

**The Chaotic Epoch:
Southwestern Chinese Warlords and Modernity,
1910-1938**

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Thesis Directed by Dr. Timothy Weston

Abstract

Although southwestern China was chaotic politically and economically in the warlord era (1910-1938), Sichuanese warlords became primary actors in many municipal modernization projects. This thesis argues that Sichuanese warlords' engagement with new Republican values and modernity manifested itself in many modernization projects and promoted a new idea of the government's role in society and in the creation of public spaces. By redefining warlordism outside of a national narrative, this thesis reframes Sichuanese warlords not as "stagnators" of national progress or simply a residual effect of the collapse of the Qing dynasty, but at times as creators, promoters, and sometimes advocates of modernity. Although many warlord municipal modernization projects were not successful in Sichuan, they display how new Republican values did not need nationalized administrative implementation or direct foreign influence, but rather these values grew organically out of new ideas of modernity, echoing similar changes in many parts of Chinese society.

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Introduction

Although southwestern China was chaotic politically and economically in the warlord era (1910-1938), Sichuanese warlords became primary actors in many municipal modernization projects. This thesis argues that Sichuanese warlords' engagement with new Republican values and modernity manifested itself in many modernization projects and promoted a new idea of the government's role in society and in the creation of public spaces. By redefining warlordism outside of a national narrative, this thesis reframes Sichuanese warlords not as "stagnators" of national progress or simply a residual effect of the collapse of the Qing dynasty, but at times as creators, promoters, and sometimes advocates of modernity. Although many warlord municipal modernization projects were not successful in Sichuan, they display how new Republican values did not need nationalized administrative implementation or direct foreign influence, but rather these values grew organically out of new ideas of modernity, echoing similar changes in many parts of Chinese society.

Modernity continues to be a complex term stemming from contested visions and multi-faceted layers of intellectual, cultural, and political models. Although there may not have been a uniform vision of modernity or even systematic southwestern warlord implementation, this thesis argues that warlords played key leadership roles in how modernity manifested within local warlord administrations. Modernization projects displayed how these different visions of modernity could be expressed, from the demolition of older buildings to make way for wider city streets to the cutting of traditional queues and shortening Confucian gowns at the city gates. Modernization projects sprouted from warlords' views of modernity. Even though warlords did

not have full agency over the ideas of modernity, they had great impact on how modernity was implemented. For the purposes of this paper, *modernity* means the a new way of thinking linked to progress influenced by changing underlying cultural, political, and economic processes.

One of the most important theoretical frameworks for this thesis comes from Prasenjit Duara's book *Rescuing History from the Nation*. In responding to Paul Cohen's call for a more China-centered history by American historians, Duara responds by writing, "The history of China can no longer be innocently a history of the West or a history of the true China. It must attend to the politics of narratives –whether these be the rhetorical schemas we deploy for our own understanding or those of the historical actors who give us their world."¹ This thesis attempts to better understand how southwestern warlords implemented different visions of modernity through modernization projects. By taking Duara's theoretical framework and giving a voice to southwestern warlords, new narratives can be formed to better understand how forms of modernity were implemented.

The historiography of this thesis straddles many topics with vast numbers of works, including Sichuanese militarism, warlordism, modernity, and Republican cosmopolitanism. Robert Kapp's pivotal work *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic* is one of the most important works in its examination of Sichuanese warlordism. In this work Kapp analyzes how Sichuanese warlordism developed and responded to Communist and Guomindang forces throughout the Republican era. Another important historiographical work in Sichuanese Republicanism is Kristen Stapleton's work *Civilizing Chengdu*. Stapleton examines the emergence of late Qing reformers who transformed Chengdu's municipal administration and how this Qing reformist

¹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1995), 26.

discourse reemerged in the warlord era. While this thesis does not engage the subjects either of these works directly, they form an important part of how this thesis was constructed. Stapleton's work on modernity as it relates to the Qing reformist movement or Kapp's argument of Sichuan's political evolution are not contested or negated by this thesis; instead, this thesis tries to tease out the possibility of studying southwestern warlords' relationship to modernity independently from political or prior Qing constructs.

Other important historiographical works directly related to this thesis include David Strand's two works *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920's* and *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China*. These works engage how Republican values created new public spaces and manifested themselves through new cosmopolitan lifestyles. Ruth Rogaski's work *Hygienic Modernity: Meaning of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* also is important to this thesis as it analyzes how modernity discourses changed Republican municipal policies and expectations. This thesis also engages with warlordism as a subject of study and examines key works in the field such as Jerome Ch'en's famous article "Defining Warlords and Their Factions," which was written in response to James Sheridan's work on warlord Feng Yuxiang in 1968. Ch'en's article reexamined warlords not only through biographical lenses or as a result of political turmoil, but as part of ongoing political microcosm that developed in different forms at the provincial level. This thesis also uses more recent studies on warlordism, including Edward McCord's book, the *Power of the Gun*, and Diana Lary's work, *Warlord Soldiers*. These works take a more systemic approach by analyzing warlordism's effect on the militarization of Chinese society. This thesis contributes to these broader works by showing how new Republican values interacted with political uncertainties in an era of immense change, and specifically how these values grew under warlord rule.

