun Yat-sen, *Jian guo fang lue* (Fundamentals of National Reconstruction), Shanghai: min zhi shu ju, 1925, p. 181.

¹⁰⁸ “Saturday’s Speeches” in PPMS2 Dispatches, Vol. 4, 1916-1925, from *China: trade, politics, and culture, 1793-1980*, an online archives from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Library, London.

possibility to make Hankou the regular port of ocean steamers all the year around.

As a romantic nationalist, Sun considered the building of the three cities into one modern city more for the national good than the local interest. Underlying the vision of “Great Wuhan” was a China of railways, modern ports, dams, and schools developed by a powerful state. His ambition to unify the three cities to be one of “the world’s largest cities” that would rival the fame and fortune of London and New York was far beyond the imagination of the local society. To achieve such an ambitious goal, he argued that the city had to be giant in its size and comprehensive in its urban functions. Therefore, it was necessary to merge the three older cities to allow the new Wuhan to combine their roles as a modern center for industry, commerce as well as administration.

In his plan that highlighted big as modern, Sun also envisioned using advanced technology to overcome natural barriers presented by the Yangzi and the Han River. He understood that the previously separated cities could only be bind into one through creating links of transportation and communication that was not there before. The key to the success of this plan was to build bridges over the Yangzi as well as an under-water tunnel to connect the three with each other.

Not surprisingly, Sun’s idea of a “Great Wuhan” was by and large ignored at the time. The idea of a “Great Wuhan” was far beyond the spatial imagination and experience of residents of the three cities. They saw no need to artificially

make such a mega city. Many regarded Sun's idea as "completely unrealistic" and mocked Sun as a "dreamer."¹⁰⁹ "Big-gun-Sun" (*Sun dapao*) was the nickname given to Sun Yat-sen by his compatriots.

Nevertheless, Sun's nationalist vision and rhetoric justified the right of the central government to intervene in local society. In 1912, the government organized a special team of technicians to survey the cities of Wuhan and draft a reconstruction plan. The state's attempt to challenge the autonomy of the province and local government was opposed by both the provincial government and local elite. With little progress, the team was dissolved only after three months. One year later, Yuan Shikai, the military general replaced Sun Yat-sen as provincial president. In his presidency, Yuan worked continually to gain control over the urban reconstruction of Wuhan's three cities. His political ideals were order control, and rigid devotion to regulations. To him, local self-government bodies were a potential threat to his policy of strengthening the state. In February 1914, therefore, he promulgated an order abolishing local self-government institutions throughout the country.¹¹⁰ He hired British engineers to draw a new plan and sent out officials to supervise the urban rebuilding in Wuhan area. The whole plan failed to be carried out as well, mainly because of the financial problem and Yuan Shikai's death in 1916.

¹⁰⁹ C. Martin Wilbur, *Sun Yat-sen: Frustrated Patriot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 324.

¹¹⁰ Li Xin, Sun Sibai, *Minguo renwu zhuan*, Beijing: Shehui kexue yuan, 1978, 1:108.

After Yuan's death the army created under his patronage (the *baiyangjun*) broke up into rival factions.¹¹¹ Since no one faction was able to dominate the others, China split up into a mosaic of fiefs held by military leaders, linked to one or another of the ruling cliques by shifting alliances. Conditions pushed toward a restoration of the local self-government. This was an unpropitious environment for Sun's urban plan, which needed a strong state with a central government. Meanwhile, the euphoric vision of "Great Wuhan" was little concerned with the availability of necessary technology. An investigation on the Yangzi navigation was conducted by "the Commission for the Discussion of the Improvement of the Yangzi" in the Beijing government in 1921. It concluded that Sun's plan for building Wuhan a "deep-water Port" for ocean steamers was not economically sound. The report pointed out that the cost would be entirely out of proportion to the benefits obtained and "utterly unremunerative and financially impossible."¹¹² In addition, his idea of building a bridge and an under-river tunnel to connect the three cities would cost billions of dollars and therefore was rejected as unrealistic by the local government and people.

¹¹¹ On the emergence and development of military cliques in China, see David Bonavia, *China's warlords*, 1995; Zhang Bofeng, *Beiyang jun fa, 1912-1928*, 1990.

¹¹² *Chinese Maritime Customs* (Annual Trade Reports 1921 Hankou), p. 238. From *China: trade, politics, and culture, 1793-1980*, an online archives from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Library, London.

The merchant-driven effort to construct Hankou

Despite the fact that the official reconstruction efforts made little progress, the city of Hankou experienced a golden age of growth between 1912 and 1925. Indeed, most of the major buildings of republican Hankou were built in the era. For instance, the bund of Hankou, “one of the finest Bunds in the Orient,” extended for three miles along the river, with splendid bank buildings, offices and other public buildings.¹¹³ There were newly developed residential buildings, like alley houses or palatial mansions of the merchants. Instead of the central and local government, the shop owners, merchants, bankers, compradors, industrialists were the true city developers and therefore contributed most to the urban reconstruction of Hankou. With their endeavor, about eighty percent of damaged urban area was successfully reconstructed by 1914.

To better understand the leading role that local merchants played in rebuilding Hankou, we need to take a look at how important they became to the livelihood of Hankou’s work force in the early twentieth century. The first attempt at a modern census for the city, carried out in 1912, broke down nearly 100,000 households by occupation, and a few years later the Hankou Chamber of Commerce surveyed the number of shops engaged in each of 171 major

¹¹³ Ibid.

trades of the city.¹¹⁴ Comparing the two sources, we might get a glimpse of the change in Hankou's occupational structure between 1909 and 1915.

Occupation	No. (1909)	No. (1915)
Officials and professional security personnel	7,199	652
Professional literati (teachers, journalists, students)	2,365	2,351
Self-employed wholesale	1,660	30,990
Lawyers	/	652
Self-employed retail	10,503	9,464
Cultivators	11,159	761
Rickshaw pullers	/	10,742
Doctors	917	401
Shop clerks and commercial laborers	2,379	13,779
Monks , priests	1,500	415
Subbureaucratic yamen functionaries	2,461	487
Beggars	1,368	494

(from *Hankou xiaozhi* and *jindai wuhan chengshi shi*)

¹¹⁴ Xu Huandou, *Hankou xiao zhi*, p. 3-4.

As the chart shows, the number of officials and professional security personnel serving in Hankou dropped dramatically after the Republic was established. The same declining trend can be also seen in the occupations closely associated with agriculture and religion. While the elements of the imperial system fell into a decline, big merchants, entrepreneurs, and compradors replaced the old officials and traditional gentry to be the new elite of the city. At the same time, petty merchants, like shop keepers, stall keepers, and itinerant peddlers, continually constituted a major part of the commercial world of the city.

Hankou's local business section was further strengthened during the World War I. The war gave Chinese merchants and industrialists an opportunity to play a more active role in foreign trade. The number of privately owned cotton-weaving mills increased from 120 before the revolution to 300 in 1915.¹¹⁵ The flurry of development of privately-owned business and industry accompanied the rising power of merchants. New businessmen's associations sprang up. Local businessmen increasingly depended on the Chamber of Commerce to facilitate their business enterprises, to mediate between businesses and businessmen, and to serve as a conduit between business and government. The powerful merchants' community was not entirely a new phenomenon in Hankou, as William Rowe shows that it had already enjoyed much autonomy by

¹¹⁵ Stephen R. Mackinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*, p. 11. It can also be seen in *Wuhan tong shi (republic II)*, p. 104.

the late Qing. What's different after 1911 was that merchants and their organizations translated the economic muscle into political power and actively participated in rebuilding the city.

The urban recovery began with the foreign concessions, the only area that remained safe and unscathed. During the war, a large number of Chinese merchants, landlords, local officials and other wealthy urban residents fled into the concessions for protection. The sudden growth of the Chinese population in the foreign concession stimulated the economic development afterward. By 1911, only 65 Chinese lived in the British concession and 23 lived in the Japanese concession.¹¹⁶ The population of the foreign settlements increased dramatically. By 1933, according to a local tourist guide book, the Japanese concession had more than 300 stores, half of which were owned by Chinese.¹¹⁷

As a consequence of the Chinese influx, the real estate market flourished. Commercial and residential buildings were erected and built primarily for Chinese after 1911. The businesses of financial support, construction, and architectural design were in great demand. Foreigners quickly established firms to provide these services, which mainly focused on the following five types:

¹¹⁶ Liu Yutang, Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tong shi* (republic II), p. 11.

¹¹⁷ *Wuhan zhinan* (Hankou, 1933), p. 29.

issuing loans, construction/design, providing insurance, renting management, and *guaqi* registration (挂旗).¹¹⁸

In spite of the problem of crime and the burden of public health, the foreign merchants and community benefited greatly from the prosperous real estate market. The profit earned through construction and leasing was abundant. Besides, in order to own property and do business in the concession, Chinese merchants had to pay the registration fee to get permission and usually depended on foreign firms to manage their properties. For instance, a Belgian firm that originally issued loans in construction later on expanded its business to provide property management. The commission for renting and selling constituted 80% of its annual income.¹¹⁹ Another advantage foreign officials were happy to see was that the urban infrastructure and public service improved rapidly. The income of British Municipal Council rose as business flourished and commercial taxes increased. It made it possible to fund the massive scale construction, like the Bund along the Yangzi River that protected harbors and warehouses from water problems. It also gave a catalyst to municipal development with improved transportation, sanitation, and health service.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Guaqi* is to register under the name of “foreign firms.” It is a common procedure for all Chinese merchants whoever wanted to start business or purchase properties within the foreign concessions.

¹¹⁹ *Wuhan shi zhi: chengshi jianshe zhi*, (Wuchang, 1996), p. 965; *Wuhan wenshi ziliao wenku*, vol. 3, pp. 515-516.

¹²⁰ *Wuhan tongshi* (Republic II), p. 12.

Municipal budgets in Hankou's foreign concessions¹²¹

	1911	1920
British concession	89,432 (taels)	187,438 (taels)
Russian concession	27,707 (taels)	109,240 (taels)
French concession	43,145 (dollars)	123,474 (dollars)
Japanese concession	29,503 (dollars)	170,488 (dollars)

The conduct of the foreign concession inspired Chinese merchants, who saw urban reconstruction as a chance to gain commercial profit. Hankou's commercial communities made active efforts to benefit from developing the real estate market. The best illustration of this can be seen through the career of Liu Xinheng, a Hankou entrepreneur and real estate developer. Liu's career began simply and unpleasantly in the hide markets of Hankou. In addition to possessing sound entrepreneurial instincts, he had good timing or excellent luck. In the 1880s, just when foreign trade began to expand rapidly in Hankou, young Liu left the hide trade, converted to Christianity, learned French, and became a comprador for a leading French trading company. He quickly made a fortune in

¹²¹ *Shinain haiguan baogao* (Hongkong, 1989), p. 78

commissions by arranging deals for the French. By the turn of the century he was a local tycoon, branching out into real estate and forming partnerships with scions of Hankou's old trading elite. After 1911, Liu played an even greater role in directing the physical growth of Hankou. He drew up plans for expanding infrastructure and constructing new buildings, banking centers, and hospitals in the Hankou metropolitan area. Under his auspices, Hankou acquired a new look, with a string of buildings going up in the heart of the old commercial district. Streets were rerouted, thoroughfares widened, and plans laid out for a grid-patterned district west of the railway line. East of the railway line, around Jiangnan Road on the border of the foreign concession area, the New Market complex was erected and became the heart of the city.

In addition to commercial buildings, Liu also designed and constructed a large number of stylish alleyway houses compounds to meet the increased housing demand. This type of house first appeared in 1902, and was usually 2-3 stories high and constructed of brick, wood, and cement. They were built in rows, and a few rows were marked off by surrounding walls to form a residential compound. Paved alleyways between the rows were designed within the walled compound, a necessity for access, light and ventilation. These well designed alley houses were usually bought by wealthy merchants. Hiding in back alleys behind the commercial road, they provided both privacy and convenience.



(Picture 1: “Tai Xing li (泰兴里),” Hankou’s alleyway house compounds built by the comprador, Ye Chengzhong.)¹²²

Encouraged by Liu’s success, more and more compradors participated in developing the city of Hankou. By 1912, eleven compradors in Hankou—Liu Xincheng, Liu Futang, Liu Zijin, Yang Kunshan, Han Yongqing, Chen Jinqing, Jiang Peilin, Wang Bonian, Wang Zhifu, Wei Zifen, Wen Kunsheng—owned thirty large alleyway house compounds, constituting almost all of the houses of such a kind that the city had.¹²³ The rapid economic growth in the early republican era concentrated money and power in the hands of the richest and most powerful of the city’s merchant barons. It encouraged them to add investment to the real estate market and raise the construction standard.

In 1912, a French comprador Liu Futang and his son, Liu Zijin, invested to construct a series of alleyway house compounds, such as Li Fude, Li Futang, Li Furen, Li Fangzheng, Li Jinfu. Among them, Li Fude occupied about 2,420 square meters with twenty houses in it and Fangzheng Li had fifty-five houses

¹²² <http://www.whdaj.gov.cn/jcfm/jz-10.htm>

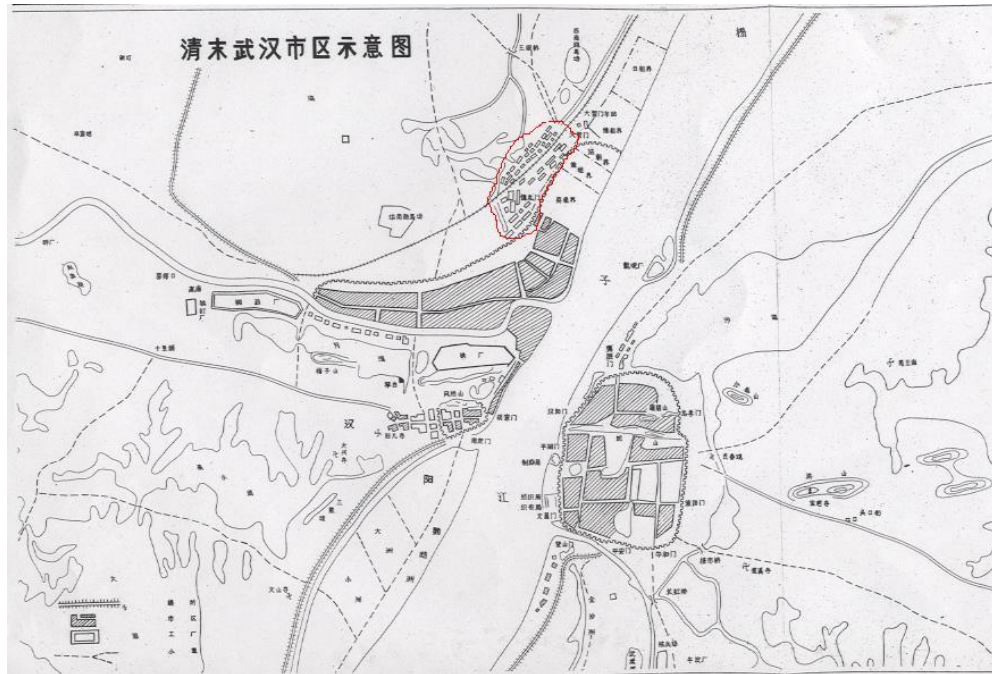
¹²³ *Wuhan shizhi: chengshi jianshe zhi* (Wuchang, 1996), p. 961.

with the area of 7,997 square meters. The property could bring the Liu family 30,000 dollars per year, which was a large amount of money when considering the annual income brought by sugar tax in Hubei was only about 400,000 dollars.¹²⁴ Another comprador, Zhou Fujiu, built the largest alleyway-house compound—Wuchang Li in 1914. It was located in Zhongshan Road, composed of more than 200 houses in a single, walled compound. The buildings were constructed of brick and wood, and were 2-3 stories high. Zhou got a generous return from them. The land price increased from 50 *liang* per *zhang* in 1914 when the land was first purchased, to 200 *liang* per *zhang* in 1915, and eventually to 1000 *liang* per *zhang* in 1917 when construction was completed.

Stimulated by the high profit out of real estate, more merchants, military officers, and even old urban gentry became speculators in Hankou's real estate market. Jiang Guangchang, an industrialist from Shanghai, together with *Huqingyu tang*, a medical shop from Hangzhou, bought land between Jiangnan Road and Nanjing Road and constructed Shengcheng Li. The former governor general of Huguang, Yuan Haiguan, built Changyi Li, Changle Li, Changkang Li, Changshou Li and etc. Sang Tieshan, who used to be Shanghai *daotai*, invested to construct Baohe Li, Baoan Li, Baocheng Li. The warlord, Kou yingjie, had his own building erected in the new urban center. (See Map.) He Peirong, who was governor of Hubei, was also an active private urban developer. He spent money to build Shangde Li, Fude Li and Hancheng Li. Liu

¹²⁴ *Shinain haiguan baogao* (Hongkong, 1989), p. 174.

Zulong, the key figure in the “general group,” (a military elite class which emerged after the revolution) helped to build Bayuan Li. The military office Fang Benren constructed Hongchun Li.



A map of Wuhan's cities in the early twentieth century, from *Wuhan lishi lishi ditu ji: the historical atlas of Wuhan* (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe), 1998. The area in the red circle is a newly developed urban center by merchants.

Local Interests and Urban Development:

The history of Wuhan's three cities during the decade after the collapse of the Qing is always influenced by national politics. Being the most important

revolutionary province, Hubei was quickly occupied by Yuan Shikai's military forces in 1913. After Yuan's death, the militarist of the Zhili military clique, Wang Zhanyuan, seized power in Hubei.¹²⁵ Wang basically ruled Hubei as his personal domain, which angered local officials and elites. Wang was driven out of Hubei in 1920 by another militarist of the Zhili clique, Xiao Yaonan. For a brief period, Xiao, a Hubei native, tried to bolster his legitimacy by supporting Hubei's self-government, a part of the nation-wide federalist movement, while the latter secretly allied with Sun Yat-sen and his military government in Guangdong province. As a committed federalist, Xiao Yaonan shared the nationalist view on China's unity with Sun Yat-sen, but he believed that the unification should be achieved through a federal constitutional government, which allowed autonomous self-government of localities.

With such a vision on the future of China, Xiao came up with another comprehensive urban plan that promoted the urban integration of the three cities after 1921. The first attempt was made by administrative innovation. In 1923, the office of "Hankou market supervisor (汉口商场督办)" was renamed as "Wu-Yang-Xia market supervisor (武阳夏商场督办)." Accordingly, its task was extended to urban construction for the three cities of Wuhan.¹²⁶ A well-known "self-governing" advocate and Hubei native, Tang Xiaomin, was

¹²⁵ The Zhili military clique was one of the ruling cliques of Yuan's military force with the base in shangdong province.

¹²⁶ "Wu" stands for Wuchang, "Yang" for Hanyang, and "Xia" for Hankou.

assigned to take charge of the massive urban reconstruction project. It was the first official effort at the local level to put forward a comprehensive urban plan that broke the division of the three cities.

Xiao's urban reconstruction project began with the capital city of Wuchang. At first glance, Xiao's attempt to build a trade port in Wuchang was similar to Zhang Zhidong's late Qing reform plan. A series of actions were taken quickly: the Bureau of Trade Port (商埠局) founded, officials and experts selected, and urban land in Wuchang carefully examined and measured. The urban boundary was redefined by the government, which included the White-Sand Island in the south, Qing Mountain in the north, Yangzi River in the west, and Shuiguo Lake in the east. This made the city proper of Wuchang several times bigger than the original one. In November 1921, a Land Bureau was established a part of the government's reorganization of the administration of Wuchang. All property owners in the city were given a deadline to register their real estate with the Land Bureau. On the day set for an on-site investigation, all interested parties were required to attend with their relevant documents in hand. A fine was levied if an owner failed to register. This process of registration with the Land Bureau supplied the government with detailed information on the address and location of property, the use of the land and the plot boundary, the plot's size and price, documents, related to the land, and the owners' name, sex, native place, address, and profession.

In addition to acquiring information, the government began to regulate land use. The city was scientifically classified into five zones, industrial, commercial, cultural, residential and governmental areas. Within each category, the provincial government tried to distinguish “public land” from “private land.” By comparing current land distribution with old maps and gazetteers, the government determined to confirm which lands “belong to the city” in order to expand the city’s holdings.¹²⁷ The government paid three types of compensation: the value of the land and everything on it, the value of the land and moving costs, or the value of part of the estate where any improvements on the land were deemed too old for future use. However, its implementation proceeded very slowly partly due to local people’s resistance. Within two years, approximately two hundred families were compensated under these regulations; the government paid them 25,000 *yuan* in total.¹²⁸

At the meantime, Xiao Yaonan promoted the integration of communication infrastructure of the three cities through the improvement of the means of transportation. In the eyes of Xiao, improved transportation would facilitate economic growth and bring potential commercial profits to people in all of the three cities. The communication among the three cities had not improved much since the late Qing. Travelling between any two of the three cities was still

¹²⁷ Xu Huandou, *Hankou xiao zhi*, p. 78

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65

“extremely inconvenient.”¹²⁹ The most common means of transportation was still by privately-owned junks. They were easily found along the Yangzi and Han rivers. It usually cost about 80 *wen* to cross the Yangzi on one of these junks.¹³⁰ Because their flexibility to leave any time and for multiple destinations surpassed the more modern means such as steamships, they remained the most popular means of transport. The development of steamship transportation by no means went smoothly. It was first introduced and used for inter-cities communication in 1913. Fen Qijun, a local merchant, started the inter-cities water transportation business between Wuchang and Hankou after his two ferry companies were pushed out of the profitable but competitive Hankou-Shanghai route. Between 1915 and 1922, only two more companies brought the total of four steamships into the business and opened two new routes. In 1922, both of them went into bankruptcy because of low passage level and little profit.