The sources used for this thesis come from a few primary works and many secondary works. Due to the lack of a wide availability of southwestern warlord primary sources this work draws on the archival research of other authors and some primary source material related to this subject. Southwestern warlords have been studied in some detail by historians such as Robert Kapp, but few have tried to connect southwestern warlords to modernity and modernization projects. Travel and personal accounts, such as those by Harry Franck, Graham Peck, Agnes Smedley, and Alexander Hosie, and Chinese authors, such as Xie Kaiti and Fu Chongju, are used to develop impressions of Sichuanese modernity and warlordism. Unfortunately, several sources could not be located; for instance, Mingsheng Company records could not be examined in detail which could have provided more fine-tuned evidence of warlord participation within economic and municipal projects. Given time and resources, this subject could be further developed and could provide more insight into how local processes of modernity and warlordism interacted.

The four chapters of this thesis cover major themes of warlord participation in modernization projects. Chapter One gives a contextual overview of Sichuan and warlordism in the Republican period. This context is necessary to understand the political and economic situations from which Sichuanese warlords emerged and how the political and economic landscapes changed in the warlord era. Chapter Two examines how transportation modernized under Sichuan warlord administration and how transportation was used as political legitimizing tool by warlord regimes. By focusing on this narrow topic, the thesis draws out the intricacy of how warlord modernization projects were implemented and how the local population responded. Chapter Two also examines certain particularities of Chinese modern transportation, such as how and why highway and aviation links developed before railway links were established. Communist leaders, Guomintang officials, and warlords would all use transportation

modernization as part of a new Republican rhetoric of a larger civilizing process. Sichuan warlords desired political hegemony, but as this was unachievable province-wide, each had to make decisions about how to modernize transportation links according to local and regional needs. These transportation needs were not solely economic; warlords also had social and cultural motives. Far from being stagnant and uninvolved, Sichuanese warlords developed urban and provincial transportation systems and actively supported urban transportation projects.

Chapter Three analyzes how warlord policies helped modernize municipal administrations to meet the needs of the Republican era. Included in this section is information surrounding warlord municipal modernization projects, such as renovating city parks, building municipal and educational programs, and public utility infrastructure development. Many of these programs grew out of contradictory motives but nonetheless they show how warlords promoted more than just material technological changes. Motivation for modernization projects differed among warlords. Some used modernization projects to increase territorial revenue and facilitate faster movement of troops, while other projects served as legitimizing authority through serving the public with new public spaces for recreation and education. Several warlord regimes wished to modernize not only materially, but also organizationally through governmental administrative transformation. The second generation of Sichuanese warlords wished not only to gain hegemony, but also to embark on new administrative reformation which found its roots in late Qing reformers. Sichuanese warlords desired to be perceived as modern and as defenders of the people, while at the same time preserving their own power bases and expanding into rival warlord territory. For instance, second generation warlords such as Liu Xiang and Yang Sen were defenders of Sichuan against other warlords, and they strove for a unique Sichuanese

identity as modernizers and tried to create a legacy which would outlast their warlord administrations.

Chapter Four analyzes how southwestern warlord regimes promoted economic development within their spheres of influence. Although many have viewed warlord regimes as having a negative effect on economic development, this section raises questions about how effective warlord regimes were at raising revenue or stifling economic growth. Key to understanding warlord economics is the study of opium, tariff duties, and taxation models, but also how merchants would sometimes join and support warlord regimes for mutual benefit. The complex web of public and private ties of many warlords could promote or stifle the growth of particular industries. Opium became a key source of revenue for many warlord regimes, and this section explores how warlords financed and expanded trade within their territories. Chapter Four considers how warlords were a dragging force on the economy as well as how warlords transformed or modernized local economies to suit their own needs.

Chapter One

Sichuan and Warlordism in Context

Hard are the ways of Sichuan,

Harder than scaling the sky.

-Li Bo, 762CE²

The geographic, historical, economic, and political contexts for Sichuanese warlordism provides insight into the processes of warlord development from 1916 to 1938. These contexts demonstrate that the geography and demographics of Sichuan situate the province as a unique subject of study: Sichuan was somewhat isolated, but it was experiencing many of the same phenomena of encounters with modernity that were occurring in other parts of China. Evidence of modernization in the Sichuan context reveals that the discourse of warlordism as sporadic and self-serving rule should be adjusted to acknowledge the civic benefits warlords brought to the province through modernization projects.

Geographic and Demographic Introduction

Sichuan sits in the fertile Red Basin on the upper reaches of the Yangzi River surrounded by a ring of formidable mountains, making it isolated but rich due to its secure geographic

² Herold Wiens, "The *Shu Tao* or Road to Szechwan," *Geographical Review* 39, no. 4 (October 1949): 1.

position and mild climate. At the fall of the Ming Dynasty, the population was devastated by rebellions and war, but by the late nineteenth century Sichuan not only produced more grain than any other province, it also had the highest yield per cultivated acre and per capita.³ Sichuan remained connected to other regions by a treacherous stretch of the Yangzi River and a mountain road but was largely economically self-sustainable as an independent macro-region of the Upper-Yangzi River valley.⁴ (See figure 1 for political borders.) By the early twentieth century Sichuan had a population of about forty-five million and the total taxes in Sichuan paid to the Qing government amounted to only three percent of Sichuan's gross agricultural production. The local Qing government had only 168 ranked officials, making for a lightly taxed, but relatively rich provincial administration.⁵

³ S.A.M Adshead, *Province and Politics in Late Imperial China: Vice-regal Government in Szechwan 1898-1911* (London: Curzon Press, 1984), 3.

⁴ G. William Skinner and Hugh D.R. Baker, *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 212.

⁵ Adshead, 12.

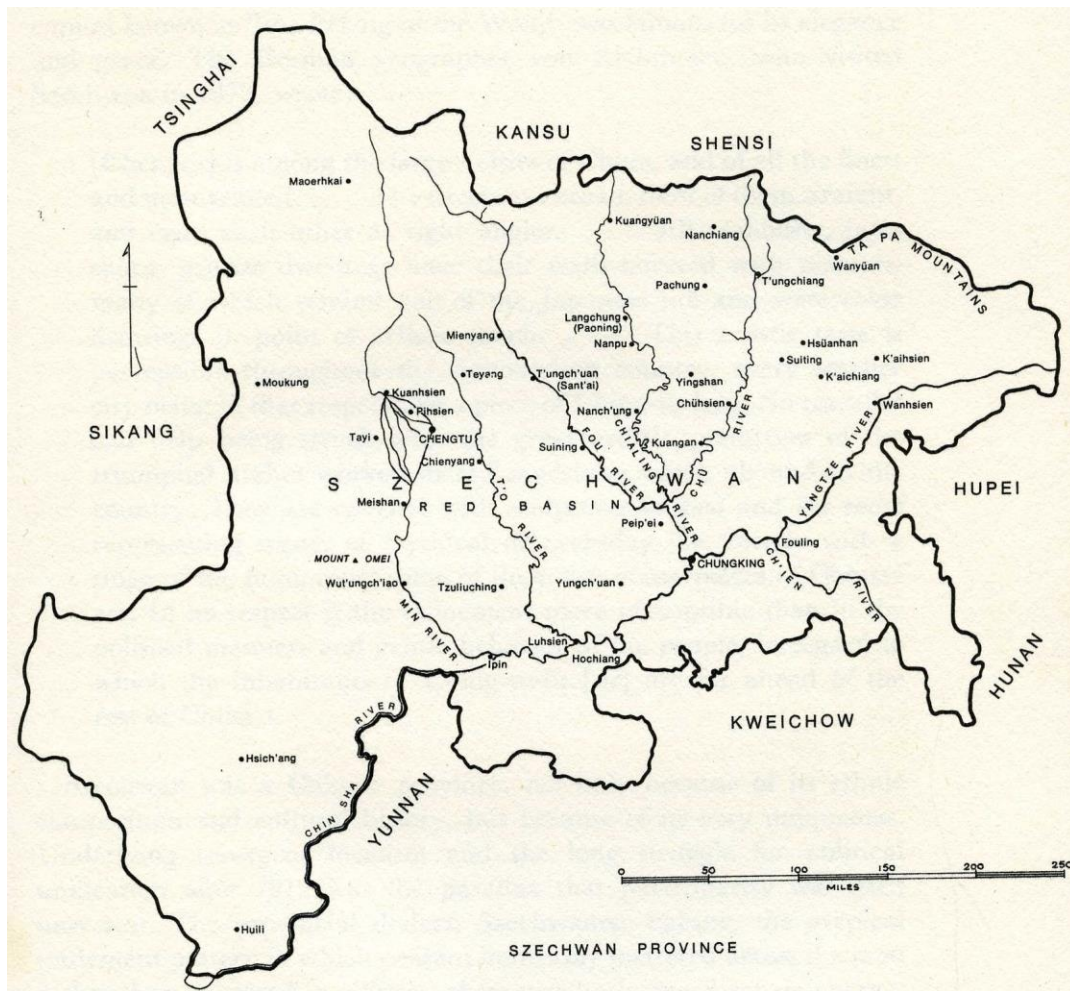


Figure 1
Map of Sichuan in the Early Republic⁶

However, even though Sichuan was a model of a high-functioning Qing dynasty province, by 1938 it was seen as politically and economically “backward.” Warlordism has traditionally been viewed as a main culprit in Sichuanese stagnation, but the province’s development owes much of its successes to warlord involvement. While Sichuanese commercial centers never became as developed as Shanghai or Nanjing, warlords ruling major cities such as Chongqing and Chengdu started many warlord-initiated modernization projects that would leave

⁶ Robert Kapp, *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1973), facing page, 4.

lasting impacts on modernization discourses and the physical character of the cities with widened paved roads and a new municipal governance systems. Warlord modernization efforts in Sichuan often became wrapped into later Guomindang or Communist modernization discourses, but the warlord efforts themselves had lasting effects within local municipal administrations such as Chengdu and Chongqing.