Xiao Yaonan’s plan for the urban integration of the three cities was largely ignored by local people, especially merchants in Hankou. The massive urban scheme employed by Xiao’s plan was far beyond the experience of people’s daily life and was at odds with the newly formed spatial identity of “Great Hankou.” Hankou’s self recovery and the fast growth during the World War I gave the local people the very reason to be proud of its superiority and uniqueness. Hankou quickly recovered from war damage and became the most

¹²⁹ *Shina shōbetsu zenshi*, Tōkyō, Tōa Dōbunkai, 1917-1920, p. 49.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.99.

prominent trade center in Central China. Within 20 years from 1909 to 1930, there were about twelve years when Hankou ranked second among the four biggest trade centers in China.¹³¹ It had become the financial center, with a stock market and banking sector important enough by the 1920s to influence Shanghai and Tianjin. Moreover, the rise of economic significance of Hankou in China was often regarded as a collective contribution made by local people (merchants) and hence symbolized the glory of the locality.¹³² In 1924 a feature article in the important Shanghai journal *Dongfang zazhi* described Hankou as a successful example of how a strong merchant-driven effort could quickly modernize economic and civic life.¹³³

The separation of Hankou from the rest of the region also has to do with the western treaty port system, which obtained high level autonomy of operation. The interests of the western powers in Hankou were mainly carried out through the “most important institution”—Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS) in the Republican period.¹³⁴ CMCS was a cosmopolitan institution dominated by

¹³¹ The four biggest trade centers of China were Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and Hankou.

¹³² Newspapers flourished in Hankou after 1912. The political upheaval following the end of the imperial system was a time of a mixed blessing. Despite the deconstruction, political freedom produced an explosion of publications. The major local newspapers in Chinese include *guomin xinbao* (国民新报), *Hankou zhongxi bao* (汉口中西报), *Hankou xinwen bao* (汉口新闻报), *Wuhan qinxian lu* (武汉清闲录), *youxi bao* (游戏报), *ziyou bao* (自由报), *fanhua ribao* (繁华日报). There were also quite a few newspaper published in English and Japanese.

¹³³ Zhou Yirang, “Wuhan sanzhen zhi xianzai ji qi jianglai” in *Dongfang zazhi*, March, 1924.

¹³⁴ Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*. Routledge, UK, 2009, Introduction.

British nationals, stretching along the China coast and penetrating inland along waterways. It was a central element of the treaty port system. The Hankou Maritime Customs station was the major one in the vast network of over 40 Customs stations and sub-branches monitoring and regulating foreign trade with China. Despite being drawn inexorably close to Chinese political affairs from 1911 onwards, the Hankou Maritime Customs Service still represented and advanced foreign trade interests in inland China, more specifically British interests.

During the Republican era, the foreigners got more involved the urban life of Hankou through the operation of the Maritime Customs service. The job of the custom station in Hankou encompassed far more than the collection of import and export duties, but assumed public works like lighthouses, harbor maintenance, postal service, quarantine and anti-piracy measures. It continued to be of great assistance and benefit to trade and shipping on Yangzi. At the local level, it helped to prevent floods or try to minimize the disastrous effects of floods to the city of Hankou. The operations were not confined merely to improving local conditions, but also improved navigational facilities in the Yangzi.

The independence of Hankou was to the best interests of the western powers, who enjoyed a beneficial distance from the provincial government in Wuchang and the much autonomy in Hankou, “the most important trade center

of China.”¹³⁵ Entering into 1920s, the British had taken efforts to improve the public image of the Maritime Custom service in a way to reinforce their control over the urban society in Hankou. This intention was best illustrated by building the new Customs house, as a new urban symbol for Hankou.

Plans for the new Custom House had been prepared since 1921. It was first proposed by Sir Francis Aglen when he first served as commissioner of the Custom in Hankou. He recognized the paramount importance of increasing the volume of trade by improving communications in the district and navigational facilities on the Yangzi between Hankou and the sea. Hankou’s trade significance was strengthened as the opening of the Beijing-Hankou railway and the partial opening up of the Guangzhou-Wuchang railway. The fact that projected trunk line to Sichuan would open up vast potentialities of trade with that province also adds more weight to the position of Hankou among other Maritime Customs stations. The old Customs House was located up river near the China Merchants Wharf and was difficult to get to and furthermore was a ramshackle building. The obscure location and shaky house could not match with the prominent status any longer.

The difficult and intricate negotiations which resulted in the ground being obtained for the purpose of the new building were originally inaugurated by Sir Francis Aglen during his tenure of office as Commissioner of Customs

¹³⁵ Chinese Maritime Customs Service, annual trade report for the year 1924, p. 243. From *China: trade, politics, and culture, 1793-1980*, an online archives from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Library, London.

and piloted to a successful termination by him in his capacity of Inspector General. The new site was a very fine one at the southernmost end of the British Bund, with commanding views for miles down the Yangzi River and Bund. It was admittedly the best location customs authorities could find in Hankou, because it was not only on the finest Bund but also adjacent to the newly developed native business center of Hankou. As Sir Francis Aglen expressed great confidence in the new Custom house on the ceremony of laying the foundation stone, it was “a happy compromise between Chinese and Foreign usage.”¹³⁶ The fact that the new house was constructed on such extensive lines may be taken as an index of the confidence on the future development and prosperity of Hankou as the principal trade centre of Mid-China.

The work on the foundations began in 1922 and the building operation was complete by the close of 1923. The architects of the building are Messrs. Stewardson & Spence, Bryan Watson, and A.R.I.B.A. (Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects) of Shanghai and Hankou. The Clerk-of-the-Works was Mr. A.S. Mill, and the general contractor Mr. Wei Qingji (魏清记). Its architectural features include a lofty tower and a colonnade in modern Renaissance style. It is four-story building of rein-forced concrete, having its three principal facades built with Henan granite. The internal fitting up of all

¹³⁶ “Hankou Despatch No. 7325 to I.G. Appendix.” In PPMS2 Despatches Volume 4—Hankou, 1916-1925. From *China: trade, politics, and culture, 1793-1980*, an online archives from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Library, London.

offices, halls and flats was carried out in the most up-to-date manner possible.¹³⁷

One great function the house provided through a turret-clock on the central axis of the frontage of the tower was to standardize the time of Hankou for the general public.



(Picture 2: Hankou's Custom House)

¹³⁷ Ibid.

A grand ceremony of laying the foundation stone was performed on the 4th November in 1923, which added more political and ritual meaning to the building and its relation with the city. It was witnessed by a large and distinguished assembly of Chinese and foreigners with about 300 invited guests, including His Excellency the Military Governor, the Consular Body, and the leading bankers and merchants of Hankou.¹³⁸ The date was carefully chosen, for it was exactly sixty years from the opening of the Customs in Hankou. During the ceremony, the superintendent of Customs, Chen Jie, the Inspector-General, Sir Francis Aglen, the inspector of Jiangnan Customs, Mr. S. W. Maze, the chairman of the committee of Foreign Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Marker, and the chairman of the Hankou Chamber of Commerce, Wan Zexiang, and the military governor, Xiao Yaonan all gave speeches. The ritual part of the ceremony was conducted by Lady Aglen, who was asked to accept a casket, containing copies of the local newspapers and coins, and placed it under the foundation stone. This ritual added symbolic meaning to the new Custom house and for over half a century the building became the most important landmark of Hankou. As best articulated by the words of the chairman of the Committee of Foreign Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Marker, “the laying of this foundation stone marks a new era in the expansion of the Hankou Customs and therefore also in the development of the port of Hankou. The splendid building which is in

¹³⁸ “Hankou Despatch No. 7325 to I.G. Appendix.” In PPMS2 Dispatches Volume 4—Hankou, 1916-1925. From *China: trade, politics, and culture, 1793-1980*, an online archives from the School of Oriental and African Studies and the British Library, London.

course of erection on this site bears eloquent testimony to what Hankou has already achieved and, what is of more vital importance, what Hankou is expected to achieve in the future.”¹³⁹

In addition to its being the key landmark of the city, the giant clock above the Maritime Customs Building created the different temporal frame in which people in Hankou were. Compared its two neighbors, Hankou was the place where mechanical timepieces of European origin achieved prominence in public space. Large clocks commanded sweeping views atop buildings in banks, factories, department stores, and train stations. The sound of the clock was always remembered by the people as a crucial part of their urban experience in Hankou. It was less audible where Hankou’s urban boundaries dissolved into its hinterland. In a sense, we can argue that this mechanical time of the city was reconstituted into a shared sense of communal time among people in Hankou.

Chinese merchants reinforced their power as the developers of their own city. The urban reconstruction effort they made in 1920s also contributed to the forming of Hankou’s identity as an independent city. One distinctive effort was to build a “model village,” a large-scale urban residential construction designed primarily by and for Chinese elite. Unlike the previous individually-owned real estate development, the “model village” project was the first ambitious attempt that merchants of Hankou made collectively to transform the urban landscape.

¹³⁹ Liu’s famous claim was “General Li established the Republic and I created the city of Hankou. (都督创建了民国，我创建了汉口)” *Wuhan wenshi ziliao wenku*, Wuhan: wuhan chuban she, 1999, p. 343.

The idea was also proposed first by Liu Xinsheng and it later made him a name as the creator of “New Hankou.”¹⁴⁰ Since Liu Xinsheng occupied about one fourth of the city proper in Hankou, he generously donated one third of his land for building the “model village,” which he believed would provide modern and comfortable living environment comparable with that of the foreign concessions. It encouraged many other wealthy merchants to join his project. Slots were soon booked out. The governor of Zhejiang province, Sang Tieshan, invested in 220 valley houses. The chairman of Chinese Merchant Association of Hankou, Jiang Peilin, agreed to build 457 houses in De Runli valley house compound. The tong oil comprador, Zhou Xiangshan, invested in 57 houses and Shanghai daotai, Yuan haiguan, invested in five valley house compounds.¹⁴¹ The locally invested project gained great popularity among the local community and outweighed Xiao Yaonan’s urban planning and construction.

Besides the potential great profit, the great motivation for the construction was the intention to strengthen the merchant community and their commanding power over the urban society. It was designed to provide healthy and safe accommodation in the native city for well-off merchant families, which was competitive to the foreign concession. The ground land was located south of the railway line, north of Zhongshan Road, west of Dazhi Road, and east of Jiangnan road, close to the commercially booming area of Hankou and north of

¹⁴⁰ Pi Mingxiu, *Hankou wubainian* (Wuhan, 1999), p. 112.

¹⁴¹ *Wuhan shi zhi: chengshijianshezhi*, pp. 778-779.

the foreign concession. This marked with narrow, winding streets and crowded dwellings and ramshackle sheds lacking entirely in sanitation used to set great contrast to the neighboring concession, which was well-planned streets lit by electricity. Within only a few years, streets were paved and broadened. A vast complex of public buildings and private dwellings were erected. Influential local industrialists, merchants, military officers and politicians collectively contributed to the construction. Among them were the chairman of the Chinese merchants association, Jiang Peilin, and gentry and military officials in “the general clique.”¹⁴²

The living condition of Chinese merchants improved dramatically after the “model village” was constructed. The newly built business and residential area was equipped with modernized transportation and public facilities comparable to those in the foreign concessions. High criteria were set for the building of commercial and residential architectures. Alleyway houses were only allowed to be made of bricks and woods in good quality. Small gardens were located in front of these houses, within which there were living rooms and bedrooms with big windows. Usually shops were facing the streets. Besides the alleyway houses, there were other types of buildings, like apartment houses and single-family houses.¹⁴³ The “model village” also developed with public services and

¹⁴² Pi Mingxiu, *Hankou wubainian* (Hankou’s Five Hundred Years), p. 113.

¹⁴³ Dong Yumei, “Chinese merchant’s streets in the ‘model village,’” in *Wuhan wenshi ziliao*, 2006, no. 3, p. 57.

western-style management. All the buildings had to be carefully scrutinized and get permission to start the construction. It had its own police station, responsible for the security of the area.

In addition to the raised living condition, the power and interest of local Chinese merchants in Hankou was fully recognized and protected through building the Chinese Merchants' Association House (华商总会) in 1922, a new home for the influential businessmen. It was a three-story grand building, with library, conference rooms, dining room and barbershop in it. It mainly served as a recreation center for merchants. At the same time, it played an important role in aggregating Chinese merchants and assisting the information exchange among them. After its building, more Chinese merchant's associations and organizations moved their buildings and clubs to the "model village" from the foreign concessions. People later on called the streets in the area as Chinese merchant's streets (华商街)."

Conclusion:

As the birthplace of the Republic, the three cities of Wuhan faced as many challenges of reconstruction as the new Republic did. The urban planning history of the Wuhan's cities is always seen as a part of the broad national reconstruction (*guojia jianshe*). Writing about changes in Chinese urban growth, Ray Chang (Zhang Jinxiong) hoped that Chinese urban planners would direct

and control urban growth so that China could prosper successfully.¹⁴⁴ The passion for transforming the indigenous Chinese urban settlements into modern metropolises were generally shared by Sun Yat-sen and other nationalist politicians and officials. In their eyes, the fifteen year reconstruction of Wuhan's three cities was generally a failure and "lost the opportunity to rebuild based on modern principles."¹⁴⁵ This chapter, however, tells a different story about the urban rebuilding of the three cities in the first fifteen years following the 1911 revolution. The urban reconstruction became a testing ground where different groups of people tried to apply their own visions of the modern city.

The strong local community in Hankou, including merchants, industrialists, compradors, and shop owners, was the key builder of the city. Their place-centered and community-based approach to rebuild the city competed with Sun's idea of building "Great Wuhan." In the chapter, I suggest that the different urban planning ideas were not merely of different built forms, but of alternative societies for China in the early twentieth century. Unlike conditions after 1927 when the "centralism" became the dominant political ideal, this local self-government and the urban idea of building an independent city of Hankou constituted a historical alternative in the early Republican period. The city of Wuhan, which was taken for granted by Chinese nowadays, was not the only historical possibility back then.

¹⁴⁴ R. Chang, "On Chinese municipal government," *Chinese Administrator*, 1 (1935), p.267.

¹⁴⁵ *Shinain haiguan baogao* (Hongkong, 1996), p. 64.

Chapter Three

The Nationalized City: Revolution, Nationalization, and City Planning of “Great Wuhan”

In his book *Xu Hankou congtan* (Continuation of the Hankou Compendium), Wang Baoxin, a local historian, bemoaned the loss of the old city Wuchang after 1927. He recalled that his first visit to Wuchang after the Northern Expedition was only to see the city that he was familiar with had “no longer the same look (武昌则无复旧观).” Soon after the nationalist army successfully seized the Wuhan area as a temporary capital, the city wall and other classical forms of the old city were discarded and removed as “backward elements.”¹⁴⁶ Wang’s words described the dramatic change of urban morphology in Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang as the result of ambitious official urban plan of building “Great Wuhan” after 1927.

The success of the Northern Expedition and the advent of the Nationalist regime marked the beginning of a new era for Wuhan’s cities. The region became a vital nerve center for the new regime, whose political ambition and desire of modernizing China was demonstrated in its consistent efforts to unify the three cities into one giant urban center. Soon after the nationalist government moved to Wuhan in 1927, it established a unified municipality of Wuhan and recruited a large number of young technological bureaucrats who desired for

¹⁴⁶ Wang Baoxin, *Xu hankou congtan* (续汉口丛谈), Wuhan Shi: Hubei jiao yu chu ban she, 2002 (1915), vol. 2, pp. 28-29.

making “urban progress” through scientific planning, technological advancement and urban expansion.

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part examines why and how the idea of “Great Wuhan” gained currency in the Nationalist regime. The second part takes a close look at ways in which the city of Wuhan was imagined and constructed by the new state through two main city planning projects from 1927-1931. It explores the political, theoretical, and urban contexts of the design and construction of “Great Wuhan.” For the first time, the idea of “Great Wuhan” seemed to outweigh other options to guide the transformation of urban society. The third part examines the challenges to the urban integration of Wuhan and why the city of Wuhan fell apart. The size of the city and territorial boundaries became the subject of a long drawn-out quarrel between municipal officials, provincial officials, and even local community leaders. In 1931, the three parts of Wuhan suffered a serious flood and all of them were inundated. The flood caused massive loss of life and damage of property. Soon after 1931, the Wuhan municipal government fell apart and the three cities remained separate.

Wuhan: an appealing nationalistic idea for China’s unity

The military success of the Northern Expedition that seized the control of Wuhan’s cities in 1926 advanced the Guomindang’s progress in unifying China. The strategic position of the Wuhan area gave the Guomindang’s

Nationalist government the power to claim control over four provinces, a large territory of China. In 1927, the nationalist government moved from its old base in Guangzhou to Wuchang. As a consequence, Wuchang and the other two cities became the new political center of China. The party coalition conference in the end of 1926 decided to designate Wuchang, Hankou and Hayang into the capital administrative district (京兆区).¹⁴⁷

To strengthen the control of the Nationalist government over the newly seized region, it helped to reorganize the local society by setting up new municipal governments based on its successful experiment in Guangzhou.¹⁴⁸ Followed the model of Guangzhou, two separate municipalities were established. The Hankou municipal government founded in October 1926. Two months later, the Wuchang municipal council was organized as well. Both Wuchang and Hankou promulgated *Provisional municipal regulations* which followed the general principles of the municipal structure in Guangzhou.

Considering itself Sun Yat-sen's heir, the Nationalist government was not satisfied with the separateness of the three cities and aimed to carry out Sun's unfinished project of building "Great Wuhan." Sun Ke, the former mayor of Guangzhou and the permanent committee member of the Nationalist government, was one of the proponents for creating a unified Wuhan. In the late

¹⁴⁷ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, (Republican, II), p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Guangzhou was the capital of the southern government that Sun Yat-Sen and his Guomindang had established since 1919 to counter the government in Beijing. It became China's first municipality and an early experimental site for urban modernization.

1926, Sun designed an urban plan for the integration of Wuhan's cities. The plan gained the support of the ministries of finance and communication and was later accepted by the Nationalist government. To Sun Ke, to build "Great Wuhan" was more than a political gesture of showing respect to Sun Yat-sen as the founder of the party. Connecting "Great Wuhan" with the growing nationalist demand for China's unity helped the new government to gain public support. The urban construction also provided an opportunity to reorder the society and eliminate any potential threats or dissidents to the new regime.

The growing nationalist sentiments in the idea of Great Wuhan began with Hankou's political campaign against the western imperialism. The British concession in Hankou became the target and was regarded by the nationalists to be the splitting element of the society. In the eyes of zealous revolutionaries, the existence of foreign concessions represented the power of western imperialism that harmed sovereignty of China. It placed a large part of north Hankou out of the jurisdiction of the new municipality. The revolutionary public started to ask for the retrocession of the British concession on January 1st in 1927. It was a holiday designed by the Nationalist government to celebrate the success of the Northern Expedition and the establishment of the new regime. Soon the celebration parade marched to the foreign concession area and shouted out anti-imperialism slogans. It turned into a zealous anti-imperialist campaign that attracted thousands of urban students, workers, and even priests, who gathered in front of the British concession. The political movement contributed to the

integration of Wuhan's cities, as a western journalist observed, "[the] wave of unionization in the Wuhan cities, Hankou and Wuchang, has entered strange quarters. Chinese priests, nuns and monks have formed a union They parade through foreign concession with banners, incense and music, notifying the public that they had adopted a scale."¹⁴⁹ As more and more people gathered around, some Chinese started to take "aggressive" and "angry" activities, including throwing stones and damaging road barriers.¹⁵⁰ When the British tried to drive the Chinese mass away by force, there were violent conflicts which caused three Chinese wounded.

The growing public wrath was soon used by the Nationalist government to officially negotiate with the British for retrocession of the concession. Within one week, the British concession was brought back under the control of the Nationalist government. The diplomatic success soon made headlines all over China. The Nationalist government proved that it could provide effective leadership, under which China would regain lost sovereignty and be unified to be a strong nation. This news also brought Wuhan's cities into a center of national attention. The growing enthusiasm for national unity compelled more people to accept Sun's vision of Wuhan, a giant urban center that would unify the three separated localities. Through the official propaganda, Wuhan was

¹⁴⁹ *New York Times*, Jan.28th, 1927.

¹⁵⁰ *Chu Bao* (楚报), January 7th, 1927, "Hankou's New Year Riot" from the British Archive Bureau, F4291/67/10 in *Wuhan Minguo zhengfu shiliao* (武汉民国政府史料), online sources at <http://www.whdaj.gov.cn/dazl/new-dazl-slgf.asp> .

invested as a politically and culturally created locality that symbolized China's unity.

In the same month, the central committee of the nationalist party started to design the city of Wuhan. A unified Wuhan municipal government was established to replace the separate municipal government and govern Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang collectively. The new consolidated city government was comprised of eleven committee members, two from the central committee of the Guomintang, one from the national government, four from the Hubei provincial government and provincial committee of the Guangmindang, and one from the Hubei Labor Union, two from the Hankou Chamber of Commerce and the Hankou Merchants' Association.¹⁵¹

This newly established municipal government valued "self-governance" less but rather privileged national agenda over local interest. It was dominated by members of the Nationalist Party and thus subjected to tremendous influence of the party. The Nationalist government's ambition to control major urban centers was set and secured through laws. According to the law, the city of Wuhan with a population of over one million was classified as "a special city," under direct control of the central government. The mayor-centered structure of the municipal government gave tremendous power to the mayor, who had extensive administrative and police powers. To secure tight control over the city, the mayor of Wuhan was usually directly appointed by the central government.