Historical Background

Sichuan's historical background reveals how warlordism transformed Sichuan into a decentralized state and how warlords coped with continuing changes of the province. Warlordism as a historical phenomenon originated long before the Republican period and the changes in warlordism in the Republican period varied greatly from province to province. Great economic and political changes shook Sichuan at the end of the Qing dynasty. The late Qing Sichuanese provincial government during the Viceroyalties of the Zhao brothers (1907-1911) greatly disrupted trade and the political status-quo when it imposed direct Chinese rule over the Sikang region near Tibet, implemented new opium suppression campaigns, initiated salt and tax reforms, and nationalized the Chongqing-Chengdu railway project.⁷ Instability of the Sichuanese regional government had been growing for some time with localized uprisings in 1898 and 1903, but the growing frustration of the rural gentry in perceived administrative mismanagement would manifest itself in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement in 1911.

This instability was mainly caused by an increased governmental role in the economic changes occurring throughout the province. For example, the late-Qing opium repression campaigns reduced farmland value and governmental tax revenue as farmers could not import as

⁷ Adshead, 74.

much cotton linen from the lower Yangzi region without a replacement for opium as a cash crop. Opium was one of the most important cash crops in Sichuan in the late Qing dynasty, providing one sixth to one seventh of the total provincial budget.⁸ Because Sichuan was a key opium producing region in China, the repression of opium production had profound effects on the local Sichuanese economy, forcing many farmers to grow less profitable goods. The opium repression measures also forced Sichuanese merchants to reduce imports from other regions of China due to the lack of a replacement export commodity to pay for them. To offset falling provincial administration revenue and due to an increase in costs associated with the military presence on the Tibetan border, the Sichuan regional government imposed new tax reforms on salt as well as new taxes on vegetable oil and alcohol. The economic instability and governmental inability to stabilize the economic and political fallout of Qing policies brought forth a crisis in 1910 when the government tried to nationalize Sichuan's railway project. The Railway Protection Movement would become a catalyst for change in Sichuan, with national repercussions.

By 1910 over nine million *taels* had been raised to build a Chongqing-Chengdu railway through taxes on rents of Sichuanese landlords. The government handed over responsibility for the railway construction to a Sichuanese company in 1908 with merchant rather than official government leadership which led to allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Due to poor investments on the Shanghai stock market from 1909 to 1910, the railway fund lost 2 million *taels* in value, causing great anxiety for shareholders. Many shareholders began to question whether the merchant-led project was sustainable.⁹ The government offered and eventually forced a buyout of shares for bonds at the depreciated market value instead of face value. This

⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁹Ibid., 99.

galvanized the Sichuanese gentry to form the Sichuan Railway Protection League (*baolu tongzhihui*) to be compensated for any losses. The Sichuan Railway Protection League also protested the Qing's use of the Railway fund and construction as collateral for additional foreign loans. Initially, the Qing provincial government under Governor Er-Feng Zhao tried to sympathize with dissenters, but by the fall of 1910 Zhao ordered the arrest of key Railway Protection members out of fear of organized resistance. This led to an all-out rebellion by rural gentry in the western and southern regions of Sichuan who feared arrested Railway Protection League members would be executed. The rebellion in Sichuan did not originate purely as a progressive response to Qing conservatism, but as a reaction to the Qing modernization efforts and the changing political dynamics of Sichuan. The leaders of the rebellion sought a return to a Confucian version of governmental economic policies over new disruptive governmental economic policies allied with foreign interests. But the leaders of the rebellion combined new Republican ideas of egalitarian citizenship and rights with older Confucian values of loyalty and moral concepts of virtue. This historical event of the Railway rebellion parallels the juncture of the beginning of the warlord period and complex value systems expressed by warlords; warlords also had idealized notions of Confucian virtues mixed with new Republican progressivism. And above all, there existed an intense conflict of military power, where the warlords had to negotiate idealized notions of virtue and Republican values with political and economic realities.

Economic Background

Sichuan traditionally had two main commercial centers. Chengdu sits on the north-central Sichuan basin and was the historic administrative capital, while Chongqing sits on the south-eastern hills of the Sichuan basin by the Yangzi River. These two cities vied for power and influence, but Chongqing held the key for interregional commercial trade with the lower

Yangzi region. The other important commercial city in Sichuan was Ziliujing, located south of Chengdu and west of Chongqing, and known for its significant salt production. (See Figure 1 above.) The Sichuanese economy, while mainly rural and agricultural, did export a significant amount of raw goods including silk, tung oil, salt, pig bristles, sugar, tobacco, and medicinal herbs, both domestically and internationally. These exports did not remain stable but changed significantly from the 1920s to the 1930s. For example, from 1926-1930 under warlord administration, silk and linen made up 38.7% of total exports, but by 1934-1935 they made up only 5.4%.¹⁰ Meanwhile, exports of tung oil and pig bristles grew from 20.9% in 1926-1930 to 42.9% of Sichuan's total exports from 1934-1935.¹¹ Sichuanese goods would be sent downriver on warlord supported transportation systems to Shanghai before being sent overseas. Silk production was famous in Chengdu, but gradually was replaced by tung oil as Sichuan's main agricultural export. Tung oil was highly sought after as a quick drying waterproofing agent in varnishes and paints. It quickly grew to be China's largest export to the U.S. with more than 200 million pounds exported annually by 1937.¹² Most commercial trade remained highly intra-regional and was rural and agriculturally orientated, but Sichuan's economy by no means remained stagnant or isolated during the warlord period.

Warlord Political Background

What makes warlord-era Sichuan an interesting object of study is how its political development mimicked many other parts of China, but still retained uniquely Sichuanese characteristics. Sichuan warlords remained politically divided from 1916 to 1938 but

¹⁰ Tim Wright, "Distant Thunder: The Regional Economies of Southwest China and the Impact of the Great Depression," *Modern Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (July 2000): 703.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² George F. Deasy, "Tung Oil Production and Trade," *Economic Geography* 16, no. 3 (July 1940): 260.

experienced increased levels of confrontations with Communist and Nationalist forces from 1934 to 1938 when they vied for dominance in the west. Sichuan's development changed rapidly from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, like many other parts of China, and yet this change occurred largely under divisive warlord regimes largely disconnected from national interests or interaction.

From 1910 to 1938 Sichuan went through roughly four transitional political periods. The first political period lasted from 1910 to 1915 after the Southwestern provinces declared independence from the Beijing government. The conflicts in this period were southwest coalitions versus the centralized state. The second period lasted from 1916 to 1927 when Yunnanese and Guizhou forces allied with various Sichuanese factions and fought over control of local garrison areas. This period involved conflicts among coalition members. The third period lasted from 1927 to 1934. In this period warlords from other provinces were forced out of Sichuan, and a status-quo developed between five of the major Sichuanese warlords, and even though there were conflicts among the warlords, some provincial stability ensued. The fourth and final period lasted from 1934 to 1938 and saw an increased confrontations between Sichuanese warlords and the Communist and Nationalist forces.

After independence, in the Early Republic (1910-1915), Sichuan faced an increasingly contentious central government under Yuan Shi-kai. In 1915 Cai E's Yunnanese forces invaded Sichuan forcing Yuan Shi-kai's Sichuan Governor Yi Zhang to declare Sichuan's independence, as Sichuan became a battleground between Beijing and southwestern forces.¹³ The initial conflict involved Beijing appointed Sichuanese administrators and local southwestern armies

¹³ Kapp, 15.

who battled for control of Chengdu and key cities on the Upper-Yangzi River. However, this battleground shifted to a southwestern regional conflict from 1916-1927, when external and internal forces from Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou fought each other for control of Chengdu and various parts of the Sichuan basin. Each provincial warlord force failed to gain any regional hegemony, but external provincial forces from Yunnan and Guizhou were driven out by 1927, leaving only five main Sichuanese warlords in control of the province from 1927 to 1938. These warlords included Yang Sen, Liu Xiang, Liu Wenhui (Liu Xiang's younger uncle), Tian Songyao, and Liu Cunhou. In 1934, Sichuan faced its first invasion of Communist forces from the Long March and from other Communist forces from Shaanxi province. With aid from the Guomindang government, the Communists were driven out of Sichuan, but the Nationalist Government became more frequently involved within Sichuan's warlord politics. Chiang Kai-shek and Liu Xiang, the Sichuanese leading warlord, formed an uneasy truce, but that trust was broken during the Xi'an incident. Liu attempted to drive out loyal Guomindang forces, but stopped when news of Chiang's release reached Sichuan. After the Japanese invasion, Liu Xiang and the other four major Sichuan warlords contributed troops to the Battle of Shanghai. Sichuan warlord power began to erode after Liu Xiang died (or was possibly murdered) in January of 1938. When the Guomindang's leaders retreated from the capital of Nanjing to Wuhan and then to Chongqing, Sichuan was finally brought back fully under Nationalist control.

The Sichuan warlords were not uniform in appearance or background but formed two distinct generational groups. Robert Kapp in *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic* notes that most of the Sichuanese warlords from 1911-1927 were born between 1875 and 1880.¹⁴ These warlords trained at Qing military schools such as the Military Preparatory School in Chengdu,

¹⁴ Kapp, 12.

which operated from 1902 until 1906. Many of the first Sichuanese warlords had studied in Japan and took part in the modern army movement in the late Qing with contacts in the *Tongmenghui* Society in Canton. Several warlords, including Xiang Kewu and Dan Mouxin, participated in revolutionary activities before 1911.¹⁵ By 1927, a new group of warlords had emerged. These younger, less educated provincial warlords were often cadets or junior officers of older warlords who had retired to become respected gentry in their hometowns. Unlike their cosmopolitan created counterparts, the new provincial warlords were created through local and internal rather than national or regional power struggles.