¹⁵¹ Pi, Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (the Republican era II), p. 37.

For instance, the mayor of Wuhan municipality in 1929 was Liu Wendao, who was appointed by Jiang Jieshi and continued to have a close personal relationship with Jiang.

The new municipal government determined to insert its power over every sphere of life in the city. This led to the shrinking power of the local societal organizations after 1927, which had in the past assumed quite a lot governmental functions in the region.¹⁵² The true democratic function of municipality in China was a mere promise. As many scholars have noticed, the urban municipal government worked as an executive organ of the state through which the state/party reinforced its agenda and carried out modernizing projects.¹⁵³ There were still some local self-government institutions, such as the municipal government council and Chamber of Commerce. But they had little real power. After all, laws and regulations at the municipal level guaranteed the leadership of the city government in setting up local administrative institutions.

The nationalist leaders and reformers disapproved of the conventional social organizations and leaders of local communities as capable builders of their own cities, because they for the most part lacked of special knowledge and

¹⁵² William Rowe, *Hankou: conflict and community in a Chinese city, 1796-1895* (Stanford, 1989), pp. 252-340.

¹⁵³ Works include Christian Henriot, *Shanghai, 1927-1937: municipal power, locality, and modernization* (Berkeley, 1993); Micheal Tsin, *Nationa, Governmance, Modernity in China Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford, 1999); Wang Di, *Street Culture in Chengdu: public space, urban commoners, and local politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford, 2003); David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley, 1989).

advanced technology, which was believed crucial in governing a modern city and operating public works. This elitist view on urban modernization deprived ordinary people of chance to participate in urban planning and construction. Sun Ke even made a public speech when the nationalist government was first moved to Wuhan, where he pointed out that ordinary Chinese should be guided by the government in city building for they “in general had no experience on governing a city” and the very concept of *shizheng* (urban administration) was “unheard of” among them.¹⁵⁴

A qualified municipal government was organized to be a centralized and highly professionalized urban administration, which was mainly stuffed by a group of young and technologically trained officials. Among 904 municipal staff, who worked in the areas of education, social affairs, education, finance, health, public utilities, land, and public works, there were 28 persons who had studied abroad with bachelor degree, 116 persons graduating from Chinese universities, 30 trained in institutions of learning abroad, and 234 graduating from Chinese institutes of higher learning. In total, 408 people had received good education, about 45 percent of the sample (904 individuals).¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the members of the municipal staff were in general young. The statistic points a particularly high proportion (about 50 percent) of employees under thirty. If the

¹⁵⁴ From *Wuhan Minguo zhengfu shiliao* (武汉民国政府史料), online sources at <http://www.whdaj.gov.cn/dazl/new-dazl-slgb.asp> .

¹⁵⁵ Wuhan Municipal Archives (WMA), “Hankou zhengfu gongbao”, vol.1, 1929.

30-35 age group is added, the percentage goes up to about 68 percent. People over forty represented only 14 percent of the staff strength.¹⁵⁶ This essential feature, for it shows how the establishment of new administrative structures after the victory of the Nationalist provided opportunities to a large number of the young, educated men who believed that “China urgently needed to ‘remodel’ its cities in a ‘scientific’ manner through ‘comprehensive planning’.”¹⁵⁷

For the mayor, Liu Wendao, a graduate of the University of Paris, the ultimate goal of the newly established municipal government was to develop the city for the sake of the national interests rather than local concerns. This was best expressed by his public speech given on the inauguration on April 6th 1927, which he said the government was to “follow Sun Yat-sen’s idea of “tian xia wei gong” (what is under heaven is for all) and developed urban administration of Wuhan to pursue interests of the urban public and glorify the party-state.”¹⁵⁸ With this in mind, Liu promoted Sun Yat-sen’s idea of “Great Wuhan” and was dedicated to building the supersized city through scientific planning and infrastructural construction with advanced technology. Liu encouraged city planners and experts of China to contribute to building of Wuhan and organized governmental journals and conferences that fostered discussions on municipal issues. During this period, the building of Wuhan became a well-known testing

¹⁵⁶ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (the republic II), p. 46.

¹⁵⁷ *New Hankou* (Hankou’s government journal, vol. 1, no. 3, 1929 (Sept.)). WMA, 6B1122-4.

¹⁵⁸ *Hankou minguo ri bao*, 1927, July 10th.

ground for developing big urban centers of China. Challenges of the project attracted experts and city planners from other cities.¹⁵⁹ One of them was Dong Xiujia, a well-known municipal expert of China in the 1930s. He got his bachelor's degree in economics at the University of Michigan and a master's degree in civil engineering at the University of California. Before he came to Wuhan, Dong taught at universities in both Beijing and Shanghai and wrote six books on issues of municipal administration in China. After a brief service at the municipal governments of Shanghai and Hangzhou, he took the post of the director of the Public Construction Bureau in Wuhan and worked enthusiastically for the building of Wuhan. Other key figures included Chen Kemin, the director of the Construction Bureau, and Zhang Feiran, the chief engineer of Wuhan municipal government. Both were graduates of the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

Planning for Big

These young modernist city planners aimed at pinching together the three old cities to form a big city of Wuhan. Their obsession with bigness pushed the expanding of the city proper of Wuhan to cover not only the old cities but their vast neighboring rural area. The first administrative boundary of Wuhan municipality was set at the 68th conference of the Standing Committee of Hubei province in October of 1928. The resultant urban area of Wuhan became

¹⁵⁹ Pi, Minxiu, *Wuhantongshi* (the republic II), pp. 46-47.

17 times larger than the total area of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. The new urban boundary stretched 47 km long from south to north and 43 km wide from east to west.¹⁶⁰ Many villages, mountains and lakes of the neighboring counties were annexed into the city, which made the city contain more “rural” land than “urban” lands.

After the Nationalist government was removed to Nanjing in 1928, Wuhan was no longer the capital of China and the idea of “Great Wuhan” was cast into doubt. It even appeared to some officials that such a concept of Wuhan did not reflect reality and its construction would bring extra financial burden to the local society. In order to defend itself, the city government commissioned two city plans. The first one was conducted by Dong Xiujia in the late 1928. The other one was led by Zhang Feiran. Both of their planning drafts aimed at providing theoretical justification and general guidelines to building “Great Wuhan.”

In the 1928 city plan, Dong Xiujia enthusiastically embraced the idea of building a mega city of Wuhan and viewed big cities as the highest form of human society. As he wrote, “society evolves from villages to towns, from towns to cities, from small cities to big cities.....”¹⁶¹ This perception illustrates a strong version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that Chinese

¹⁶⁰ “Wuhan tebie shi gongwu jihua dagang (Wuhan Special Municipal Urban Construction Plan, 武汉特别市工务计划大纲),” in *Hankou tebieshi gongwu ju yewu baogao* (汉口特别市工务局业务报告), vol. 1, no.1, July, 1929. WMA

¹⁶¹ Dong Xiujia, *shizheng xue gangyao*, Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1932, p.2.

modernist urban planners took from their western counterparts. Dong believed that a modern city is a space to be built on a comprehensive and scientific plan, which is not to reflect current reality but to foresee the future developments of the city and technology. He cited western urban planning examples to demonstrate that it is possible to design and rebuild a living environment by following scientific rules. Dong shared with Sun Yat-sen's vision of Wuhan's strategic position at the center of China's nation-wide communicative system. As the Yangzi River runs across and the two major railways meet at Wuhan, a unified municipality would not only facilitate the communication of the city but more importantly enhance the transportation of all of China. Dong's writing optimistically points out four benefits of building Wuhan as a united city—administrative convenience, enhanced transportation, geographic coherence, and increased potential for the city's future development.

Zhang Feiran, the chief engineer of the municipal government, also adopted Dong's scientific and future-oriented vision of a "modern city." When preparing to draft the "Outline of the Wuhan Special Municipality Public Construction (武汉特别市工务计划大纲)" in 1929, he led a team of about 100 technicians to conduct a land survey of the new city proper in Wuhan. According to the land survey, the total land area of Wuhan was about "669000 mu (nearly 446 square kilometers)." ¹⁶² To justify such a rapidly extended urban

¹⁶² Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, pp. 56-57.

land, Zhang devoted a whole section of his plan to explaining why and how to make a big city. In the section, he also mentioned many western experiences in building New York, Berlin, and Tokyo. As he argued,

“Let us look at current cases in different countries. For example, the city plan for Greater London charts an area of 25 miles in radius to the city center that has a population of 9 million. Berlin also combines with neighboring small towns to become Greater Berlin with 4 million people. Greater Tokyo sets Tokyo city as a center for a planned urban area of a radius of 10 miles. Osaka also extended to merge nearby villages and towns for future urban planning....Now cities of the world expand to be new cities.....To catch up with the trend, we should reserve immense land for the development in the future.”¹⁶³

As Zhang suggested, the big city represented a world trend set by western and Japanese experiences. He particularly stressed two advantages of increasing the size of cities. First, it would better accommodate growing population. The old cities of Wuhan were constrained into relatively small area and limited urban development. To Zhang, the previous local authority never had a comprehensive urban plan ahead of time and left enough room for the growth of population. According to Zhang’s estimation, the newly demarcated urban land of Wuhan would accommodate growing urban population in the next sixty years. Second, a large size city would prevent some healthy and social

¹⁶³ *Hankou dushi jihua shu*, p.2, WMA, 9-31-3379.

problems, such as epidemic diseases and crime, associated with old densely populated cities. Zhang referred to the latest western study of the 1930s that argued for an average 30 square meters of living for each urban resident to get enough sunlight and fresh air in order to maintain a healthy life. Zhang suggested that old cities of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang could not meet all those scientific criteria and therefore Wuhan should replace them to be built into a mega city.

Zhang's urban plan encouraged people (especially officials) to take a different view on nature and landscape in the "scientific era." Natural barriers, like the Yangzi River, should no longer be seen as a natural boundary that separated the three parts. Zhang believed that the advancement of technology liberated spatial imagination and urban plans from these kinds of limits. He proposed to integrate the three parts of Wuhan by constructing a water communication system.¹⁶⁴ Powerful waterways were one chief geographic feature of the Wuhan area. Besides the Yangzi River and the Han River, there were numerous lakes and ponds inside and outside the walled cities of Wuchang

¹⁶⁴ The water communication system was one of the six urban building projects Zhang proposed in the plan. The six objects of Zhang Feiran's plan include dividing the city into different zones with special functions, such as administration, commerce, residence, industry and education (land-use control patterned upon American zoning ordinances), improvement of public transportation and communication among the three parts (bridges, harbors, railway, roads, streetcars, etc.), public buildings (governmental buildings, libraries, public toilets, cemeteries, farmers' markets, public bathrooms, parks, and theaters), and public infrastructure works (water service, street lamps, advertising plates, the electronic and coal gas supply). He expected to complete this long-term plan through three stages: 1929-1933, 1934-1938, and the complete of building bridges to connect the three parts of the city after 1939.

and Hanyang. The water surface area constituted about one fifth of the newly defined city Wuhan in 1929.¹⁶⁵ Zhang's plan was to construct ferry stations and routes to connect lakes of the three old cities and to form a water communication system of Wuhan. He also proposed to build two iron bridges, one crossing the Yangzi to connect Wuchang and Hanyang, the other crossing the Han River to connect Hankou and Hanyang. The construction sites in Wuchang and Hanyang had been chosen by then. Zhang's ambitious plan aimed to turn water from things "people had always fought with" to be precious resource for economic development of Wuhan.¹⁶⁶

This view also strengthened the connection of the urban area of the city with its rural periphery. Zhang emphasized the important function of vast farming lands in outskirts of Wuhan. In his eyes, they could provide important resources for urban consumption and production, such as fertile soils, agricultural products, timber, mines, coalfields, waterpower sites.¹⁶⁷ Scattered gardening lands were designed to form a special area where peasants would grow vegetables to meet the demand of urban residents. It provided an important food supply and facilitated the growth of communities of smallholder economy.

¹⁶⁵ *Hankou dushi jihua shu*, p.37, WMA, 9-31-3379.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

In both of the urban plans, western urban planning concepts were introduced to rationalize the bigness of a “Great Wuhan.” Zoning was a new urban planning concept of the time, and city planners used it to justify turning the three older cities into different zones of Wuhan, and argued that this way the new mega-city would have comprehensive urban functions of administration, commerce and industry. The idea of the Garden City, which came primarily from European experience, also inspired the planners to turn mountains and lakes in the suburbs into public parks. The new urban planning theory justified that Wuhan should expand to provide a healthy, ex-urban environment where people could escape busy and crowded urban life. The urgent need for the city of Wuhan to build more parks was clearly expressed in a 1930 municipal report,

“Cities in other countries all have big parks so that urban residents can relax mind and body and thereby protect their health. Since the works bureau in this city was founded, we soon built Sun Yat-sen Park and a park in front of the municipal government office. However, the total area of the two parks is as small as 0.123 square kilometer. If divided by Hankou’s built urban area of 10.8 square kilometer, the parks is only 1.14%. It means everyone in Hankou obtains only 0.18 square meters. There is a big difference compared with the average 4% and 5 square meters in other countries. Therefore, adding more parks is one of measures that we need to solve its urban problems.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.53-54.

The 1929 urban plan proposed to build Wuhan's "big park (*da gongyuan*)" included a large area of Snake Mountain and Phoenix Mountain of Wuchang and Turtle Mountain, Meiliang Mountain, Xiannü Mountain, Moon Lake and Longyang Lake in Hanyang.¹⁶⁹

In Hankou, the idea of the garden city drastically transformed the greater Back Lake region. This is a lake area behind Hankou and within the Zhanggong dike. As the deserted watercourses of the Han River, the area was mainly composed of lakes and marshy lands. After the construction of the dike by Zhang Zhidong, more lands were drained to be homes of peasants. Dotted with farmhouses and vegetable gardens, the Back Lake area set a great contrast to the urban life. It had become a popular sightseeing spot for people in Hankou, particularly famous for its spring blooms of rapeseeds and snow view of the winter.¹⁷⁰ Its healthy and natural environment and approximation to the commercial center of Hankou made it an ideal place for urban development of the city. By the 1930s, the area ranked as the most rapidly developed place. The growing number of restaurants, factories, hotels greatly altered the outlook of the region.

Very few of Zhang and Dong's projects ever went beyond the planning stage. Wuhan municipal government did not have the financial resources to

¹⁶⁹ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhantongshi*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁰ Xu Huandou, *Hankou xiaozhi*, Nanjing Shi : Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she, 2001 (1915), p. 67. The description can be also seen in Xu Mingting, *Hankou zhu zhi ci jiao zhu* (Hubei ren min chu ban she, 1985).

cover the high cost of these ambitious plans. It was also confronted with the problem of the technology. For example, the project of the Yangzi River Bridge, critical to Wuhan's urban integration, failed eventually. Without the technology for building such a long bridge, the city government had to rely upon the help of an American engineer, Dr. J.A. L Waddall. After surveying the site of the bridge and choosing the route in 1929, Dr. Waddall came up with a design of the bridge with an estimated cost of 7.8 million dollars. The mayor, Liu Wendao, planned to raise money through issuing new government bonds in Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. However, the attempt was interrupted by the flood in 1931.

Falling Apart of “Great Wuhan”

The mega city of Wuhan failed to be supported by the infrastructural improvement and technology that was crucial for its existence. The obsession with the big vision of a modern city gradually faded out. The optimistic reformers' belief that “big” could accommodate the growth of population faced challenges, because the population of Wuhan recovered slowly from the decline during the Northern Expedition. Moreover, there seemed no compelling economic reason for the vast rural areas to merge into the city. In fact, the municipal government of Wuhan hardly reached an effective administrative integration over the city proper. Much of the newly annexed rural areas were taken out of neighboring counties—Jiangxia county, Hanyang county and Xiakou county. Therefore, the supersized city of Wuhan harmed the interests of

the *xian* administration. Meanwhile, as a special city under the direct control of the state, Wuhan Municipality often identified different interests from those of the Hubei Province. It is no wonder that the big size of Wuhan became a subject of a long drawn-out quarrel among municipal, provincial, and county officials, and local communities. Criticisms like “too big,” “unpractical,” and “far beyond the reality” frequently appeared in the government reports.¹⁷¹ As a result, the city size shrank quickly from 1929 to 1931.

1. Wuchang’s breaking away from “Great Wuhan”

The downsizing of “Great Wuhan” began with the withdrawal of Wuchang. Wuchang’s prestige lies in the fact that it is a provincial capital and has long served as a political and military center of China. It was a long established history that the provincial government had always controlled the administration of the city. However, the new municipality created dual authorities over Wuchang. Therefore, Hubei provincial government demanded the separation of Wuchang from the city of Wuhan on the excuse of its importance to the “autonomy of Hubei provincial government.”¹⁷²

The request was submitted to the Nationalist government in Nanjing. In April 1929, Wuchang was permitted to be taken back by the provincial

¹⁷¹“Wuchang shi xia hua jie (武昌市县划界),” WMA, 18-10-165; Hubei provincial Archives (HPA), Ls1-3-2306.

¹⁷² “Cheng wei cheng fu zun ling pai yuan hui kan Hankou shi qu jie xian (呈为呈复尊令派员会勘汉口市区界限),” Ls1-3-2306, HPA.

government and designated to be a special administrative district under the direct control of the provincial government. The withdrawal of Wuchang revealed growing conflicts between the local and the national interests. The Special Municipality downsized to include only Hankou, Hanyang and their suburban areas. The city name was changed to be Hankou Special Municipality on June 11, 1929.

In the eyes of many provincial officials, to bring Wuchang back to an independent administration would better serve its urban growth. The unified municipality of Wuhan, as provincial officials acknowledged, favored Hankou and thus distributed fewer resources to the urban construction of Wuchang. As some local officials speculated in the following words, the separateness of Wuchang would work better for its future:

“The past urban construction devoted all energy and resources to improving Hankou. We feel pity that there were many areas in Wuchang that we could not reach. Considering the fact that Wuchang is a political center of the Yangzi valley, it is important to build it up soon. Now, it is under administration of the provincial government. We believe it is much better to separate Wuchang from the city than not.”¹⁷³

The provincial government came up with its own city planning ideas for Wuchang. Instead of emphasizing technology and size, the provincial

¹⁷³ *Hankou shi shizheng gongbao* (Hankou municipal journal, 汉市市政公报), vol. 1, no. 1, 1930, WMA.

government aimed to promote Wuchang's cultural identity as the birthplace of China's revolution. Tang Zhenlong, the director of the construction bureau of Hubei, drafted the new plan. Tang also supervised the early city building of Wuchang in 1924. Tang's rebuilding Wuchang began with the effort to reinstall Wuchang's cultural identity and searching for uniqueness of the city. In the preface of his urban plan, Tang cherished the memory of the past achievement that Zhang Zhidong made in the urban construction of Wuchang and criticized the stagnation in the time of Wuhan municipality.¹⁷⁴ He attributed Wuchang's failure of development to the "bigness" of "Great Wuhan." As he wrote, "the city of Wuhan including Wuchang, Hanyang and Hankou was too big.....such a "big city" could not function with a consistency of power and responsibility, and therefore had hard time to get financial support from local society." Tang identified himself as a follower of Zhang Zhidong who dedicated himself to rebuilding Wuchang. He believed the independence of Wuchang would help to administer it more effectively, redistribute local resource and raise fund from local society better.

Nevertheless, the provincial authority's attempt to establish Wuchang as a new municipality failed in August 1930.¹⁷⁵ The nationalist government

¹⁷⁴ "Wuhan shizheng gongcheng quanbu juti jihua shu (武昌市政工程全部具体计划书)," 18-10-187, WMA.

¹⁷⁵ The attempt was made right after Wuhan Special Municipality was downsized be Hankou Special Municipality on June 11.

rejected it because Wuchang was not “big enough” to be qualified as a “city.”¹⁷⁶ According to the 1927 “city designation law,” a city had to have a population of over 300,000 or over 200,000 with half of the local revenue from the commercial tax to be designated as a municipality. Instead, the provincial government organized the Wuchang Municipal Administration Office (武昌市政处). It took charge of urban administration and construction of Wuchang from 1931 to 1936. A municipal government didn’t form until 1937.

2. The Shrinking Territory of the Special Municipality of Hankou

After Wuchang was taken out, the city government tried to keep the remaining territory. Referring to the agreement made on city’s boundary at the 68th conference of the Standing Committee of Hubei province in 1928, the special municipality of Hankou claimed control over tHankou, Hanyang, the entire of Xiakou county, and a large part of Hanyang county. But the 1928 city boundary faced the challenge from both provincial government and Hanyang county government, which demanded a re-evaluation of the city size and re-defining urban boundary.

The Hubei provincial government soon organized a special team to conduct a thorough investigation of the urban boundaries for such a job had

¹⁷⁶ “Wuchang shi xian hua jie (武昌市县划界),” 18-10-165, WMA.

never been done since 1928. The team was composed of representatives from Bureaus of Education, Finance, Construction and Civil Administration in Hubei government, and two technicians from the Hankou municipal government.¹⁷⁷ The team conducted four site explorations that carefully surveyed the border area drawn in 1928. The first three focused on the three key points along the Zhanggong dike: Tuoluo kou—the starting point of Zhanggong dike in the southwest, Zhanjia ji (Zhan Family Rock) and Daijia shan (Dai Family Mountain) in the north, and Gusao shu and Jinkou in the end of Zhanggong dike in the north. The last trip was to investigate the southern border of Hanyang.

After the investigation was done, representatives from the Bureau of Education and the Bureau of Finance produced two reports. Both questioned the big size of the city defined in 1928. One official complained simply that the city was “too large at the first look.” The report argued that the previous urban plans had placed too much emphasis on future development but forgot to take current reality into consideration. Huang Changyu, the director of Education bureau, argued that the city should expand gradually. As he wrote, “The city proper should be restricted within built urban area and the area that is prepared for expansion. As to the district of Hankou, the total land area is

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

about 360 square miles and the built area constitutes less than one fourth of it.

The rest land is far more than enough for urban development. ”¹⁷⁸

In the eyes of Huang, the remaining city proper was still too big. Criticizing that the former municipal government “simply possessed a vast territory with little achievement,” Huang suggested a further reduction of the city proper by separating suburban Hanyang out of the city: “Hanyang is separated on one side. Although it also benefits from the Yangzi and Han river, yet the inconvenient transportation has hampered the development of commerce and industry lack of development. The southwest part of the city is where Longyang lake, Moshui lake, and Taizi lake are located. As a desolate river-lake-estuary region, it has no urban function at all. Moreover, it is completely out of the municipal police jurisdiction that only covers flourishing areas.....If we take the area out of city proper.....it won't affect the urban growth. Plus, it leaves people to the county administration and exempts the poor whose livelihood depends on fishing from the heavy tax that urban residents subject to. It will do good to both national economy and the people's livelihood.”¹⁷⁹

Huang's words pointed out the different ecological environment and life style in suburban Hanyang and argued therefore that it should not be

¹⁷⁸ “Cheng wei cheng fu zun ling pai yuan hui kan han kou shi qu jie xian fu jut u shuo qing qi (呈为呈复遵令派员会勘汉口市市区界限付具图说敬祈),” Ls1-3-2306, HPA.

¹⁷⁹ “Chengqing suoxiao shiqu fanwei (呈请缩小市区范围),” 18-10-164, WMA.

“artificially” incorporated into the city. The other representative from the bureau of Finance responded Huang’s suggestion and also agreed that the geographic feature of Hanyang and its urban function were so different from the metropolitan center, Hankou. He argued that the integrative urban plan would place Hanyang under the shadow of Hankou and it would not be able to achieve its own development. Both of the two reporters pointed out that the making of a modern city should take consideration of differences among regions and local practices to benefit people.

The disagreement of the provincial government and the municipal government over the ideal size of the city not only revealed the different principles in city planning but also reflected their conflicting financial interests. It is clear that the “bigness” of the city meant the loss of the provincial government in revenue. The urban boundary investigation and reports led to another meeting where provincial and municipal officials negotiated with each other in defining a new boundary. It ended up with Hanyang’s moving out of the city. In May 1930, Hanyang was taken back to Hanyang *county* government. Since then, Hankou was reduced to about 135 kilometers square. The principle on how the city’s boundary was revised was based not on scientific calculation but on the tradition concern on natural division. According to that principle, the borders of Hankou were the Yangzi river in the east, the Han River in the south, Zhanggong dike in the west, and L üjia he (L ü family River) and Zhangjia he (Zhang family River) in the north.

3. Hanyang's demand for independence

The return of Hanyang to the *xian* administration lasted for four years till 1935, when the provincial government decided to merge Hanyang with Wuchang so that Wuchang could meet the qualification to be a municipality. Starting from July 1935, officials from four administrative institutions—the Hubei provincial government, Hanyang county government, Wuchang county government, and Wuchang Municipal Administration Office held five meetings to discuss the urban integration of Wuchang and Hanyang. The issue of urban size was raised as a key problem at all these meetings. Hubei provincial government's efforts to establish a municipal government to facilitate urban construction was constrained by the fact that Wuchang's size and population was not qualified to be designated as a city. Adding Hanyang into the city of Wuchang would increase the population of the city and therefore solve the problem.

The creation of the Wuchang Municipality provoked discontent among people in Hanyang. In July 1935, twelve people from Hanyang sent an open letter to the provincial government opposing the integration of Hanyang and Wuchang. The letter stressed Hanyang as a separate administrative unit in history and geographic location. It worried that the natural barrier set by the Yangzi River would make it hard to administer two localities by one municipality. The letter also argued that the provincial government should be

consistent with the principle that they used in city planning. When separating Hanyang from the city of Hankou, the provincial government mentioned the division of nature as a key reason. Now, people in Hanyang questioned “how come the two (Hanyang and Wuchang) separated by the intimidating Yangzi River can be integrated, while the two (Hankou and Hanyang) separated by a small river could not?”¹⁸⁰ These Hanyang people insisted that the geographic and custom coherence should be the key criteria in designating a city because it was convenient to govern and best fit to people’s life style.

The increase of taxes was another reason why Hanyang people resisted the urban integration. The letter expressed the surprise and anger people had when seeing extra tax burdens added by the preparation of the new municipal government on “poor people and weak business” in Hanyang. As it accounts, “besides the old taxes on contracting signing, pawning, categorical merchandise, and butchering (契牙当屠), the proposed taxes that would be collected in Hanyang would include the house tax (the heaviest one), contract tax on private properties, taxes relating to vehicles, advertisement, entertainment, market, food inspection, wood, public security and etc, which would be no different from Wuchang. These taxes are extremely heavy to people in Hanyang who were in fact greatly weakened by the municipal administration. How innocent Hanyang is as it suffered so much!”¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

What made people in Hanyang even more worried is that “Hanyang only bears tax obligation without right,” since all the administrative institutions of the new municipality were located in Wuchang. The only one in Hanyang was the tax collection bureau of Wu-yang (武阳税捐稽征处). They also were concerned about the uneven distribution of local resources between Hanyang and Wuchang, which might cause a shortage of revenue in running schools, controlling rivers, and conducting other public construction projects in Hanyang. The end of the letter demanded for the self-governance of Hanyang so it would not bear high tax burden and protect the local interests. It clearly expressed a strong local identity of Hanyang that conflicted with centralizing and statist urban planning.

Their efforts finally paid off. Hanyang was once again returned to Hanyang *xian* administration, although some urban issues like public security, fire protection, and cleaning, were still controlled by the police bureau of the Hubei province.

The 1931 flood

Besides the administrative challenges to “bigness” of the city, what also brought a serious challenge to the idea of “Great Wuhan” was the flood in 1931. In 1931, the Yangzi River’s water level rose to a record high and breached dikes in Wuhan area. All three districts of Wuhan were inundated and cities streets were submerged in water for more than two months. The city suffered massive

loss of life and damage of property. It turns out that the former city planning and reconstruction led by the ambitious Wuhan municipal officials caused much of the severity of the flood, for it seriously weakened the three old cities' defense against natural disaster.

Though many former plans on “Great Wuhan” failed to go beyond the planning stage due to the lack of financial resources and technologies, what Wuhan municipal government did manage to do was to dismantle the city walls of Wuchang and Hanyang. For many young modern-minded officials, it was a powerful revolutionary statement for the new city government to break up with the decadent imperial past. They also believed that removing the walls of traditional cities would promote communication in the Great Wuhan. They tore down the city walls of Wuchang and Hanyang in 1927, ignoring the fact that the walls had always helped protecting these river-side towns against flood.

Some local elites resisted the official order of dismantling city walls. Wang Baoxing, a local literatus, warned of the potential danger of floods people would face after removing walls. In his memoir, Wang recorded a serious flood that Wuchang experienced in the thirty-ninth year of Daoguang reign (1859). By then, some parts of the city wall had been ordered to be removed because people argued that it would facilitate markets of the region to dismantle the wall.¹⁸² However, Wuchang became extremely vulnerable without the protection of the

¹⁸² Wang Baoxin, *xu hankou congfan*, p. 101.

city wall. After that, the magistrate, local merchants and gentry rebuilt the lost city wall collaboratively.

After the success of the Nationalist revolution in 1926, Wang observed the trend that local concern and knowledge had been forced to give way to the “superior” command of modern reformist agenda set by young foreign trained officials who had little interest or knowledge about Wuhan’s cities. As Wang wrote,

“[A]fter the middle of Xuanton era (1909-1912), officials of the northern and the southern China were primarily the ones who came back from overseas. They did not appreciate people of the older generation and had never learned about how people did things before Since reforms started in China, there had been nothing that had not broken from the past. This is merely one small example. ”¹⁸³

This lack of knowledge on the traditional wisdom in city planning can also be seen in another urban reconstruction policy. As soon as the municipal government was established, the ambitious officials ordered that some big lakes in and around the older city Wuchang were reclaimed to create more land for new construction. A similar policy was carried out to encourage the urban development of the Back Lake area in Hankou.

Such measures left the city with few outlets to drain excess water and therefore worried local people that their cities would become very vulnerable

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 97.

when flood occurred. 84 members of Wuchang's philanthropist associations wrote a letter to the new municipal government, warning that the decision to fill in lakes and canals of Wuchang would cause the shrinking of reservoir and hence weaken the city's flood control system.¹⁸⁴ The importance of the marshy land and lakes in the city's water control had been long acknowledged by local officials in the imperial era.¹⁸⁵ Those outside the city wall functioned as a high water discharging area when the Yangzi flooded; while, the ones within the city served as outlets to drain excess water. During Zhang Zhidong's tenure, he ordered the design of the watercourse system that connected lakes in and outside the wall for Wuchang's water control.

Those modern-minded officials and technicians largely ignored the conventional wisdom. Their single-minded pursuit of urban expansion turned the marshy lands and lakes to city parks and even prosperous urban markets. Their faith in "scientific" knowledge and power of technology made them believe human being's capability to reengineer the physical environment.

The flood of 1931 struck a blow to the "scientifically planned" urban construction which had been ascendant since 1927. All the worries that local residents had previously expressed were proved to be right. The high water level

¹⁸⁴ *Hubeisheng 1931nian shuizai dang'an xuanbian (Selection of Archives of Hubei on The 1931 Flood, 湖北省 1931 年水灾档案选编)*, Wuhan: Hubei sheng dang an guan, 1999, pp. 249-150.

¹⁸⁵ Hu Zuhe, *Jin Chu xiu su zhi yao*(荆楚修疏指要), Wuhan Shi : Hubei ren min chu ban she, p. 257.

of the Yangzi did not impose an immediate threat to the old city of Wuchang and Hankou. At the beginning, the huge cost of lives and property was from the newly annexed urban land, which underwent rapid development with many new factories, schools, and shops and resultant increasing population living outside the old city boundaries. All the newly built urban area was swallowed by the floodwater. In Wuchang's suburbs, the flood immediately rendered about 14,520 people homeless.¹⁸⁶ In Hankou, the entire Back Lake area and newly built markets, equal to one fifth of the total urban area proper, were submerged in water.

As time went, the Yangzi River's water level rose to record high and breached most dikes in Wuhan area. By the mid-August, all districts of Hanyang and Hankou were inundated. Wuchang was the only place that could find dry land in the region. But the diminished lakes and damaged old watercourse caused a serious problem to people in Wuchang. Since excess water in the small lake out of Wuchang could not flow into big lakes, it broke the dike and flew into the city of Wuchang.

Now, what Wuchang could rely upon for its defense was only remains of the city wall.¹⁸⁷ The modern minded officials finally learned the hard way about the crucial function of the city wall. On August 5th, the government organized the "City Wall's Flood Defense Committee" (城垣防水委员会). As the title

¹⁸⁶ *Hubeisheng 1931nian shuizai dang'an xuanbian*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

implies, its main task was to strengthen and rebuild the wall. Ironically, the officials who dismantled the walls before started to take actions to consolidate wall foundation and build up some parts of the wall. However, it turned out to be extremely hard to achieve the goal for the wall was too fragile. The report of the head of the Department of Construction described the fragile state of the wall,

“[A]fter the city wall was torn down, the boulders set as the foundation of the wall were also taken away. The deep digging caused the ground to sink. The remaining foundation of the wall mixed with sediments and scraps was loose and fragile. For the section between the Hanyang gate and the Wenchang gate, water seeps in everywhere. As water is suppressed in one place, it comes out on the other place. It is extremely hard to stop leakage completely. The dangerous situation occurs all the time. This is very urgent!”¹⁸⁸

Finally, the floodwater found way to run into Wuchang. About two thirds of the city proper of Wuchang was well under the water.

The flood of 1931 was the largest flood that the region of Wuhan had had in sixty-one years. It elicited divergent responses on the previous urban reconstruction from different levels of Chinese society. The immediate response took the form of rumors spreading out the two cities. One believed that the flood was the wrath of Heaven to people’s greed as the result of the urban

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., telegraph from the Bureau of the Construction, on August 18th, 1931, p. 266.

development. Another one said that the disaster was caused by the dismantlement of the Dragon King Temple in the city beautiful project of 1929, in which many residents were required to relocate and buildings were forced to remove as the result of rebuilding the riverside avenue along the Yangzi River.¹⁸⁹

These local interpretations represent Chinese traditional notions about nature, which saw natural disaster like droughts, floods, or earthquakes, a divine punishment and a sign of the declining virtue or misbehavior of mankind. These rumors expressed a deep sense of uneasiness felt by people towards urban modernization. The earnest belief of municipal urban planners in technology and men's power to master nature contradicted the traditional reverence that Chinese people generally shared for nature. These responses also illustrated the discontent with the centralizing and forced urban reconstruction among urban residents. For example, the reconstruction of roads in Hankou involved forced dismantlement of buildings and relocation of people.

The reservation about building "Great Wuhan" was also aroused among those who had zeal for technology and progress. The inundation of Wuhan's three cities shocked many people and cast a doubt on capability of humans to remold the natural world. Xie Qinmao, a local journalist, made the most detailed record on Hankou in the flood. He expressed how upset he had been when he saw that Wuhan was submerged in water for months. To him, it is was such a

¹⁸⁹ Xie Maoqian, *1931 Hankou dashui ji*, Hankou : Jiang han yin shu guan, 1931, p. 17.

disillusion of the previous ambition to make Wuhan China's second largest metropolis comparable to Chicago of the United States, Manchester of Britain, and Osaka of Japan.¹⁹⁰ He questioned the effectiveness of the "modern" and "scientific" governance that the new municipal government promoted. As Xie pointed out, Wuhan was the region where water control was historically crucial to its development. Therefore, water control had long been the most important responsibility of the local government. Ironically, the urban modernization that the modernist city planners promoted and conducted largely weakened the flood defense capability of Wuhan. As Xie mocked, "Even without obtaining scientific methods, [imperial officials] had always been able to solve the water problem cautiously."¹⁹¹

The cost of the flood in 1931 had been unprecedentedly huge in lives and in property. There were about half a million people in Wuhan's cities who became homeless: Hankou 230,000, Wuchang 50,000, and Hanyang 30,000, over 30,000 rickshaw coolie refugees and 100,000 wharf coolie refugees. There was no accurate record on the total death toll for the Wuhan area. According to the reports of the Hubei Disaster Relief Committee on buried corpses, we can estimate that the death toll was no less than 30,000. In addition to loss of life, much economic damage was caused by the flooding of houses and shops. Practically all shops closed their doors and business was at a complete standstill.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p2.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

Half of the 20,000 shops that Hankou had in total were closed. The numbers of houses that fell down in the flood was very high, 56% in Hankou, 32% in Wuchang, and 41% in Hanyang. The economic loss in Wuhan's cities reached about forty-one millions yuan in total. Considering the fact that the total deposit in Wuhan's banks was only around sixty millions in 1934, the economic damage caused by the flood almost exhausted the cities' wealth. Soon after 1931, Wuhan municipal government fell apart and the three cities remained separate.

Chapter Four

Tensions of Rebuilding: War, Unification and Struggles over Land

By the end of Nanjing decade, the idea of “Great Wuhan” had largely remained on government’s urban planning drafts and represented mostly an official way of thinking. The previous governments made efforts to promote the “Great Wuhan” as a state imagined future. But each promotion was rescinded within a short period of time. In addition to physical separation, there was lack of common “urban identity” in the three cities. Each of the three cities had formed its distinct culture, history and local identity in the past four hundred years. Even today the different urban function and culture of the commercial town Hankou and political center Wuchang continue to give the city of Wuhan a split personality.¹⁹² The previous urban plans drew much inspiration from the example of western cities and stressed advanced technology in creating a giant urban center of Wuhan, which made the city building project of “Great Wuhan” out of the reach for most ordinary people who did not grasp the knowledge.

However, the outbreak of the war in 1937 transformed the idea of “Great Wuhan” from an elitist project to a common dream of Chinese popularized through wartime propagandas and nationalist movements. Serving as the de

¹⁹² Stephen MacKinnon “Wuhan’s searching for identity in the Republican period,” in Joseph Esherick ed. *Remaking the Chinese city: Modernity and National identity: 1900-1950*, 1999, p. 161. It also can be seen in Pi Mingxiu’s book *jindai wuhan chengshi shi*, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993.

facto capital of China in 1938, Wuhan's three cities led one of the most significant battles against Japanese advancement. People from the three towns experienced the unprecedented unity under the political course of rescuing China from Japan's invasion. The war and growing nationalism contributed to the formation of the "Wuhan defense" spirit shared by Chinese people in the wartime. It led to the revival of the idea of "Great Wuhan" and made it central to the postwar urban recovery project.

This chapter looks at how the battle of Wuhan led to the revival of the "Great Wuhan" and how the postwar land law and policy was used by the local government to gain a tight control over urban land and prepare for urban reconstruction. The first part particularly examines the transformative effects that the war had on the three cities and how they created an opportunity to form the "Wuhan defense" spirit which prevailed in the local society. The second part explores the postwar urban planning and construction for "Great Wuhan." The uprooting of large population in wartime weakened the old ties of family and local societal organizations, which used to dominate the control of land. The war destruction and the coercive military administration of the Japanese occupation provided the nationalist government an opportunity to assert its control over the urban land. In the immediate postwar period, the attempt of building "Great Wuhan" among local officials and urban planners always went hand in hand with efforts to limit private ownership and increase the state's control over land usage. By late 1947, the project of "Great Wuhan" not only embodied the

Chinese nationalist spirit for a unified strong nation but its implementation also marked an early experimental attempt to adopt Sun Yat-Sen's "equalization of land rights" method in solving land problems that previous local governments faced in urban construction. However, this kind of attempt was soon interrupted by the civil war between the nationalists and the communists.

The defense of Wuhan: unification for the national salvation

The urban society and the relationship of Wuhan's three cities transformed profoundly during the war. From January to October 1938, Wuhan became the staging ground and logistic base for two million Chinese troops defending the central Yangzi region against Japanese attacks. Though Wuhan fell in the end, the battle of Wuhan was regarded as the most heroic battle in modern Chinese history. During the siege of the city, the Japanese suffered their greatest losses of the war. In effect, the siege of Wuhan prolonged the war in China until the U.S. entry in 1942 and Japanese chose not to pursue the Nationalist government into Sichuan and turned their attention to expanding their grip on the north. In what follows I will discuss the social and cultural dimensions of the transformative effects that the war brought to Wuhan's cities in 1938.

In the early days of the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45), Wuhan saw the forced migration of nearly a hundred million people after the fall of Shanghai and Nanjing in 1937 and the lost battles in Xuzhou. The large number of

refugees from all over coastal China converged on the cities of Wuchang, Hanyang, and Hankou and found ways to work together. By the late spring 1938 Wuhan's population had grown from 1 million to 1.5 million.¹⁹³ The massive migration as one dramatic story of the war was recorded in the book *Thunder Out of China* (1946) written by two American eyewitnesses,

Through the long months of 1938, as the Chinese armies were pressed slowly back toward the interior, they found their way clogged by moving people. The breathing space of winter had given hundreds of thousands time to make their decision, and China was on the move in one of the greatest mass migrations in human history. It is curious that such a spectacle has not been adequately recorded by a Chinese writer or novelist. Certainly the long files of gaunt people who moved west across the roads and mountains must have presented a sight unmatched since the days of nomad hordes; yet no record tells how many made the trek, where they come from, where they settled anew.¹⁹⁴

Despite the inadequacy of aggregate figures, the mass migration was clearly unprecedented in size and impact. In Wuhan's cities, people from all over China who speak in different dialects and different in class, educational, and regional backgrounds were thrown together. Surveys of refugees in Wuhan

¹⁹³ On wartime growth of Wuhan's population by at least half a million, see Wu Chengguo, "Wuhan Kangzhan shiqi de nanmin zhouji gongzuo," p. 100; also Sun Yankui, *ku nan de ren liu*, pp. 81-89.

¹⁹⁴ Theodore White and Anna Lee Jacoby, *Thunder out of China*, Da Capo Press, 1980, p. 55.

and later in Chongqing demonstrated again and again the wide representation of peoples from the various regions of China.¹⁹⁵ The National Relief Committee's 1938 report on Wuhan found 111 shelters operating in the three cities. More than half of the refugees were housed in government-run shelters. The relief works in the three cities were integrated under the leadership of the National Relief Committee, whose centralized works overshadowed the traditional disaster relief operated separately in Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang.