The two generations of warlords in Sichuan also may have had differing views on modernity, but the primary sources do not give a clear picture as to how they may have differed. This difficulty of determining what their views were on modernity is mainly due to two reasons. The first reason is that the first generation of warlords had little political stability. Their main concern for political control was interrupted by invasion by Yunnan and Guizhou forces. Due to this instability, most of the warlords' projects were completed during the 1920s and 1930s under the second generation of warlords. Another reason that it is difficult to determine how intellectuals influenced warlords' ideas of modernity was that the second group of warlords were highly provincial. Many never left the province due to continued fighting. Although many warlords from their territorial bases within Sichuan recruited promising intellectuals, little is said about how these local warlord administrations interacted with imported versions of modernity. Certainly foreign education in Japan and Germany influenced many warlord administrations, but to what extent is not clear. For instance, Stapleton notes how the second generation warlords invited intellectuals, but she doesn't discuss where the intellectuals were educated or how they

¹⁵ Ibid., 12

brought ideas of modernity to the warlords. Stapleton also says that one warlord, Yang Sen, was known for recruiting intellectuals from as far away as Shanghai and Beijing, but he would marry intellectual women into his harem or enfold male intellectuals into his administration.¹⁶

Of the many warlords in Sichuan, there were six that stand out as being more powerful than the rest, and each had a specific territorial base. How southwestern cultural and political identities were formed and shifted during this transitional period reveal complex relationships between the individual personalities of specific warlords, as well as a the communal sense of identity within the wider southwest region (see Figure 2 for geographic location of garrison areas).

¹⁶ Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 238.

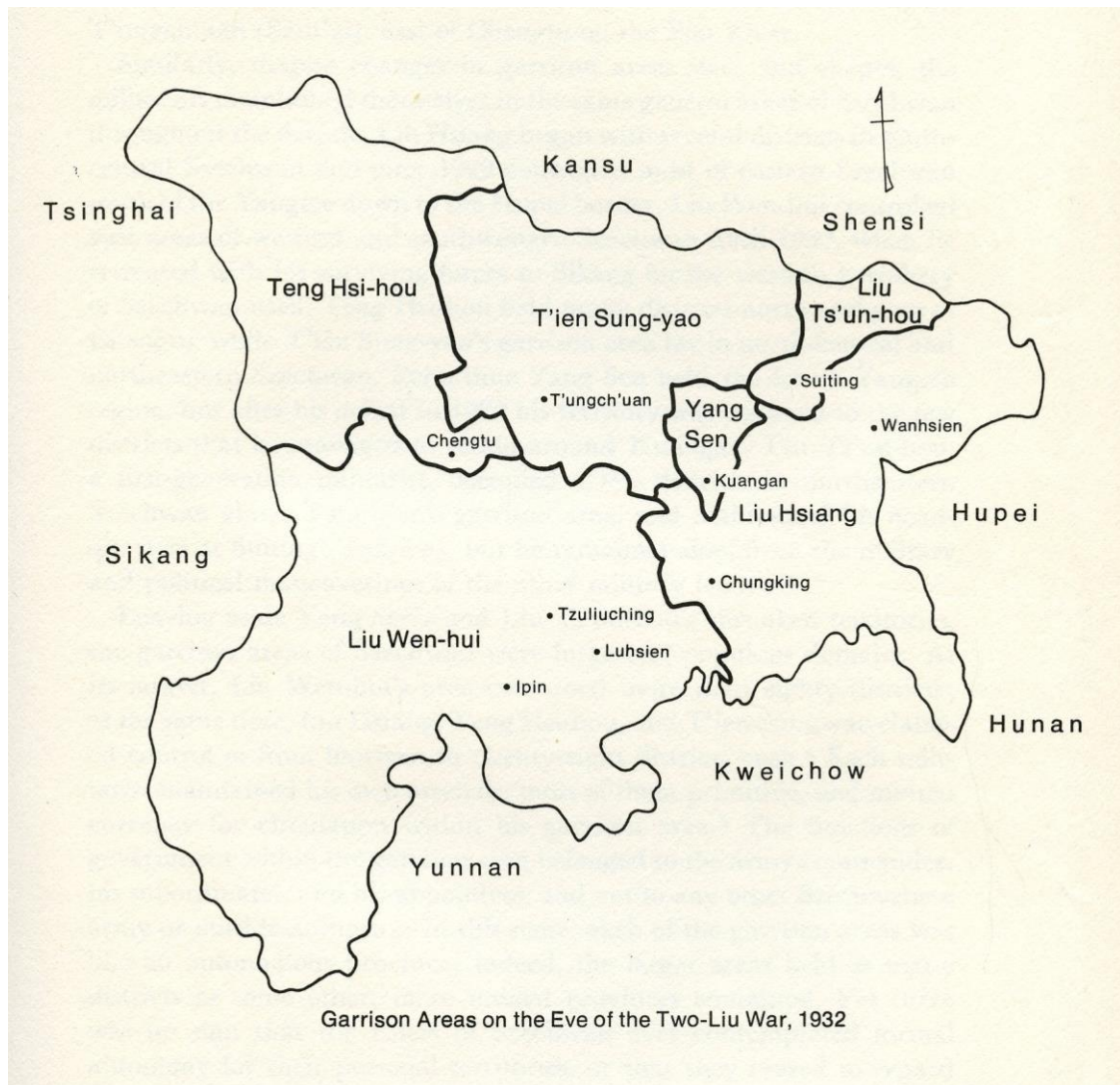


Figure 2
Political Map of Sichuan from 1932¹⁷

Liu Xiang was the most powerful Sichuanese warlord throughout the period who controlled eastern Sichuan and Chongqing. Liu Cunhou (spelled *Liu Ts'un-Hou* in Figure 2 above) controlled northeastern Sichuan. Tian Songyao (spelled *T'ien Sung-yao* above) ruled in north-central Sichuan. Deng Xihao (spelled *Teng Hsi Hou* above) controlled the northwest, Liu

¹⁷ Kapp, facing page 34.