The war had transformed the nature of the urban society in Wuhan. The war shut down most of the prewar commercial economy of Wuhan that had relied heavily on transshipment of commodities and processed goods in and out of the port of Hankou. And yet within a matter of months of the start of the hostilities the Wuhan economy was operating successfully on a war footing, with an emphasis on industrial production and state control. By the spring of 1938 about one hundred and seventy factories from the Shanghai area had moved to Wuhan and begun operation. Along with the machinery came skilled labor—including large numbers of engineers and technicians. Estimates indicate that over forty thousand skilled workers fled inland during the war, and most of them passed through Wuhan in 1938. The most fortunate refugees were the ten thousand or so skilled industrial workers who moved from Shanghai at state expense to work in Wuhan's armament industry.

¹⁹⁵ Sun Yankui, *Ku nan de ren liu*, Guilin shi: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 1994, pp. 69-71.

Besides the transformed economy, the local culture of Wuhan's cities was largely replaced with a highly centralized and politicized war-directed culture. With the arrival of refugee intellectuals from the rest of China, mainly from Beijing and Shanghai, a cultural propaganda with national focus was organized by them to whip up maximum support for the defense of Wuhan among the urban and rural populations of the central Yangzi. This group of intellectuals included most of the important names in the Chinese literary, art, drama, and university worlds at the time, such as Lao She, Guo Moruo, etc. With them came the national press. Dailies like *Dagongbao*, *Zhongyang ribao*, *Shen bao*, and *Saodang bao* moved their presses inland and resumed publishing. The explosive growth of the print media in Wuhan was remarkable. In the first three months of 1938 the number of dailies shot from three to fourteen and the number of weeklies, from twenty to thirty; the number of journals climbed from thirty to over two hundred within ten months. Dozens of new publishing houses set up shop. Every faction and political group seemed to have its own publication.

In addition to transplanted intellectuals from coastal cities, there were local people who also participated in the wartime cultural propaganda. For example, Hu Qiuyuan, a young Wuchang intellectual, had just returned to Wuhan in 1937 from a couple years of study in the United States. He first worked as an assistant to the British Guardian correspondent Freda Utey. His publishing career began when he won the political and financial backing of

General Chen Mingshu, a Baoding graduate who was nationally known for leading the valiant defense of Shanghai against the Japanese. In the early spring of 1938, with General Chen's help, Hu took over a bankrupt local paper (*Hubei ribao*), renamed it the *Times* (*Shidai ribao*), and gave it a national focus.

This flowering of urban culture was possible because of the basic political restructuring that occurred in Wuhan after the fall of the central government in Nanjing. For the first time, the Guomindang and Chinese Communists, two rivals, joined in a United Front government that tolerated publications critical of both sides. Therefore, Wuhan enjoyed parliamentary-style debate and political experimentation, the flowering of a free press, and “the unleashing and redirection of enormous creative energies in cultural spheres.”¹⁹⁶ Forging unity by tolerating political diversity became more important than preserving authoritarian party politics. The political unification in a United Front government in Wuhan helped to knit together the three parts of Wuhan into a unified whole.

As Chinese United Front government worked to contain the advancing enemy, on the front line of Spanish civil war, Madrid, was withstanding the attack of Franco's forces. Delegates of the Chinese Communist Party in Wuhan delivered assurances that if the Chinese masses mobilized as the Spanish people

¹⁹⁶ MarKinnon, *Wuhan 1938: War, refugees, and the making of modern China*, University of California Press, 2008, p.3.

had done in Madrid, Wuhan could be held.¹⁹⁷ Pro-CCP newspapers and magazines produced numerous articles disseminating this line. It was best summed up in an editorial in *Xinhua ribao*: "turn Wuhan into China's unbreakable Madrid".¹⁹⁸ A powerful war song expressed such a hope:

Warm blood burning with righteous indignation at the lake of Boyang;
Sparks flying off in the Yangzi River;
The nation roars in anger;
Defend Great Wuhan!
Wuhan is the center of our War of Resistance;
Wuhan is the greatest metropolis;
We'll defend her without fail;
Like the Spanish people defend Madrid,
We'll shatter the enemy's offensive;
And consolidate our anti-Japanese battle line;
We'll use our inexhaustible power;
Defend Great Wuhan!¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Victor Shiu Chiang Cheng, "Imaging China's Madrid in Manchuria: The Communist Military Strategy at the Onset of the Chinese Civil War, 1945-1946," *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2005, p. 73.

¹⁹⁸ *Xinhua ribao*, August 1, 1938.

¹⁹⁹ *Baowei da Wuhan*, Wuhan shi dang an guan: zheng xie Wuhan shi wei yuan hui wen shi xue xi wei yuan hui, 1998, p. 36.

The song described the “defend Wuhan” spirit that embodied the patriotic zeal of the people. Youth and students were the heart of this idealistic spirit. Students from all over China were also thrown together in Wuhan’s cities. They fully believed the propaganda and worked for the unification of people in the three parts of Wuhan. They worked at the refugee shelters and health clinics in Wuhan’s cities, made weekly marches ferrying back and forth across the Yangzi almost daily from Wuchang to participate in rallies, and put up fresh wall posters on the Hankou side daily. They were mobilized in mass campaigns to convince rural as well as urban citizens of the need to sacrifice and join in the war effort. The large number of intellectuals and students in wartime Wuhan raised the conscience of nation among local people. As many historians have argued that because the student marches and demonstrations of the twentieth century were so consciously staged, they acquired a symbolic or ritual power that gave educated youth special status as the conscience of the nation.²⁰⁰

The war experience in 1938 had profound physical and psychological impact on local society in Wuhan. Old ties of family and geography were torn asunder as marriages dissolved and massive migration occurred. During the ten months of the heroic defense in Wuhan, a new sense of community responsibility arose within the bizarre mix of humanity thrown together by the war. The relief effort connected national integration to social responsibility,

²⁰⁰ Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai*, Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991.

reaching beyond family and local ties toward a redefinition of community. War propaganda further knit together the three parts into a unite entity by forming a collective consciousness on “Wuhan’s defense spirit” shared not only by people in the cities of Wuhan but also Chinese people as a whole.

Postwar urban planning

As early as 1939, the Hubei provincial governor Chen Cheng had proposed the Great Wuhan project (da wuhan jihua) as a blueprint for postwar recovery. As the chief commander of the Wuhan Battle, he was encouraged by the nationalistic zeal in the defense of the Wuhan area and urged to carry that enthusiasm into the postwar urban recovery of Wuhan’s cities.²⁰¹ Because of Chen Cheng’s promotion, the provincial government decided to add the city building project of Wuhan in “the Outline of Building New Hubei” in 1942. This was the first preliminary plan preparing for the operation of recovery Hubei. The notion of “Great Wuhan” in this plan was clearly shaped by the wartime strategy which included not only the three old cities but also six neighboring counties that used to be in the defense zone of Wuhan. Two years later, the provincial government expanded the idea to come up with “the draft plan of Great Wuhan Municipality (大武汉市计划草案),” a more detailed urban plan for rebuilding Wuhan municipality.

²⁰¹ Chen Cheng (陈诚), “New Hubei Construction Planning Draft (preface) (《新湖北建设计划大纲前言》), 119-130-95, p. 3, WMA.

All these recovery plans have the rebuilding of the city of Wuhan as their focus. They envisioned the restoration of the authority over Hubei through taking over the urban center of Wuhan first. This urban-based recovery thinking allured local officials to make a much bigger city of Wuhan. A 1943 provincial report expected to increase the population of “Great Wuhan” to reach 1.65 million and the total urban area to about 3600 square kilometer, three times larger than that of the 1927 plan.²⁰² As the chart shows below, nearly 1/3 of the population was from the six neighboring counties, whose recovery depended on the urban reconstruction of Wuhan.

Estimated population of Great Wuhan Municipality²⁰³ (March, 1943)

Districts	Pre-war Population	Proportion of population in the annexed district	Estimated number
Hankou	743,434	all	743,434
Wuchang	296,405	all	296,405
Hanyang	110,004	all	110,004
Huangpi	689,414	1/4	172,353

²⁰² LS3-2-2232, HPA.

²⁰³ Ibid.

County			
Wuchang County	209,798	1/2	104,899
Hanyang County	446,064	1/3	148,688
Huanggang County	873,424	1/20	43,670
E'cheng County	450,299	1/30	15,009
Xiaogang County	637,151	1/30	21,271
Total	4,455,993		1,655,733

The integration of the three old cities also marked a new survival strategy of Hankou, Wuchang, and Hanyang in the postwar period. All of the three were seriously weakened and lost their prominent positions in the national commerce and industry. After 1938, the National Defense Planning Commission dismantled and removed most of most major state-run industries of Hanyang and Hankou, such as steelworks and arsenal and munitions factories. It followed with a massive relocation of the private sector, such as textile, cigarette, and food-processing businesses in Hankou and Wuchang to the interior. In addition to relocating 13 large industrial plants, businesses removed about 250 major light

industrial units.²⁰⁴ By the time the Japanese took Wuhan in late October, over 70 percent of the city's industrial capacity was either destroyed or relocated.²⁰⁵ After Wuhan's cities were taken back in 1945, the total number of industrial enterprises that the government inherited was only 73.²⁰⁶

The first efforts to restore the municipal structure were undertaken separately in the three cities. On August 16th 1945, the Ministry of Interior appointed Xu Huizhi as the new mayor of Hankou. The Hankou municipal government was established two months later and worked to put the city in normal operation. The new city of Hankou lost its rank as a “special municipality” under the direct control of the Nationalist government. The weakened position and the lack of financial support hindered its urban recovery. The Hubei provincial government helped the preparation for the establishment of Wuchang's municipal government. Soon after Wuchang municipal government was established in October 1946, it applied for the status of “model city (模范市)” in order to get state financial support. However, it failed to get it and also suffered severe financial difficulties.

²⁰⁴ Pi Mingxiu, *Jindai wuhan chengshi shi* (Beijing, 1993), p. 534.

²⁰⁵ Yang Bingde, *Zhongguo jindai chengshi yu jianzu*, (zhongguo jian zhu chuban she, 1993), p. 157; Li Ze, *Wuhan kangzhan shiliao xuanbian* (Wuhan, 1985), pp. 249-57; Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan chengshi fazhan gui* (1990), pp. 334-39; Ao Wenwei, *Hubei kangri zhanzheng shi* (Wuhan, 2006), pp. 142-47.

²⁰⁶ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (Republican I), p. 363.

Facing disadvantageous circumstance, the mayor of Hankou, Xu Huizhi, publically supported the conglomeration of the cities and suggested that it would strengthen the bargaining power of the three and win national support. As he argued in the Hankou municipal report of January 1946,

“Wuhan is the birthplace of the Republic and the thoroughfare of nine provinces. Our building of new China, particularly the rebuilding of the birthplace Wuhan, should unite all the forces, plan carefully, and manage to complete the task. Only by doing so can we accomplish such an important task.”²⁰⁷

The same view was taken by the “Wuhan Regional Planning Committee (武汉区域规划委员会),” a leading institution set up to guide the municipal governments of Wuchang and Hankou in postwar urban recovery. From 1945 to 1946, it invited nearly one hundred experts and city planners throughout China and organized them into six groups that took charge of urban planning in (1) urban transportation, (2) public health, (3) flood protection and water conservancy, (4) cultural development, (5) financial work, (6) urban and rural administration.²⁰⁸ The committee published its research results as “the 1946 preliminary research report of Wuhan regional planning.” The central idea of the report was to build a city of Wuhan that would be large and modern, both in its

²⁰⁷ *Hankou Municipal Report*, 1946, Jan., 9-3-17, WMA.

²⁰⁸ *Wuhan regional planning preliminary report* (武汉区域规划初步研究报告), LS1-6-5712, HPA.

structure and in its functioning. It drew inspiration from Sun Yat-sen's ideas of "Great Wuhan" and shared his commitment to technological advancement and infrastructural construction.

In the report, the committee also designed three developing stages for achieving such a massive scale urban plan. The first stage is the urban construction of the metropolitan center of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. The ultimate goal for this early period is to "unify the three cities into one giant urban center through infrastructural construction."²⁰⁹ The second stage is to aim at the transformation of the vast neighboring rural area where 2.5 million people lived. It aims to turn the area into a group of small satellite-towns that support the metropolis of Wuhan. These new towns are also expected to absorb excessive population and hence lower the density of the urban center. The third stage is to develop the transportation connection of the greater Wuhan region including eight neighboring counties with territory of over 15 thousand sq. km. and population of more than five millions.²¹⁰

As for the urban plan of the first stage, it shared the same ambition with the urban plan that municipal officials and city planners made in 1929. It desired a total transformation of the urban land and people of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang based on western urban planning principles. Like earlier city planners,

²⁰⁹ "Hubei provincial government's minutes of the first talk after its moving back to Wuchang (《湖北省政府迁复武昌第一次谈话会纪录》), Sept. 25th, 1945, LS1-6-5781, HPA.

²¹⁰ Mi Zhancheng, "Wuhan Regional Planning Report," in *shizheng pinglun (Municipal Review 市政评论)*, Vol. 8, no. 10, 1946, LS1-6-5781, HPA.

the committee members embraced the western city planning concepts like zoning and “garden cities” to justify the integration of Wuhan’s three cities in 1946. The difference of the three older cities was believed to contribute to comprehensive urban functions and richness of urban culture in Wuhan. The concern of public health and urban ecological issues also strengthened the decision on urban integration. The 1946 report cited the British scientific study that showed the standard urban population density should have less than 20 persons per *mu* in order to maintain healthy urban environment.²¹¹ This new standard justified the official attempt to consign people from the populated old urban center of Hankou to Wuchang and Hanyang where city planners believed to have “more land for future development.”²¹²

These rationales of urban planning applied themselves to the two main tasks of the postwar urban construction: remaking of the old urban center of Hankou and the improvement of the communication in Wuhan. The first task included the moving of the Beijing-Hankou railway out of the city and relocation of 1/3 of residents in the old urban center of Hankou to Hanyang.²¹³ This method was believed to be an effective one because it would improve the public health condition of Hankou and stimulate the economic growth of

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² *Wuhan regional planning preliminary report* (武汉区域规划初步研究报告), p. 5, LS1-6-5712, HPA.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

Hanyang as well. The other focus led to the official efforts to improve the communication among the three cities. From 1946 to 1948, the local governments prepared for constructing the Yangzi River Bridge, the under-river tunnel, and the city airport.²¹⁴

Normally, these urban projects that required a tight control over land and people went beyond the capability of the local government. Nevertheless, property damages and family uprooting during the war created an opportunity for the local government to insert its authority over the arrangement of urban land and population in the postwar era. The war led to physical destruction of more than half of houses and shops in the cities. According to a municipal survey, there were 8096 houses burned or damaged in the wartime Wuhan area and 90% of them were private properties.²¹⁵ Meanwhile, the war weakened the power of society which used to be retained by families, lineage, and communities. Half of the population of Wuhan had been evacuated after October 1938 as the result of frequent bombing raids. When Japanese took over Wuhan's cities, the coercive military administration in the years of 1938-1941 made more people leave the cities of Wuhan. According to a 1941 police report, the population of Wuhan's cities dropped from 1.25 million to 450 thousand in 1939 and 310 thousand in 1940.²¹⁶ Even though people gradually returned to Wuhan's

²¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 14-16

²¹⁵ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (Republican I), p.359.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 354.

cities after 1945, the postwar hardship made people largely rely upon the local government in rebuilding homes. All this gave the Nationalist government the unprecedented power in controlling the city proper and people.

Land Policy and Urban Recovery

1. The 1946 Land Law and the postwar land policy

The municipal government of Hankou realized that it had to deal with land aspects of the urban recovery before it was able to embark seriously on the task of carrying out any real urban planning projects set by the committee. It took advantage of the newly implemented land law to facilitate the process of urban land consolidation. The 1946 land law was based on the early one that was drafted by the land law committee of China's legislative Yuan (Assembly) in 1930. Though it was formally adopted by the national legislature in 1930 and promulgated by government mandate in 1936, yet it was not implemented until 1946.²¹⁷ Consisting of some 500 articles, the newly inaugurated land law aimed to achieve two goals: (1) the equalization of land rights through land nationalization and limiting private ownership of urban land, (2) granting land to the tiller through rent control and protecting interests of tenants.²¹⁸ As for the urban recovery of Wuhan, the law granted the municipal government the right of

²¹⁷ Guo Chunhua, "An Analysis of The Land Acquisition Policy of the Nanjing Government (试论南京国民政府的土地征收制度)," *Minguo dang'an*, 2004, vol. 4, p. 96.

²¹⁸ Liu, Linhao, "An Analysis of the Land Policy in 1927-1937 (试析 1927-1937 年国民政府的土地政策)," in *Journal of North China Institute of Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Power (Social Science)*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2006, p. 67.

preemption to purchase or use land for public interests. Meanwhile, it set the ground for the taxation of land values which was expected to increase the government's revenue and curb land speculation.

The idea behind the land law can be largely attributed to the teachings of Sun Yat-sen's doctrine—the *min sheng* principle. As one of the most controversial doctrines, it was devised by Sun as a formula for urban China to confront the western social problems, which he thought was seemingly inevitable tendency of great inequalities of wealth and income in the process of western modernization. Sun believed that it is because the West “has not solved the land problem.” In his first public speech on the *min sheng* principle, Sun cited England as an example, where a few wealthy individuals have monopolized large tracts of urban and agricultural land and hold them for speculative purposes.²¹⁹ In order to protect “public interests,” Sun suggested the taxation of the future rise in land values as a way to implement *min sheng*. By doing so, he believed that it would prevent a few rich people from monopolizing favorably situated land, yet it would not infringe upon currently held wealth.²²⁰

After the 1911 revolution and Sun's brief tenure as Provisional President of the Republic, he stressed *min sheng* more than any other aspect of his program. In his speeches of 1912, Sun described the “equalization of land

²¹⁹ Emerson M.S. Niou and Guofu Tan, “An Analysis of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen's Self-Assessment Scheme for Land Taxation,” *Public Choice*, vol. 78, issue. 1, 1994, p. 104.

²²⁰ Harold Schifferin, “Sun Yat-sen's Early Land Policy: The Origin and Meaning of “Equalization of Land Rights,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Aug., 1957), p.554.

rights” process in the following steps: (1) self-assessment of all land values exclusive of improvements; (2) a standard tax rate of about one per cent on the assessed value; (3) governmental appropriation of all future increases in value; (4) the government to have the right to purchase any piece of land at any time according to its original value. As he further explains how the land policy can protect public interests in his later writings,

“After the land value has been fixed, we should have regulation by law that from that year on, all increase in land values, which in other countries means heavier taxation, should revert to the community. This is because the increase in land values is due to improvement made by the society and to the progress of industry and commerce. This proposal that all future increment should be given to the community is the ‘equalization of land ownership’ advocated by the Guomindang; it is the *min sheng* principle.....”²²¹

Sun’s “equalization of land rights” method set a model for the municipal governments of Hankou and Wuchang to solve land problems in the postwar era. While Sun aimed to prevent injustice and inequality as the result of the urban modernization and create a more equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, municipal officials were concerned more with how the land policy could give them a sound financial basis while at the same time curbing land speculation. The 1946 Land Law further strengthened the state’s control over

²²¹ Sun Yat-sen, *Sunzhongshan quanji*, shanghai: San min gongsi, 1928.

land and other natural resources in urban construction and weakened the power of individuals who might monopolize large tracts of urban land for speculative purposes.

The pragmatic way of thinking and the postwar anxiety for a fast urban recovery made Chinese officials and city planners proposed the notion of “shidi shiyou (city land owned by cities).” This new notion reinforced the socialist element of Sun’s “equalization of land rights” and suggested complete urban land nationalization. While Sun agreed in principle with the notion of complete land nationalization, he did not see the need for such a drastic measure in China. To him, only indispensable land of sites for railways, highways, market places, and other public development projects, need revert to state ownership.²²² Obviously, the view was replaced by a more radical belief on land ownership after 1945.

As the leading urban planning institute, the Wuhan Regional Planning Committee celebrated the idea of “shidi shiyou” and regarded it as the prerequisite for urban reconstruction of “Great Wuhan.” Land ownership and urban construction were brought out as an important issue at the committee meeting on March 7th 1946. Many officials and specialists in municipal administration supported the nationalization of city land and believed that it would increase the government’s revenue and facilitate construction works. Yuan Guoyin, the direct of public works bureau, harshly criticized the private

²²² Sun Yat-Sen, *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction*, Taipei: 1953, p. 69-70.

land ownership as the major hindrance to urban modernization. He blamed his previous failure to build “modern village” in Guiyang for the government’s lack of control over land.

This radical view on urban land was officially taken by the provincial government and set as the land principal in “the Great Wuhan Municipal Construction Plan (大武汉市建设计划)” drafted in 1946. The section on land policy began with the statement: “When the city proper is under private ownership, it would inevitably cause many miserable social problems. There is no exception in cities all over the world. Therefore, ‘city land owned by cities’ is an unarguable verdict.”²²³ Although the plan portrayed private land ownership as a universal problem, it acknowledged that some western solutions were not applicable to China. For instance, it proposed that China should neither follow the example of Germany who purchased urban land with borrowed money nor the Soviet Union’s forced land nationalization without indemnifying owners.²²⁴ In general, the plan suggested adopting Sun’s “equalization of land rights” method to limit the private ownership first and gradually bring urban land under the state’s control. It encouraged the municipal government to take the urban recovery as an opportunity to find a systematic and effective way to solve

²²³ “Great Wuhan Municipal Construction Plan (大武汉市建设计划),” LS3-2-2232, HPA.

²²⁴ Ibid, p.6

problems of urban land so that Wuhan can set an example for the rest of the country to follow.²²⁵

2. Hankou's urban recovery

The Great Wuhan project, although still but vaguely formulated, was upheld by Xu Huizhi during his tenure as the head of the Hankou municipality. Unable to obtain slightest financial support from the national and the provincial governments, Xu's municipal government faced severe financial difficulties and was in no position to carry out any planned projects despite some tentative moves.²²⁶ So the municipal government decided to give priority to consolidate its control over urban land through land survey and registration. By doing so, the city government aimed to prepare for land taxation and acquiring necessary land for some important urban planning projects in the future.

Therefore, the postwar urban reconstruction and land consolidation usually went hand in hand in the recovery period. In 1946, the Hankou municipal government set up the Office of Cadastre and ordered it to conduct a systematic survey to determine how much land the city had, its ownership, and value of real property. It took about one year to complete the survey of all eight urban districts in Hankou. All the land was divided into small plots which were numbered and documented. It produced 15,200 maps with detailed information

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ WMA, 16-9-29, p. 24.

on land form, size and ownership of thousands of land plots.²²⁷ The information was valuable for serving as a basis of taxation and a land-purchasing policy for the municipal government. It particularly attached weight to the first three districts, where the old city center of Hankou was located. As the focus of the postwar urban planning, the transformation of the old city center required a thorough survey of land. There were about 80% of the urban center surveyed preparing for the land registration.

Following the land survey, the city government began a city-wide land registration after August 1946. In addition to examining ownership and value of the urban land in Hankou, the municipal government had the ambition to establish itself as the only authority in the recognition of land property rights. In a commercial city like Hankou, a fairly broad range of different kinds of proof could successfully support property claims, including white contracts, private documents graves, and the testimony of witnesses on past practice.²²⁸ Therefore, the official registration of land was not required for transaction. Under such conditions, the government could never gain any sort of control over the real estate market and had little hope to limit private ownership in the city.

From the beginning of the land registration, the city government determined to follow a strict rule to establish the official registration and

²²⁷ “Hankou’s Work Plan (汉口工作计划),” p. 178, 9-31-3085, WMA.

²²⁸ Anne Osborne, “Property, Taxes, and State Protection of Rights,” in Madeleine Zelin, Johnathan Ocko, Robert Gardella, eds., *Contract and property in Early modern China*, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 121.

certificate of title as the only way to prove property rights. It warned that people who failed to register their land with the government within five months would lose the land ownership. During the period, all transactions were halted to prevent land speculation. The registration began with the districts 1-3, the place where most economic activities were located. From August 1946 to the end of February 1947, 90% of the land in the area was registered.²²⁹ It can be seen as a big step forward to be taken by the city government in realizing the goal of “city land owned by cities.” however, the registration work in the districts 4-8 proceeded less smoothly and only 53% of the land in the periphery of the city was registered with the government. Peasants as the majority of people living in the area still held the old way of thinking and did not consider the state recognition of property rights as very important. Some excused their delay for the busy harvest season. Some simply ignored the government’s warn and apparently judged that the enhanced security of property rights was not worth the trouble and expense of registration and tax liability.²³⁰

When coming to decide whether a title should be granted or not, the municipal government showed an obvious intention to limit the private land ownership. Gleaning from court cases, a sealed contract and proof of tax

²²⁹ There were 15139 registration cases in the districts 1-3.

²³⁰ “Hankou’s Work Plan (汉口工作计划),” p. 180, 9-31-3085, WMA.

payment right were no longer enough to establish property rights.²³¹ This indicated a drastic shift in the state's attitude toward land. As many scholars noticed, Chinese government generally went to extraordinary lengths to respect property rights when established by contracts or tax payments.²³² In a study of land property rights in the Qing and the early Republican era, Anne Osborne asserted "I never saw a case where the land was confiscated if there was a sealed contract or proof of tax payment."²³³ However, the land disputes in Hankou between 1946 and 1948 show that land owners who provided contracts and tax payments still lost their ownership if their land had been classified as "ownerless land" by the city government.²³⁴ Due to the war damage and people's failure in registering their land within the period of time ordered by the government, the amount of land classified to be ownerless land tripled. According to the 1946 land law, all the ownerless land should be confiscated and under the direct monitor of local governments.

After the land survey and registration, the city government of Hankou quickly moved to work on land assessment, the final preparation for land

²³¹ Madeleine Zelin, Johnathan Ocko, Robert Gardella, eds., *Contract and Property in early modern China*, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 121.

²³² Madeleine Zelin, Johnathan Ocko, Robert Gardella, eds., *Contract and property in Early modern China*, Stanford University Press, 2004, and Kenneth Pmeranz's article "Land Markets in later Imperial and Republican China," *Continuity and Change* (2008), 23 : 101-150.

²³³ Anne Osborne, "Property, Taxes, and State Protection of Rights," in Madeleine Zelin, eds., *Contract and property in Early modern China*, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 122.

²³⁴ 99-1-387, WMA.

taxation. The leading institutions for this effort were the Office of Cadastre, Hankou real estate guild, and the Wuhan Regional Planning Committee. They adopted the method of self-assessment of land value proposed originally by Sun Yat-sen. Under this scheme, each owner submitted his own valuation but the state reserved the right to purchase the land at the self-assessed value. The authorities believed this method would induce reporting of true market value by the landowner because the government would buy the land at the reported value if the landowner underreported and the annual tax would also discourage them from over-valuation. By the late 1947, Office of Cadastre had compiled the complete land value books of Hankou and had sent them to the departments of finance and grain, who worked together to prepare for land taxation.²³⁵ The municipal government was optimistic about the future use of the increase of land tax and values to fund the urban planning projects.²³⁶ Nevertheless, the intensified civil war made the land taxation never go beyond the planning stage.

The land survey and registration enabled the municipal government to take a real step to carry out some initial works to reconstruct Hankou. The first effort was made to transform the old city center of Hankou. As the most densely populated area, the old city center was the focus of the change desired by the regional planning committee. The convenient location close to both the Han

²³⁵ “Hankou’s Work Plan (汉口工作计划),” p. 178-181, 9-31-3085, WMA.

²³⁶ He Haoruo, *Min sheng zhu yi yu zi you jingji: Sun Zhongshan xian sheng de jing ji si xiang yu Meiguo de zi you jing ji zhi du* (Taipei, 1960), p.322.

River and the Yangzi River made the area the center of all economic activity. It attracted hundreds of thousands people to live and conduct business there.

Despite the commercial prosperity, the area with randomly built buildings and unplanned roads failed to meet “modern urban planning principles.”²³⁷ It’s the city government’s dream to remake the old urban center through broadening roads, pushing the Beijing-Hankou railway up to north, and moving existing residents out to lower population density.

It’s never been easy to rebuild the old urban center. The private land ownership was usually the major obstacle to the official urban reconstruction. As a self-grown urban market, 90 percent of the land was owned by individuals, families or societal organizations.²³⁸ The hot real estate market of the old urban center supported easy land transaction for money therefore deterred the official manipulation over urban land. For instance, the major avenue along the Yangzi was rebuild in 1929 and only half as wide as planned partly because of the local resistance against official acquisition of land. Drawing a lesson from the previous failure, the city government spent a few months in promoting the new land law and the land acquisition right that the local government had in conducting for the public good. The landowners of the planned area were the targets of the propaganda and educated to offer the portions of their land in

²³⁷ “Work Report of Hankou Police Bureau Oct.-Dec., 1947 (汉口市警察局民国 36 年 10 月至 12 月工作报告),” p. 83, 9-3-41, WMA.

²³⁸ Ibid.

supporting urban reconstruction projects, which were expected to pay them back with to an increased land in the near future.

The propaganda works and some financial delay postponed the date when the urban construction began. It was until November of 1947 that the municipal authorities gave orders for the initial works to be undertaken. By then many local residents had already managed to rebuild their houses. So the city government ordered land owners to dismantle all the temporary buildings within one month and warned them that the police department would do that by force otherwise. This decision brought protests from the local people, who petitioned for keeping their houses. The matter was serious enough for the mayor to organize eleven related municipal bureaus to have a conference. Meanwhile, the mayor with the companion of the directors of the Land Bureau and the bureaus of Public Works visited people in the old urban center. After that, the mayor of Hankou decided to suspend other construction projects and only keep the road construction one. He also agreed that people could delay dismantling houses and wait until the road project is really about to construct.²³⁹ Soon the municipal officials had to abandon even the road construction due to the civil war.

Two other major postwar urban planning projects—the building of Hankou civil airport and the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge, shared the same fate with the urban center building works. All of the three projects had been designed by the Wuhan Regional Planning Committee and regarded as implementary

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 147.

parts of “Great Wuhan” project. To improve the communication of Wuhan’s three cities, the provincial government prepared to build a bridge over the Yangzi to connect Wuchang and Hankou. It invited Mao Yisheng, the specialist of bridge construction to lead the construction project in 1946. The Wuhan Yangzi Ridge Bridge Construction Preparation Committee was soon established and presided by the provincial governor Wang Yaohuang. They also set up a transportation incorporated company to raise a fund for such a massive urban construction. The project later was suspended for the Nationalist government worried that the bridge would benefit the Communist Party in the civil war.

Starting from the late 1947, the bridge construction project was replaced by the project of building a civil airport in Hankou. With the support of the Civil Aviation Administration and the ministry of communication, Hankou municipal government established the land acquisition association and worked to the acquisition of 2,600 *mu* of land from hands of peasants who lived in liu jiamiao, Hankou’s western suburb. It aroused the local resistance and Liu Shanchu and other 290 farm households petitioned for moving the planned site one mile to the west. After negotiation, the municipal authorities decided to compromise and agreed to expropriate 1630 *mu* of land for building the main runway first.²⁴⁰ But later the civil war and galloping inflation would not have allowed the city to achieve it.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 149-150.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

In August 1947, Deng Xiaoping and General Liu Bocheng led the communist troops to march over 500 km to march to Central China. Facing the military threat, the Wuhan Garrison Headquarters ordered to stop all the urban constructions so that they could concentrate resource and labor force in the military defense. Against such a backdrop, the Wuhan Regional Planning Committee was dissolved. So did the initial works in execution of “Great Wuhan” project.

Chapter Five

Socialist Urban Ambition and the Conquering of the Yangzi

The mega city Wuhan was a project completed by the Chinese Communist Party after it took national power. On May 16th 1949, PLA (People's Liberation Army) seized control of Hankou. In the following day Hanyang and Wuchang were liberated as well. The liberation of the three cities made the newspaper headline with the title of “the day for Wuhan's revival (武汉复活的日子).”²⁴² The celebrating parades that people from the three cities joined brought back the wartime memory of the “Wuhan spirit.” It was reported that the nationalist zeal mobilized about 20,000 people from the Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang who called for “the birth of Wuhan.”²⁴³

Within only one week, Wuhan municipal government was established. Once again, the three cities were merged into one unified municipality. Although the CCP had quite different ideology than the nationalists, they were obsessed with building the giant urban center of Wuhan as much as the previous nationalist government had been. In fact, they gave the highest priority to the city building project and made it the center of the first Five-Year Plan in 1953-1957. From the establishment of a unified municipality in 1949 to the completion of the Yangzi River Bridge in 1957, the Communist government

²⁴² *People's Daily*, May 22nd, 1949.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

successfully integrated the three distantly separated three towns into one giant urban center. The completion of “Great Wuhan” that the Nationalists started but did not complete was used to justify the CCP as the new leader in building a strong nation. In this sense, the starting of the Communist regime in 1949 marks less a turning point of modern China. The CCP shared the “big” vision of modernity—gigantic and centralized—with the Nationalists. In the process of building the city of Wuhan, the socialist system proved to be very compatible with gigantic state-sponsored constructions.

This chapter intends to understand why and how the CCP was able to achieve what the preceding regimes had failed to achieve. The study focuses on the socialist urban transition from 1949 to 1957 and explores how the heavy industrially oriented central plan shaped the spatial layout of Wuhan and contributed to the administrative, cultural and physical integration of the city. It contains three parts. The first part investigates the centralized bureaucracy of Wuhan aiming to put the city under the control of a unified municipality. The second part traces the socialist urban transition of Wuhan in the First Five-Year Plan period and how the central focus on heavy industry directed the local urban planning and affected production of urban space. The third part is a study on the construction of Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge. How the state-owned economy and centralized redistributive state developed in the previous years and the internalized “planning spirit” contributed to such a socialist engineering feat. Its

completion contributed the large-scale intercity mobility of Wuhan and made the supersized city of Wuhan a reality.

“Big City, Big Government”—A Centralized Bureaucracy of Wuhan

During the PRC, the state was the motivating agent for the building of Wuhan, which expressed an ardent desire of the CCP to reorganize Chinese society. The communist commitment to development shared much with Sun Yat-sen’s vision of a modern China. Quite a few huge projects that the CCP undertook after 1949 were the ones originally envisioned by Sun Yat-sen, like the Three Gorges high dam and the city of Wuhan. As the most populated metropolitan center of Central China, Wuhan obtained a strategic position in the Communist blueprint of socialist reconstruction. Soon after its liberation, Wuhan was made the capital of Hubei province and a new center of the Central China Administrative Region, one of the six big administrative regions designed by the CCP at the early years of PRC. As the special municipality, Wuhan was under the direct command of the central government. Therefore, Wuhan’s creation was not purely a political demonstration for the communists’ superiority but also played an effective role in establishing a centralized state system in the consolidating years. Such a big urban construction plan seemed require a big government. From 1949 to 1957, the Chinese communist state gradually established a centralized command administrative system. It put

forward the three levels of administrative system in 1951, dividing national administration into: the central government, the big administrative region (*daxingzheng qu*), and province. The political position of Wuhan was tremendously strengthened in the new state system. In fact, its urban construction was considered the most important part of state building in the 1950s and hence received most of funding from the state. It shows that Wuhan occupied an important place in the state planning in the early stage of socialist transition.

Wuhan municipal bureaucracy was also in the process of consolidating its power over the three former separate cities through forming a centralized command system. Before 1949, the three cities of Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang were divided into 26 districts with 277 *bao* and 4,913 *jia*.²⁴⁴ The new municipality dissolved the former *baojia* (neighborhood organization) system and emerged the 26 districts into 5 urban districts and 4 suburban districts.²⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the city was organized in a three level (city-district-street) administration system. The six district governments played important roles in resuming the normal city lives. Within the districts, street committees were formed as a means of social control, implementation of local policy, and mobilization of street residents. Under each street office were ten to twenty

²⁴⁴ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, PRC(I), p. 77.

²⁴⁵ In the early 1950s, Wuchang and Hanyang each constituted single administrative district, and Hankou was divided into three administrative districts—namely, Jiang'an, Jiangnan and Qiaokou. The suburban districts include donghu, nanhu, huiji, and fucheng.

residents' committees that routinely carried out essential day-to-day services. Their functions included supervising social services and welfare tasks, such as employment offices and nurseries. Residents' committees also transmit governmental edicts, channel complaints upward, mediate local disputes, enforce birth control, and report suspicious activities or persons.²⁴⁶

In the formative phase, in order to consolidate the new municipal bureaucracy and prepared it for future socialist construction, it was important to provide a steady flow of revenue. It is by no means easy. The unified municipality could do thing unless they had adequate extractive capacity. For a government to perform the political tasks it targets, it has to be able to mobilize sufficient resources and use them to achieve these goals. It was under this thinking that the new city government created tax system in 1949-1953, constructed a centralized extracting system, as a way of financing the new municipal bureaucracy

The first thing the new city government did with the inherited Nationalist tax collection agencies was to merge them into a single new structure. The Wuhan Municipal Tax Bureau formed the core of the structure. It supervised 5 branches in the five city districts, 37 neighborhood subbranches of the city, and 27 check stations at river ports. During the Nationalist era, tax collection agencies were top-heavy, with large percentages of their employees working in headquarter offices rather than in direct field collection. The new government transferred

²⁴⁶ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, PRC (I), p. 78.

half these office workers to the subbranches and check stations.²⁴⁷ This three – tier network under centralized control enabled the Communists to penetrate much deeper into Wuhan society than the Nationalists had managed.

The most remarkable success for the new government was to stamp out chronic corruption among tax collectors, which had devastated the Nationalist regime. At the very beginning, the government was determined to fight this endemic corruption. Its prevention was a key concern of the ideological education. The tax bureaus were usually staffed with a combined kind of tax collector: the retained Nationalist-era officials and the Communist cadres without their respective deficiencies. Nationalist-era holdovers were supposed to accept the new officials' ideological strengths, and the newcomers were to acknowledge the veterans' training and experience. Anyone found guilty of corruption was subject to severe punishment. In addition to routine checks, the government periodically launched political campaigns against corruption. In mid-1950, Wuhan tax collectors went through a two-month rectification campaign. In December 1951, the national government launched a campaign against the “three evils” of corruption, waste, and bureaucracy and made tax collection agencies one of the campaign's focal points. The reorganization and reorientation of tax collection agencies significantly reduced the revenue leaks caused by corruption and the wastes, thus increasing the municipal finance.

²⁴⁷ *Wuhan difangzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui*, 1992: 247-53.

In order to enlarge its revenue base, the new government of Wuhan immediately worked to develop a mechanism to bring people and local resource under its control. In the early years of PRC, it depended upon existing communal institutions. When the communists assumed control of the three parts of Wuhan in 1949, there were 181 guilds in Hankou, 87 in Wuchang, and about 30 in Hanyang. The existing citywide guild structure provided the city government with a ready-made mechanism for reorganizing industrial and commercial businesses and identifying taxpayers. From June 1949 to May 1950, the city government launched four intensive campaigns to collect the gross receipts tax and net income tax. In all four, guild organizations were used as tax agents and divided into two categories: industrial and commercial. In each of the three parts of the city, there were a region wide industrial council and a region wide commercial council, which supervised local industrial and commercial guilds. The number of firms who paid the tax increased rapidly during the campaigns. In the first campaign, 19,488 firms in 179 trades paid the net income tax. By the time of the third campaign, the number of firms increased to 23,313 in 207 trades.²⁴⁸ The increase of the number of taxpayers was an important factor that contributed to the growth of the government revenue in Wuhan.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ When the Nationalist collected the net income tax in Hankou for the last time in the second half of 1948, only 11,632 firms in 135 trades paid.

²⁴⁹ *Changjiang ribao*, April 19th, 1950.

Though effective, the guild organizations were regarded as short-term solutions and were gradually replaced by neighborhood-based organizations in June 1950. Because these cooperating guild confederations had the potential of becoming independent power centers, the Communist regime weakened and eventually eliminated them. Neighborhood-based organizations were innovated to match the new centralized bureaucratic system of Wuhan municipality. Each of the five administrative districts of Wuhan was divided into four or five “tax areas” (*pian*). Within each area, every fifteen neighboring firms formed a “small tax group” (*xiaozu*), five to seven small groups formed a “large tax group” (*dazu*), and two to four large groups formed a “tax section” (*duan*). This system had several advantages over the guild-based system. A survey of 1950 found that about 3,000 firms that were supposed to belong to guilds did not belong to any guild and thus had evaded payment in 1949.²⁵⁰ Now no firm was left unattached. Moreover, neighboring firms probably knew each other’s business well so that concealment of assets and income was more difficult. Unlike the structure of guild organizations, the system was state centered. Each “tax area” was headed by a subbranch of the Municipal Tax Bureau. The state economic control mechanism also helped to lay a solid ground for building a centrally planned city economy in the later years.

²⁵⁰ *Changjiang ribao*, Nov. 11th, 1950

“Make Wuhan into the industrial base of Central China” (*ba wuhan jian cheng hua zhong gong de ji di*)

The new municipal government was able to gain more effective control over people and resources during the first Five Year Plan period (1953-1957). By 1953, the society itself had begun to stabilize; the problems of governing were more predictable and Communist officials had acquired more experience. In 1953, therefore, the CCP turned its full attention to socialist transformation and economic development, which aimed to establish the Soviet-style centrally planned economy with emphasis on heavy industry. Wuhan became the focal point of the plan and its role was officially promoted:

The modern city concentrates population on a large scale, making the capability of these people multiply greatly. However, under capitalism, the latent energies within each individual were subdued and are only liberated when the era of socialism arrives. These energies now produce material and spiritual wealth in great quantities and at an unprecedented pace, greatly promoting the development of socialist enterprise in both city and countryside.²⁵¹

As an old industrial center of Central China and one of the nine extra-large cities in the early PRC, Wuhan acquired a prominent position in the national heavy industrial development plan. From 1953-1957, the state provided

²⁵¹ Shi Tian, “The Issue of Scale of the City,” *Planned Economy* (Beijing, 1958), pp. 25-27.

extensive financial and technological assistance to Wuhan. Seven of the 156 key point projects constructed nation-wide were situated in Wuhan, including the renowned Wuhan Iron and Steel Works, the Wuhan heavy Duty Machine Tool Plan, the Wuhan Boiler Plant and the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge. The shifted attention of the CCP from coastal areas to interior areas even placed Wuhan prior to cities like Shanghai and Guangzhou within the state planned economy.²⁵²

In Wuhan, the most intensified period of socialist transformation in 1953-1957 started with the transformed ownership system in the city. All urban land was nationalized and farm land in the countryside began the process of collectivization. The abolishment of private land ownership eliminated the obstacles that Nationalists used to face in urban construction and made it easier for government planners to allocate resources directly on their own “commands.” Soon, the ownership of the urban economy drastically altered. Starting from 1952, more and more small, private-owned enterprises were pushed out of business mainly as the result of the previous tax reform and political campaigns. It was reported that about 70% of Wuhan’s business owners suffered financial difficulties during the five-Antis campaign, a political campaign designed to target the capitalist class.²⁵³ By early 1953, the proportion

²⁵² Dorothy J. Solinger, “Despite Decentralization: Disadvantages, Dependence and Ongoing Central Power in the Inland—the Case of Wuhan,” in *The China Quarterly*, No. 145 (Mar., 1996), p. 7.