Wenhui (spelled *Liu Wen Hui* above) controlled the southwest, and Yang Sen controlled the central territory sandwiched between the Tian Songyao and the two Lius.¹⁸ Each warlord had a distinctive personality, but the overall level of professionalism of the Sichuanese army was lower than in many other parts of China. Many joked that while the armies were marching, the wives and concubines outnumbered the soldiers. One American was amazed at how Sichuanese soldiers did not walk in formation, did not wear uniformed clothes, and carried their pet dogs, birds, and monkeys into battle.¹⁹ This low level of professionalism persisted throughout much of China, but numerical superiority often mattered more to the warlords than the discipline of the fighting force.

The new generation of warlords' power depended more on their ability to control and manipulate the loyalty of their troops rather than on their tactical ability or educational background. Liu Xiang became the leading warlord of Sichuan, despite having a poor educational background. Liu Xiang failed his entrance exams to the Army Primary School and was only admitted later because of his relationship to the examiner.²⁰ Graduating last in his class, Liu would never finish middle school, but Liu's family bought him 200 rifles and grey uniforms from Shanghai and provided enough pay for his army for two months, jump starting his career as a junior officer.²¹ He would eventually become the most powerful Sichuanese warlord by controlling Chongqing, the region's gateway to the Lower Yangzi. Many of the other Sichuanese warlords were also known for their shrewd ability to gauge political and military opportunities. For example, Tian Songyao was nicknamed the "Crystal Monkey" because of his

¹⁸ Kapp, 35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ William Gilman, "Liu Hsiang- the Szechwan Warlord: A Personal Interview," *China Today* (June 1935): 167.

cleverness. Tian Songyao would often wait out power struggles and take advantage when the opportunity arose. Because of this environment, many Sichuan warlords were described by Chinese writers as “crafty, cowardly, ruthless, or coarse.”²² Yet despite these characterizations, warlords would oversee key urban modernization projects such as the Chongqing-Chengdu highway, the widening of city streets, the renovation of city parks, and the creation of a modern urban police forces and public institutions. The humble origins of the warlords did not prevent them from becoming modernizers. In fact, they prepared the way for future successful modernization projects completed by the Communists and Guomindang.

Warlordism Discourse

Historians interpret the warlord era in Sichuan in conflicting ways. Many historians, such as Robert Kapp, characterize Sichuan warlords’ modernization efforts as shallow, sporadic, or superficial. Certainly, most acted more out of self-interest than for the benefit of Sichuan’s citizens, but even symbolic warlord modernization efforts were influenced by new Republican ideals and transformed local culture. Many of the warlord-initiated urban modernization projects were unpopular as they required forced labor, new taxes, and the tearing down of shops and homes to widen city streets. In the quest for modernity, there were both winners and losers. Many warlords failed to achieve their modernization aims, and many civilians also were forced to accept warlord modernization demands. The failure of many warlord projects did not mean they did not have positive impacts. Also, those who failed to oppose warlord modernization projects did not lose their political voice. Edward Friedman in *Backward Toward Revolution* writes, “While winning is by no means inevitable, through struggle and loss the losers may prove

²² Kapp, 28.

their moral worth and give witness to the authenticity of their words. In their sacrifices the losers may begin to attain legitimacy while old power-holders begin to be discredited.”²³ In Sichuan, this process occurred as the second generation of warlords took power.

One of the most modernizing Sichuanese warlords was Yang Sen, who had an extensive career in Sichuan and transformed Chengdu during his brief tenure in the city from 1924 to 1925. He would promote new schools, widen city streets, renovate city parks, and build a city museum with a planned library, zoo, concert hall, and classrooms to be added later.²⁴ In addition to physical changes, Yang Sen also promoted literacy, physical education, and a new type of authoritarian populist ruling style by portraying himself as a common man. Yang Sen would discourage popular Qing practices such as foot-binding, and the wearing of long gowns and queues, and he would encourage students to study abroad. The modernization projects undertaken by Sichuan warlords were not entirely successful, but even though Sichuan would continue to be seen as a backward province, the modernization efforts of the warlord era would have lasting effects.

Differing interpretations of what warlords were and how they fit into Chinese history stem from how warlordism is defined. The pejorative term “warlord” has been replaced by “provincial militarist” by historians such as Robert Kapp, while others such as Diana Lary argue that the word “warlord” should be used and not given alternative designations. Arthur Waldron traces the etymology of warlord or *junfa* from a new concept of European warfare after WWI through a Japanese context.²⁵ However, Waldron contends that, even at the word’s introduction,

²³ Edward Friedman, *Backward Toward Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 3.

²⁴ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 223.

²⁵ Arthur Waldron, “The Warlord: Nineteenth Century Understands of Violence, Militarism and Imperialism,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 96, no. 4 (Oct. 1991), 1074.

many in China debated whether warlordism was a new or cyclical condition tied to foreign imperialism, dynastic change, or economics.²⁶ This debate over the usage of “warlord” as a meaningful term is only one indication of the conflicts of historical interpretations of the warlord era.