²⁵³ *Changjiang ribao*, Jan. 3rd, Sept, 26, and Oct. 24, 1954.

of private sector in urban economy declined for 80% to 44% in Wuhan, while the state-owned businesses and “joint public-private enterprises” increased from 10% in 1949 to 30%.²⁵⁴

After nationalizing urban land and increasing the proportion of state-owned sector of economy, the municipal government of Wuhan was confident about its capability in reengineering the society according to its plan. From 1953 to 1956, there were three urban planning drafts designed to build the city of Wuhan. The first one was drafted by the urban planning committee of the municipal government in 1953. After the central government announced its first Five-year plan, the Wuhan municipality made changes to the early draft and submitted “the comprehensive urban plan for the city of Wuhan” to the Central Planning Committee in 1954. Two years later, the city government came up with another city planning as a local response to the state’s “Twelve Year National Economic Development Plan.” Despite different contents, all the plans had less local color but gave overwhelming priorities to the city’s state-sponsored industry projects. At the Fourth Municipal Party Congress in May 1954, the Congress retained the state’s plan as its motto, “Make Wuhan into the industrial base of Central China.”²⁵⁵ It was believed that there was nothing isolated in Wuhan and everything should be oriented to the state-building as the whole China was conceived as chess board in the centralized state system.

²⁵⁴ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi*, RPC (I), p. 62.

²⁵⁵ *People’s Daily*, June 14th, 1949.

The city plan of 1954 was designed to integrate the city of Wuhan through reorganizing urban space according to the national heavy-industry-priority development. The goal of transforming the city from a “consumer” to a “producer” entity eliminated the different urban function of Hankou from that of the other two. The prominent areas that mark the consumptive and commercial nature of Hankou were gradually downplayed in the socialist urban reconstruction. The Hankou Bund that was built by the foreigners and considered as the finest in China slumped and was gradually marginalized in the new city landscape. “Flowery Mansions” (*hua lou*), the once bustling commercial center of Hankou, lost its vigor, except for some buildings that were turned to governmental use. The Russian and British concession area became the backward and slum area of Hankou. The dominant power of the government in transformed urban space was best illustrated in an observation made by a foreign visitor in 1966,

“The Customs House...looks lonely now, without the environment of commercial rush to which its style seems fitted. A large portrait of Chairman Mao stares out across the river from an upper window. He seems to be casting an uneasy glance at the muddy waters in which his most famous swim was made, in July 1966. Above Mao’s pink

face are the characters: Ten Thousand Years to Our Great Leader
Chairman Mao.”²⁵⁶

In order to build Wuhan as a heavy industry center of China, the municipal government made both efforts to expand the old industrial bases and to develop new ones in the three parts of Wuhan. Over half of the revenue of the local government together with the state investment of more than 15 trillion yuan were used to build in total thirteen industrial zones throughout the city. Among them were two new industrial districts located to the northern edge of Hankou and two built based upon Hanyang’s old industrial zone around the Hanyang Iron and Steel Works. Most of the massive scale heavy industrial enterprises were located in Wuchang. Besides the old industrial zones along the Yangzi River that had developed in the late Qing and Republican era, there were three major ones designated to be the priorities of Wuhan’s urban and industrial development, including China’s largest steel producer and the largest heavy-machine-tool factory of its kind: the Wuhan Iron and Steel Works and the Wuhan Heavy Duty Machine Tool Plant.

These large-scale industrial projects drastically changed the face of the city and led to the urban sprawl of Wuhan. All the new industrial enterprises were located in the outskirts of the city. The Wuhan Heavy was constructed on a site on the east edge of Wuchang, which used to be a swamp. Construction

²⁵⁶ Ross Terrill, *Flowers on An Iron Tree*, Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1975, p. 318.

began in 1956 and completed in 1958. It turned the sparsely populated suburban Wuchang into a major machinery center with over nine thousand workers. The Wuhan Steel was simply built around Green Mountain, which used to belong to a neighboring county. Planning for Green Mountain began in 1952. An agreement with Moscow for technical help was signed in 1953. Twenty thousand men were working at the site by early 1956. The grassy surface of Green Mountain gave way to brown and gray construction. The hills had simply been moved away. The building of steel plant at Green Mountain transformed the countryside to be urban industrial district of 3,000,000 people and contributed to the extension of Wuchang. During the first Five Year plan period, the built up city proper doubled in Wuhan. By 1957, industrialization facilitated the integration of the city. Heavy industrial enterprises employed 73.9% of factory workers, which constituted 47.92% of the urban population. The total urban land that the 13 industrial zones occupied equaled to one fifth of the urban land area.²⁵⁷

All the other urban arrangements of the 1954 plan worked to accommodate the planned industrial zones and contribute to the integration of them. Each industrial district was designed by the party as a basic economic and

²⁵⁷ *Zhongguo ziben zhuyi gongshangye de shehui zhuyi gaizao (The Socialist Transformation of Chinese Capitalist industry and businesses, 《中国资本主义工商业的社会主义改造》), zhongguo dangshi chuban she, 1991, p. 18.*

social unit that provides care for its own workers and family members.²⁵⁸ A centrally planned residential system was designed by the city government to solve the housing problem for these industrial zones. There were ten planned residential districts. Three big ones located in Wuchang as supplementary to workers in the Wuhan Steel, the Wuhan Heavy and the Wuhan Boiler Plant. There was the “bridge construction village” in Hankou and Hanyang, a residential zone for workers hired to construct the Yangzi river bridge to connect Wuchang and Hankou. The city government also proposed a comprehensive plan to improve the communication of the three parts in Wuhan. Besides the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge, there was a unified road system planned to integrate urban communication of Wuhan.

When the new municipal government went about to carry out these plans, it turned out that the socialist system was very compatible with mega city building. In 1953, the State Administrative Council promulgated “The Decree of Claiming Land for State construction.” It was the first urban land claim law in the history of Chinese socialist regime. The decree was publicized because of the upcoming industrialization program of the First Five-Year Plan. The decree

²⁵⁸ Li Bin, “Danwei Culture as Urban Culture in Modern China: The Case of Beijing From 1949 to 1979,” in Greg Guldin and Aidan Southall eds., *Urban Anthropology in China*, New York: E. J. Brill, 1993, pp. 245-252.

laid out the procedure for government land claiming and relief of the people who lived on the land.²⁵⁹

The decree gave the Wuhan municipality more power to claim land for urban development. In 1952-57, a large area of land, a total 46.6 square kilometers of land, was claimed by the municipality. It removed the obstacle that the Nationalist government had to face in urban construction before. The previous urban plans often met with resistance of local house owners whose places or buildings happened to stand in the way of official urban construction. Failing to negotiate and persuade the residents often led to the failure of those plans. With the decree, this type of resistance no longer imposed an obstacle to the official plan of building Wuhan. In fact, the number of disputes over land usage and house property in Wuhan dropped rapidly from 4249 in 1953 to 690 in 1958.²⁶⁰

The new laws and the PRC's strong social control left little room for local people to voice any criticism on the government's progressive land policy and building demolition in urban construction. The only criticism I was able to find concerning that is a complaint letter published on *People's Daily* on January 30th 1955. Lin Shuang'er, a Wuhanese, wrote a letter to the party's major newspaper to complain the arbitrary attitude that the city government had in dismantling properties and offering compensation to local people. In the letter, Lin told two

²⁵⁹ Gao Yingzhen et al., *Chengshi tudi guanlixue (Urban Land Management)*, Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 1987, p. 89.

²⁶⁰ Wuhan defang zhi bianzuan wei yuan hui, *Wuhan shi zhi (Cheng shi jian she zhi)*, Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chuban she, 1996, p. 112.

stories about the mistreatment of urban residents and peasants. Without an accurate building plan, the city government rushed to dismantle all buildings in a tentative region of reconstruction, which forced Grandma Tao and other twenty some households to relocate. It turned out later that their buildings did not need to be torn down. Besides urban residents, peasants living in the neighboring area were often forced to turn over their lands to the government for the sake of public use in the 1950s. According to Lin, the compensation and arrangement for affected peasants were far from adequate.

Lin's complaint letter was exceptional. Public rhetoric about the socialist urban construction was designed to win popular enthusiasm. With the powerful propaganda machine, the CCP effectively disseminated their grandeur building idea. The building of Wuhan as a giant industrial center was publicized as a "great and glorious task" and the "first step away from a century-long history of economic backwardness."²⁶¹ All people were well mobilized for the national course. Individuals and social groups were gradually incorporated into a hierarchically organized system of the city. Each urban family and individual become part of a tight-knit organizational structure subordinated to the Communist Party and designed to facilitate mobilization of maximum human energies to achieve these lofty goals.

The centralized state redistributive system also approved effective to manage urban resources and eliminate conflicting interests of local society over building

²⁶¹ *People's Daily*, Sept. 12, 1954.

mega city Wuhan. Chapter 3 shows that the building of a supersized city Wuhan in 1929 became a subject of a long drawn-out quarrel among municipal officials, provincial officials, magistrates and local communities. It's because different levels of governments had different interests and the expanding of municipal power would occupy too much resource and thus hurt other local governments. Both neighboring counties and provincial government worried that too much rural lands would be taken away by the city building process of Wuhan. The centralized administrative system strengthened the coordination of the local governments. All the local governments (provincial, municipal, and county) worked collaboratively to channel local resources to the state sponsored projects in Wuhan. It was no longer possible to consider things in isolation; everything had to be seen in the light of the broader picture for the good of the nation as imagined by the CCP.

The centralized administration and economic system also provided motivation to integrate Wuchang, Hankou and Hanyang. Their emergence into one giant urban center definitely increased the bargaining power for the state resources key to their development. Within a socialist system, the state subsidy was major source of urban development fund. When Wuhan was chosen to be the location of heavy industry base and the provincial capital, more central and provincial resources were channeled into the city. During the first Five Year Plan, Wuhan received 121.36 million yuan investments on city construction and Engineering,

and Ministry of Railroad, etc. Eighty three percent of the central investment was directed to new construction that spread out the three districts of Wuhan.²⁶²

Uniting the three parts as a large industrial base could increase the city's bargaining power for more state funds. A city's bargaining power was mainly dependent on their administrative rank as well as the scale of their industrial production. The centralized structure of administration and economy therefore contributed to a general obsession with a gigantic urban form of Wuhan among local officials. During the Nanjing decade, the conflicting interests of different levels of governments usually hampered the urban integration of Wuhan. However, it was less likely to be so in such a socialist state system. The urban integration secured Wuhan a prominent position in the state development plan and allowed it to command the economic resource equal to that of an entire province. It was also Hubei province's interest to have a mega city Wuhan, which not only maximized its bargaining power with the state but also the large number of state heavy industrial enterprises increased the income of the provincial government.

Conquering the Yangzi

Although Wuhan now was under the administration of a unified municipal government, yet it was still physically separated by the Yangzi River and its

²⁶² Wuhan defang zhi bianzuan wei yuan hui, *Wuhan shi zhi (Cheng shi jian she zhi)*, Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chuban she, 1996, p. 189.

tributary the Han River. By the early 1950s, the most common means of crossing the Yangzi remained by boats and steamships. Besides a few privately-owned boats, the Municipal Ferry Company of Wuhan monopolized the ferry service on Yangzi River. In 1949, it inherited only twelve steamships that supported three ferry lines from the Nationalist government. In the following three years, the company repaired three old steamships, added four more, and increased the ferry lines from three to five. Despite the efforts to improve the facilities and service, the ferry was by no means a safe and effective way of crossing the river as it was often cancelled due to bad weathers and seasonal floods. Plus, it usually took nearly two hours to bring people to the other side of the river and could take up to an entire day to move barge railcars across the Yangzi. All this prevented the formation of a large-scale intercity mobility. In fact, the number of people who took ferries remained around 45 thousands and did not grow much after 1937, while the population of the city increased by nearly 50%.²⁶³

It's been an age-old dream for Chinese to build a modern bridge over the Yangtze River. Its strategic position in linking the communication of north and south China had been acknowledged by the previous Nationalist government since 1911. In Sun Yat-sen's *An Outline of Nation Building*, the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge constitutes an important part of his blueprint to build a modern

²⁶³ Wuhan defang zhi bianzuan wei yuan hui, *Wuhan shi zhi (jiaotong youdian zhi)*, Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chuban she, 1996, p. 463.

China through the construction of infrastructure. In Sun's eyes, Wuhan is the hub of a national network of river and railroad transportation and therefore its communicative integration is critical for China's unity. He proposed to build bridges over the Yangzi as well as an under-water tunnel to connect Wuchang and Hankou. Sun hoped to connect the Beijing-Hankou railroad and the Wuchang-Guangzhou railroad to form a unite railway system that runs through China from north to south.

There were four major attempts made in history to overcome the natural barrier set by the Yangzi. The earliest one was made by thirteen students from Beijing University and their German professor as their graduation field work in 1913. Later this project attracted the attention of the Beiyang government. With the government's support, they were able to conduct survey and drafted a detailed plan for the bridge construction. The plan proposed to build the bridge between turtle hill and snake hill and designed eight lanes for railway, bus, horse-drawn vehicles, and human.²⁶⁴ It never got the chance to go beyond the planning stage due to the political upheaval of the warlord era and the financial shortage of the Beiyang government.

After the Nationalist government established its power in Nanjing, it started to prepare for the bridge construction. The Nanjing government appointed an American engineer to supervise the bridge construction in Wuhan. This attempt didn't go very far either. After managing to drill eight holes under the Yangzi,

²⁶⁴ Pi Mingxiu, *Wuhan tongshi* (Republican II), p. 135.

the American engineer had to give it up. Besides the money issue, there were many technical challenges to build the bridge. The bridge had to be long enough to span the nearly 1150 meters from shore to shore and high enough for ships to sail under it. It also had to survive the terrible East River winds, while its base would have to withstand powerful currents.

In 1936, the completion of the Qiantang River Bridge encouraged the Nationalist government who decided to give another try to the construction of the Yangzi River Bridge. In order to solve the financial problem, the bridge construction preparation bureau planned to sell shares to raise money. Despite a carefully calculated process of amortizing, they still failed to attract enough investment. The project of building the bridge was discarded again. The attempt made in 1946-47 ended up with the same fate. The constant failures of the Nationalist government showed to people that the project of building a bridge over the Yangzi was extremely hard. It's no wonder that a popular folk song goes, "the water of the Yellow River, the bridge of the Yangzi River, one cannot be controlled, the other cannot be built."²⁶⁵

Although the CCP had a much more radical ideology than the nationalists and spent decades locked in a deadly struggle with the latter, it also shared with Sun Yat-sen's vision of building a modern China through infrastructural construction. The Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge was critical to the nation-state building through adopting the Soviet-style heavy industry development. This

²⁶⁵ *Wuhan Changjiang daqiao*, Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 1957, p. 6.

rapid industrialization requires improved transportation to facilitate the allocation of resources and labor to centrally planned projects and to strengthen the cooperation between the newly built heavy industrial centers throughout China. As the transport hub of China, Wuhan was the redistributive center where rice, subtropical fruits, and rare metal of the south was brought by the Guangzhou-Wuchang railroad to the north; and wheat, soy beans, cotton, timber, coal, iron, and northern industrial products were carried through the Beijing-Hankou railroad to the south.²⁶⁶ Without a bridge, all those goods important for industrialization and people's daily life had to be carried through barge railcars, which was often time-consuming and inefficient. Therefore, it was an urgent task for the CCP to build the bridge.

Meanwhile, the CCP legitimized its taking of national power with the idea that it was more effective than the Nationalists in building a strong nation. Completing the Wuhan city-making project that the Nationalists had started but failed to complete was to be a great contribution to CCP's claim. Such rhetoric can be clearly seen in the memorial essay on the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge Monument,

“In the past one hundred years, China was invaded by western imperialists and descended to semi-colonial state under the control of the reactionary governments of the late Qing and the Republic. The building of

²⁶⁶ *Jianguo yilai wuhan jingji jianshi* (《建国以来武汉经济简史》), Wuhan: Wuhan buban she, 1989, p.151.

the bridge was merely a dream in the time when people suffered poverty and science and technology remained backward..... All this (the completion of the bridge) shows that China's engineering science has advanced with big steps to the world level under the leadership of the Communist Party and with the power of great working class and the whole nation. The bridge is indeed one milestone in this path."²⁶⁷

The building of the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge was first proposed by the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1950, after the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Aid was signed in December 1949. The treaty included the construction of 50 industrial projects and 1.2 billion rubles (US \$ 300 million) of low interest loan.²⁶⁸ It provided valuable financial and technological support for the CCP to realize the ambitious idea of conquering the Yangzi. Designated as one of the key Soviet-aided projects, the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge received large state investment of 138 million yen. Its top priority can be also seen in the large number of central ministries that were involved intensively in the project. There were more than twelve central ministries, such as the Ministry of Railroad, Ministry of Geology, Ministry of

²⁶⁷ *Wuhan changjiang daqiao textie tongxun xuanji*, Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi chubanshe, 1958, p. 1-3.

²⁶⁸ The U.S. \$300 million loan was charged with one percent annual interest and was scheduled to be returned within 10 years. *Dangdai Zhongguo de jiben jianshe* (Beijing, 1989), p. 57.

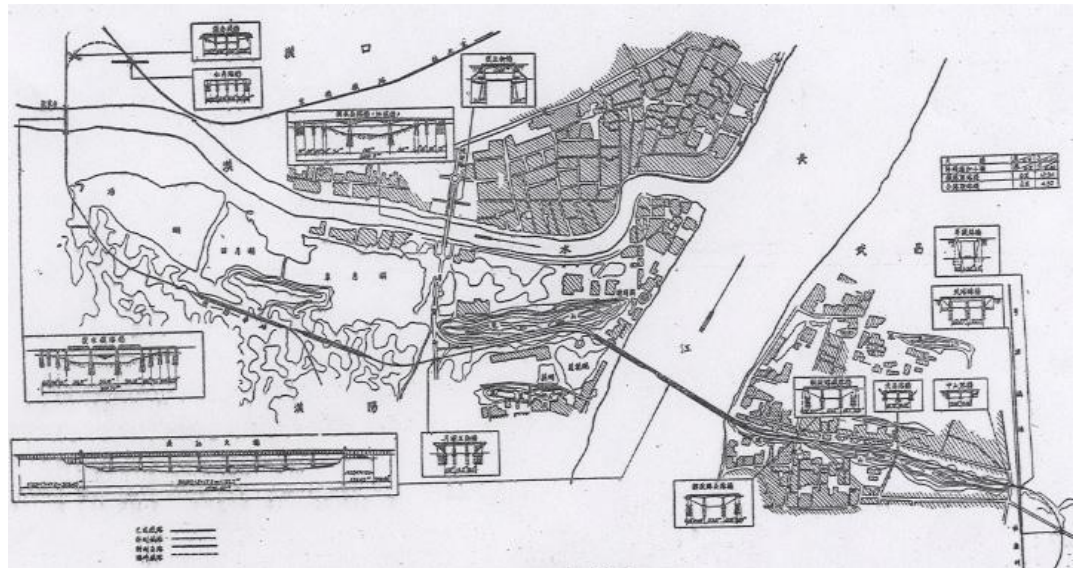
Heavy Industry, Ministry of Machine and Industry, Ministry of foreign trade, Ministry of transportation, and etc.

Soon after the idea was proposed, an exploration team and a design group were formed under the control of the Ministry of Railroads and the Ministry of Geology respectively in March 1950. In order to prepare for the design, the exploration team spent eight months in conducting surveys on geology of the river floor of 700 meters long. The design group consisted of engineers, experts on bridge construction, and professors from different parts of China. Among them was Mao Yisheng, who later served as chairman of the Technical Advisory Committee composed of more than 20 foreign and Chinese bridge experts. The design group took advantage of the land survey and four bridge designs already made during the republic era. Based on the former designs, they came up with four blueprints for the construction of the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge in 1953.

In January 1954, the State Council approved the “Decision on Building the Wuhan Yangtze River Bridge.” In July of the same year, a 25-member expert group headed by K. S. Silin sent by the Soviet Union came to China to lead the complicated construction work. After conducting another thorough survey on land and geology of river floor around the selected site for the bridge, the soviet experts finalized the bridge construction plan.

According to the plan, both Chinese and Soviet experts determined to build two bridges to connect the two main railways: the Beijing-Hankou railroad and the Wuchang-Guangzhou railroad. The Yangzi River Bridge is the major part of

the project built between turtle hill (Hanyang) and snake hill (Wuchang) and the Han River Iron Bridge then connects Hanyang with Hankou. It's a way to lower the technical difficulty that faced by engineers. The distance between turtle hill and snake hill is the shortest one and therefore would make the task of overcoming the Yangzi easier. This design contains a supporting transportation system for the connection of the two bridges, including one 4.5 kilometer long road connecting line, one 12.9 kilometer long railway connecting line, and ten road bridges. They together serve as a comprehensive communicative system that effectively integrates the three parts of the city (**See Map**).



(The Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge map, from *Wuhan changjiang daqiao*, Beijing: kexue puji chuban she, 1958.)

1. Central Organization of Construction

The construction of the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge began in 1955. The original plan was to take four years to build such a highway-railway combined bridge. In the end, it only took two years and one month. As the first modern bridge that Chinese people built themselves, it was seen as a physical statement of the “socialist miracle,” through which Chinese overcome the natural barrier separating people for thousands of years.²⁶⁹ In addition to the Soviet technical aids, the Chinese socialist state demonstrated a strong organizational power in mobilizing national resources at a scale that the Nationalist could never have dreamt for the construction of the bridge.

The central government stressed technical and Party leadership in the bridge construction. The construction bureau of the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge was established in Wuhan in April 1953. Since then, the Ministry of Railroad transferred large numbers of cadres from all over the country to Wuhan to fill up the administration and provide technical supports. There were engineers, skilled workers of fifty different types, and administrative and party cadres. About one hundred workers came directly from other underway construction projects like the Baoji-Chengdu railroad and the Xinjiang-Lanzhou railroad. The rest came primarily from Guangzhou, Liuzhou, Zhengzhou, Shanghai and Tianjing.²⁷⁰

Material supplies and machine work for the bridge construction were centrally organized by the Ministry of Heavy Industry, the Ministry of Machine

²⁶⁹ *People's Daily*, April 29, 1955.

²⁷⁰ *People's Daily*, Jan. 5, 1954.

and Industry and 48 affiliated factories nationwide. It was the first time that so many newly established industrial enterprises in China cooperated with each other to support the building of the bridge. The project consumed 24,372 tons of steel, an unprecedentedly huge amount, equal to 1/6 of the annual production in 1949. In order to meet the demand for steel, Anshan Iron and Steel Factory, the largest steel maker of North China, became the main supplier of steel. Other important steel products and materials, such as steel beams, steel rails, and cement, were manufactured in about 30 state-owned factories in thirteen cities. For example, the Shengyang Bridge Factory and the Shanghaiguan Bridge factory provided most steel beams for the construction of the bridge.

Many other ministries participated to orchestrate the construction of the bridge. The Ministry of Railroad made a special arrangement to help deliver materials from these factories to Wuhan. It agreed to delivery of the 200 to 300 carriages cargo load materials to the construction site daily.²⁷¹ The Ministry of Transportation made sure that the project got necessary ships and other shipping assistance on the Yangzi. The Ministry of Forestry guaranteed to supply required timbers. The Ministry of Fuel and Industry ordered the factories that it administered to assure enough electricity for building the bridge. The Ministry of Foreign Trade also worked to order important machinery directly shipped from Moscow.²⁷²

²⁷¹ *Wuhan changjiang daqiao*, p.14

²⁷² *People's Daily*, Feb. 6th, 1954.

In Wuhan, the municipal government and all the industrial, governmental, and educational work units of the city were expected to support the state-led project of building the Yangzi River Bridge. Through the propaganda efforts, some cadres and work units of Wuhan began to voluntarily organize themselves to provide support to the bridge construction. The growing sense of glory and responsibility of contributing to national construction was promoted by the CCP in order to achieve greater social mobilization and deployment. An article titled “How should Wuhan support the national construction?” was published on August 26th *People’s Daily*. The article argued that good progress had to be made in strengthening services that local people and working units could provide to support the national construction, particularly the bridge building. The author suggested turning the voluntary works to be the duty of local people in Wuhan. It used a military analogy to describe the role of the local society in the bridge construction. As it contended, “like a battle, on the one hand, it needs persistent hard works of construction teams on the frontier; on the other hand, it depends upon the support of the whole country, especially the cooperation and support of all the governmental units and the masses in Wuhan.”²⁷³

Soon, an institutionalized supporting program was proposed to centralize the organization of the city. The city government tried to marshal most city’s work units into formation of “supporting units (*zhiyuan danwen*)” and assigned them

²⁷³ *People’s Daily*, August 26th, 1955

different supporting tasks that were supervised by the municipal government.²⁷⁴

The supporting works touched almost every aspect of urban life, including land expropriation, relocation, transportation, supply of construction materials, electricity, and water, and education. By doing so, the state hoped to turn local working units to be both as a military rear guard and as engines of socialist construction.

This coercive supporting program was not welcomed by working units and even some local officials in Wuhan at first. For the local government, problems that local officials had to deal with increased after the start of the bridge construction. The most difficult one was the resettlement of thousands of residents who lived near to the construction area (two bridges and supplementary road and railway connecting lines) and were forced to relocate. It was also the city government's responsibility to arrange the supplies of food and other daily necessity for workers in construction. Therefore, some officials complained that the supporting program added extra burden to them. Some working units resented the fact that their workers and machines were taken away by the bridge construction project.

These accusations caught the attention of the party and an urgent ideological campaign against negative tendencies was launched in May 1955. Study classes were organized within the governmental units first to re-install the socialist value and a heart to serve the country. During the classes and government

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

meetings, the “ineffective” working units and persons were criticized and punished. It made clear that the support to the bridge construction was an important political issue. For the party, the real problem and obstacle faced by people in Wuhan was that people did not tap their producing potential. As one party cadre argued, “as long as we unleash the enthusiasm and creativity of the masses, we will get job done well.”²⁷⁵

After attacking the passive attitude among “supporting units,” the municipal government organized one-on-one cooperation trips to better help “construction units (*jianzhu danwei*) and “supporting units (*zhiyuan danwei*)” work together to design supporting plans. A special institution was set up within the municipal government and was made solely responsible for the administration and supervision of the supporting projects. By the end of August, there were forty-six supporting units and eleven construction units joined the centrally planned supporting program.

With the further strengthened centralized system, the city government became more effective in channeling local resource and labor for the needs of the bridge. The measures also enabled the state to achieve a higher degree of compliance among working units. For example, two Wuchang machine tool factories and the Electric Machine Welding factory in Hankou sent all their skilled technicians to support the building of the bridge. Fifty employees of the Wuhan Municipal Ferry Company also transferred to worker for the bridge. As

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

transport and communications networks were vital to the bridge project, the municipal government designed two special ferry lines and bus lines that had the construction site as the destination.²⁷⁶

2. “Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare”

Until 1957, few people believed that it was possible to build a bridge across the Yangzi. Some people thought that the water was too deep or that the wind was too strong. Others thought such a long bridge would cost too much. Now, there are over one hundred bridges on the Yangzi.²⁷⁷ As the first modern bridge, the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge was always remembered as the greatest engineering feat of modern China. It was, in fact, called the “socialist miracle” by contemporary newspapers.²⁷⁸ The bridge marked a new era with confidence to try the untried and to imagine the unimaginable. During the construction and the after the completion, the bridge represented socialist optimism in tempering nature and molding landscapes with advanced technology and industrialization.

The conquest of the Yangzi began with the effort to transform turtle hill and snake hill into the bridge abutments. The two hills used to be the best places to take a full view of the marvelous Yangzi. They also attracted people with famous history sightseeing spots, such as Qinchuang Pavilion, Yellow Crane

²⁷⁶ Ibid, Jun 5, 1955.

²⁷⁷ According to an incomplete statistics in *China's Cities and Towns Statistics Periodical* (2005), there had been 102 bridges built on the Yangzi by 2005.

²⁷⁸ *Chang Jiangribao*, oct. 26, 1957 and *People's Daily*, Feb, 6, 1954.

Tower, and Yuji Palace. Since the start of the construction, the look of turtle hill and snake hill changed drastically. Qinchuang Pavillion and Yuji Palace were dismantled and Yellow Crane Tower was turned to be construction workers' dormitory.²⁷⁹ A small market near to Yellow Crane Tower was forced to relocate. In its place merged rows of residential buildings designed for bridge construction workers. Machines like bulldozer were used to shape the two hills and make them more suitable for the future construction.

When starting to build the bridge on the river, the experts met with serious technical difficulties. Because of deep water and torrents of the Yangtze River, they couldn't use the pneumatic caisson method planned in the initial design to build the bridge pier foundation. At the critical moment, the Soviet engineers put forward a completely new method for building the deep-water foundation—large-sized tubular column drilling method. After careful study and repeated expounding and proving by the Chinese and Soviet experts, the Chinese government decided to adopt this method, by which the difficulties that could not be overcome by traditional pneumatic caisson method could be overcome, and the construction could be carried out over water instead of under water.

Under much better working conditions, the construction proceeded quicker than the original plan. Workers used giant drilling machine to drive tubular columns through river bottom's silt and mud into a rock-hard footing and then filled them with concrete. These solid, concrete-filled tubular columns served as

²⁷⁹ Chu Fan, *Changjiang daqiao*, Hongkong: shijie chuban she, 1957, p. 18.

the under-water foundation for the bridge. The Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge has eight piers and each has over thirty tubular columns rooted in underwater hard rock. Unlike the old method that men had to work in caisson under water, the new technology got the difficult works done with machines.

On the Yangzi, giant drilling machines, massive tug boats, floating crane, and many other machines worked to construct bridge piers. This scene amazed local people, as a journalist reporter wrote “it is like a machine world.”²⁸⁰ It became an exhibition on the success of China’s industrialization and power to conquer the nature with advance technology. Every day, the construction site attracted many people, like workers, students, official carders and even peasants from neighboring areas.²⁸¹ The bridge construction bureau finally had to design a tour schedule to accommodate visitors.

In autumn 1957, after two years and one month of hard work, the bridge was finally completed. Thanks to the adoption of the non-caisson method, the time required for the construction of the giant project was shortened by two years, saving large sums of funds for the country. The centralized organization also contributed to a fast and effective relocation of resource and labor for the bridge construction. The complete bridge is 1,670.4 meters (5,480.3 feet) long with the main body of 1,156 meters (3,793 feet). It is divided into two levels with the

²⁸⁰ Hong Jiang, *Han shui tie qiao: Wuhan Chang Jiang da qiao zhong yao zu cheng bu fenp*, Wuhan: changjiang wenyi chuban she, 1957, p. 22.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

upper one for bus transit and the lower for trains. The driveway is 18 meters (59 feet) wide for six buses to run parallel. Linking main lines of communication across the north and south of the Yangzi, the bridge has become the central hub of China's railway and highway transportation. Its completion received the nation-wide attention in China.

On October 16, 1957 People's Daily carried the front-page headline of "Age-Old Dream of Trains Passing Across the Yangtze River Realized, Millions of People Jubilant at the Bridge's Opening to Traffic" to spread the good news all over China. The bridge opening of that day turned out to be a national celebration. Fifty thousand people came, by bus, by steamer and boat, by foot. The railroads put on special trains. The vice premier, Li Fuchun, the minister of railroad, Teng Daiyuan, and the Soviet minister of transportation and construction, arrived by train. The streets on both sides of the Yangzi and the Han were packed with spectators. The *changjiang ribao* wrote, "For blocks and blocks on either side of the bridge there was scarcely a foot of room to spare.....It is a huge crowd of people. Who can count them?"²⁸² Flags and decorations and lanterns hung from every building. There were celebrating shows in Wuhan put up by musicians, singers, and other artists from all over China.

The opening ceremony began with a music concert at the Wuchang anchorage. It followed with a two hour of formal speeches given by the vice

²⁸² People's Daily, Oct. 16, 1957.

premier, the minister of railway, the governor of Hubei, municipal leaders, the chief engineer, and the Soviet minister of transportation and construction. Of all the words spoken, perhaps, vice premier Li Fuchun summed up best how the state felt about the completion of the bridge, “ it is a hallmark of the infinitive power that the socialist political and economic system have.”²⁸³

After the speeches were over, fifteen hundred guests, including officials from central government and local governments, army officers, representatives from working units, bridge employees, Chinese and Soviet experts, and the press, joined the speakers for a walk across the bridge. When the party reached the Hanyang side, they got up a special train decorated with the image of Mao Zedong in the front. After the ribbon cutting ceremony, the train whistled running across the bridge. On the upper level of the bridge, hundreds of China-made vehicles formed a ceremonial procession throughout the three parts of the city. Led by “the national top brands” vehicles (*jiefang* and *Beijing*), the procession was designed to demonstrate the success of China’s first five year industrialization. The official celebrating activities ended with showing people a documentary film on bridge construction and technology at Wuhan Seamen’s Club.

As China’s first highway-railway combined bridge, this monumental bridge was widely reported by newspapers and became the popular subject of journal articles, novels and films. Within ten days before the bridge was completed,

²⁸³ Ibid.

editorial departments of Wuhan's major newspapers received more than one thousand letters with essays and poems celebrating the completion of the bridge. They were written by people of different walks of life, including journalists, students, peasants, workers, teachers, and writers. In their eyes, the bridge was seen not only a victory over nature, but also the proof of CCP's superiority over the Nationalists. For example, Niu Peitian, a worker from Henan province wrote a letter, in which he recalled that people in the past could only lament the littleness before the turbulent Yangzi and expressed his excitement to see the bridge completed within a few years in PRC.²⁸⁴ The similar view was also revealed in a famous writer and historian, Guo Moruo's poem. As he writes, "Thirty years after the Northern Expedition, my dream eventually became true.....Who says that the party cannot lead? Please take a look at the Yangzi River Bridge. Who says that progress is not sufficient? Please take a look at the Yangzi River Bridge."²⁸⁵

Mao in fact was fascinated by the giant bridge. Both before and after the completion of the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge, Mao made highly publicized swim tours across the river nearby. He wrote a poem to celebrate the bridge and how it showcased China's strength to the world. The poem entitled 'Swimming', reads:

A bridge will fly to span the north and south,

²⁸⁴ *People's Daily*, October 14th, 1957.

²⁸⁵ *Wuhan changjiang daqiao shige xuan*, Wuhan: changjiang wenyi chuban she, 1958, p. 18-21.

Turning a deep chasm into a thoroughfare,
Walls of stone will stand upstream to the west
To hold back Wushan's clouds and rain
Till a smooth lake rises in the narrow gorges
The mountain goddess if she is still there
Will marvel at a world so changed.

Mao's poem best expressed China's collective fascination with technology, modern science, and mastery over nature. The first verse of the poem became copper-cast words recorded on the monument at the bridgehead. The ability to turn a deep chasm into a thoroughfare indeed brought the confidence and the faith that "men can force nature into obedience" to Chinese people. In late 1958, almost the entire country talked about "make the high mountain bow its head; make the river yield the way."²⁸⁶ Although the confidence was later promoted too excessively by the party to form the spirit of the Great Leap Forward, the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge did make Sun Yat-sen's idea of "Great Wuhan" a reality.

It contributed to the large-scale intercity mobility of Wuhan. The bridge shortened the time across the Yangzi from more than two hours to merely fifteen minutes. According to an incomplete statistics kept by the police department, the traffic volume of the bridge reached 80 million tons and saved 24 million

²⁸⁶ Mao Zedong, "Speeches at the Second Session of the Eighth Party Congress (8-23 May 1958)," *Miscellany of Mao Zedong Thought (1949-1968)*. Part I (Arlington, VA: 1974), p. 96.

railway transportation hours in the first five years of PRC.²⁸⁷ The improved communication facilitated the development of the industrial enterprises in Wuhan. For instance, Wuhan Steel was able to lower the transportation fee for needed raw material and products of nearly three million tons. A timber processing plant in Hanyang was able to lower the cost of each timber by 44% after the completion of the bridge.

The bridge also gave a strong local identity to people from all three parts of Wuhan. For so many years, each of the three cities—Wuchang Hankou and Hanyang—had a distinct identity and history. Their different personality is also evident in differences in local dialect, culture, and architecture. Now the Wuhan Yangzi River Bridge not only promoted the physical integration of the three but also became a source of local pride. Since 1957, there were dozens of local businesses who adopted the name “great bridge (*daqiao*)” for their products. There are “great bridge band” raincoat and T-shirt, candy and cake, soy sauce and cigarette. Hundreds of families also named their new born babies after the bridge. According to the record of one police station that is near to turtle hill, there had been more than two hundred new born babies in their precinct whose name contained the word of “bridge (*qiao*)” from 1955 to 1957.²⁸⁸

By then, the CCP successfully created the city of Wuhan through socialist construction. The first five-year plan built Wuhan as one major center of

²⁸⁷ *Wuhan shizhi (jiaotong)*, 1998, p. 677.

²⁸⁸ *People's Daily*, 16 Oct. 1957.

China's industrial power and greatly strengthened the communication of the city by completing the Yangzi River Bridge in 1957. The idea of "Great Wuhan" that was first proposed by Sun Yat-sen and later promoted by his followers in the republican era was realized under the leadership of the CCP. The city of Wuhan had become the largest city of China in terms of urban area till 1984.

Epilogue

In the past two decades, China has undergone the greatest period of urban growth and transformation in history. The rapid urbanization is often described as China's "urban revolution." It illustrates an anxiety China had acquired in the past-one-century struggle of becoming a major player in the modern world. The anxiety is mainly expressed in an unprecedentedly large scale urban construction and the growing number of mega-cities. The physical size of the city Beijing has grown more than tenfold in recent decades. Shanghai's urban land also increased dramatically after it annexed *pudong*, a new urban district of 522.8 km² and a population of approximately 1.5 million people. As I write this conclusion, the Shengzhen municipal government has just approved their ambitious goal of expanding the city proper five times bigger by 2030. The number of Chinese mega cities has grown fast in the past two decades. Forty-six Chinese cities passed the one million mark since 1992, which made for a national total of 102 cities with more than one million residents.

The speed and scale of this urban revolution is best described by the comments that Publisher Princeton Architectural Press made on Thomas J. Campanella's book *The Concrete Dragon*, "challenges nearly all our expectations about architecture, urbanism and city planning. In a mere generation, China's cities have undergone a metamorphosis that took 150 years to complete in the United States."

Our history of Wuhan provides a great historical lens through which we can understand China's rapid urban development and fascination with megacities. In the study, we see the ambitious urban plan began with Sun Yat-sen's conceptualization, gradually prevailed with the advocating of modern-minded intellectuals and technologically trained officials and city planners, got popularized in the wartime mass mobilizations, and finally became realized under the socialist urban construction in the early PRC. The broad outlines of the history present a developing trend which carried through much of the modern era: a trend towards an obsession with a big vision of urban modernity—gigantic and centralized, which developed cross time and ideology and profoundly shaped the urban landscape of China in the twentieth century.

Replacing the three formerly separated cities, the unification of Wuhan became an ideal of urban modernization that conveys a strong notion of Unitarianism. As a key concept of traditional Chinese philosophy and political thought, this notion was carried on and strengthened by the modern nationalist culture. To Sun Yat-sen and other nationalists, the unification of Wuhan's three cities symbolizes an enduring, unified, and centralized state of China. Therefore, the creation of Wuhan shows a historical continuity of cultural imagination of China. Deeply embedded in state-sponsored nationalist rhetoric, the building of Wuhan and its present geopolitical configuration was often taken for granted in China.

Rather than seeing the creation of Wuhan as an apparently “natural” and indisputable process, my study examines why and how the old three cities were forcefully pinched together. Though the building of mega-city Wuhan can represent a dominant trend, it was not the only historical possibility. As searching the flow of history, the study identifies countercurrents related to the urban modernization of the region. As I have show in chapter 1 and 2, Zhang Zhidong’s late Qing reform and the community-based urban development plans designed by merchants in the early republican era are contesting views and challenged the mega city ideal. Though both Zhang and local merchants advocated for comprehensive urban functions and expanding urban build up areas with the support of new technology, yet they made no attempt to strengthen connections among the three; instead, their plans encouraged each of the cities to continue develop along their own tracks.

It is not until 1911 that “big” became a distinctive feature of Chinese imagination of urban modernity. As more and more elite and officials turned to the West for the techniques of political and economic modernization, they aimed to break the traditional urban form of Chinese cities in order to create a modern city. The way of thinking “big” was particularly promoted with a growing faith in western science and technology, which primarily placed upon young technologically trained officials and engineers. Like Sun Yat-sen, they envisioned a total transformation of modern China through infrastructure construction. Western urban planning ideas and advanced technology were

introduced to open up innovative ways in re-engineering urban society. The emergence of a strong scientific culture and the rise of nationalism in the early 20th century led to form a “great leap” psychology that fueled the ambitious project of “Great Wuhan.” I suggest these cultural values and psychological moods that political leaders, merchants, intellectuals and engineers acquired in the process of building Wuhan profoundly shaped Chinese experience and imagination of modernity in the early twentieth century.

Being a nationalist project, the building of “Great Wuhan” gave a physical expression of an imagined modern China sanctioned by a new state. Efforts to make “Great Wuhan” always intensified at moments of national crisis and political change, through which the state consolidated its power and gained control over local society. The socialist system established in the early years of PRC proved to be more effective in carrying out the mega city project. With the movements of capital and population are strictly controlled by the state administrative system, the state was able to allocate natural resources and labor according to its plans. As we can see, dynamics of the urban development in Wuhan were less driven by organic societal movements than the political imagination of modernity in early twentieth-century China. By sponsoring the project of building Wuhan, both the Nationalists and the Communists attempted to modernize China through gigantic state-sponsored enterprises and centralized state power.

Through historicizing the city making process of Wuhan, I hope to shed critical light on understanding China's imagination and experience of modernity. The constant efforts to make "Great Wuhan" shows us material shapes and forms were very important in 20th century Chinese imagination of modernity. Size, big size, is often taken as the symbol of national power and technological advancement. In fact, such a culturally and politically constructed belief has become so internalized among people in China. Wuhan today looks so naturally one big city that its past has faded out from public memory as well as most local history works. As a person who grew up in Wuhan and had always taken the city's size and unity for granted, I was surprised to find that the city was such a recent creation and feel the responsibility to tell the story. It is more than merely a local history. The obsession with bigness is one of the most important reasons why China today boasts many of the world's largest man-made structures and cities. It is also my hope to remind people about the mentality that usually went unchallenged.

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