Chinese warlords have a stigma attached to them as many in the West viewed warlord politics as a comic tragedy. For example, many laughed at the idea of warlords stopping all conflict if there was rain or refusing to fight after dark. Sichuan warlords themselves were given comic nicknames such as “Rat Face” or “Sour Melon” in Sichuan, based on their personality or appearance.²⁷ What many forget, however, is that warlords faced several conundrums in trying to train or motivate their troops. Often warlord soldiers were simply peasants who abandoned their land in search of better opportunities as a soldier. In Sichuan the running joke was that there were “more officers than soldiers, more soldiers than guns, and more guns than ammunition.”²⁸ If a warlord wished to entice soldiers into his company, he would have to pay relatively well and hand out titles and could not discipline his troops too severely or else they could desert or even worse defect in the heat of battle. Warlord troops were driven by the needs of self-preservation and motivated by greed and pursuits of pleasure, such as opium or women. Because of this mercenary relationship between a warlord and his soldiers, a warlord was in a constant struggle to control his troops’ loyalty through preserving his territory as a means of revenue and expansion of his territory for new opportunities for liquid capital. This could lead to over-taxation and the pillaging of a warlord’s rival’s territory. This pillaging was also most severe when a warlord’s army went into another province which required more plunder for motivation

²⁶ Ibid., 1081.

²⁷ David Bonavia, *China’s Warlords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 142.

²⁸ Hsi-sheng Chi, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 83.

and a view that another province's riches were fair game for complete exploitation. However, a warlord needed to balance his insatiable need for capital with the need for sustainable governance and economic development within his territory. While some warlord methods differed in their approaches to ruling the population of their garrison area, only those warlords who balanced internal and external rivals could sustain a prolonged rule over an area.

A warlord's personal image was always at stake, so modernization projects could potentially preserve his legacy. When Yang Sen was asked why he moved so quickly in his urban modernization projects, he said that he had to hurry because he might be expelled from Chengdu before he was able to do anything worthwhile.²⁹ It was perhaps because of these multifaceted motivations of warlords in their modernization projects that many see them as shallow or incomplete. In this turbulent political and economic environment many urban modernization projects took place within Sichuan and warlords played a crucial role in how these projects were implemented.

In warlord studies, most works fall under several classifications. Diana Lary divides warlord studies into six categories: The origins of warlordism, military history, warlord biography, regional studies, political science approaches, and socioeconomic approaches.³⁰ She notes that much of the work done in warlord studies focuses on narrow topics such as warlord biography, regional studies, and political science approaches, rather than more a more socio-economic approach.

Conclusion

²⁹ Harry Franck, *Roving Through Southern China* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Publishers, 1925), 550.

³⁰ Diana Lary, *Region and Nation: The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 447.

The first section this chapter outlined how Sichuan's geographic and demographic background changed warlord development. The Qing legacy of a small, relatively detached officials transformed to highly localized control with active administrators. This transformation was only possible due to new attitudes of what was expected of provincial and municipal governments. Historically, warlords controlled Sichuan during a period of change from Confucian ideals in the Qing era to a mix of Confucian and Republican values in the warlord era.

In the economic section, this chapter showed that the economy was continually transforming throughout the warlord period, and neither stable nor stagnant. Although the economy was mainly agriculturally based, the products were constantly changing to meet internal needs and external market demands.

The political context for warlordism demonstrated how warlords evolved from first to second generation and how the political dynamics changed significantly. It also described the changing nature of the conflicts: first, southwest coalition warlords fought the centralized power of the nation for provincial autonomy; second, the members of the larger southwest coalition fought each other; finally, Sichuanese warlords themselves were vying with each other for power and resources. But with the decreased scale of the conflicts from national to provincial, relative stability ensued, until national politics re-entered Sichuan. This did occur in other parts of China after the end of the northern and southern warlord conflicts, but Sichuan never experienced a reunification that occurred in eastern China.

The following chapters uncover the connections between southwestern warlords within the Sichuan clique and their role in urban modernization projects. Despite the fact that some historians characterize the Sichuan warlord era as stagnant and backward, there exists strong evidence that warlords became active participants in urban modernization projects, and these

projects changed Sichuan. Warlords did not simply continue Qing policy reforms; rather, in some situations they instituted new types of governance, created new organizational plans for city administrations, and experimented with new ways of modernizing transportation. Republican attitudes of society and modernity influenced not only the warlords' projects but also how those projects would impact Sichuanese identity. In warlord Sichuan, state power transformed from a distant institution to one of uncomfortable close proximity between common citizens and local warlord administrators. While the 1911 Revolution would ultimately be a political failure, it opened up new avenues for ideas of how a civil society should be organized and how that civil society was organized through warlord regimes.

Chapter Two

The Modernization of Transportation in Sichuan (1910-1952)

The road has already been leveled, when will the *Duli* (referring to Yang Sen) roll?

The people's homes have been torn down, we hope the General will drive soon.³¹

-a popular *duilian* in Chengdu, 1925

Transportation Modernization Discourses

In a park in downtown Chengdu, there is a one hundred foot monument commemorating the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement. On its base is a large bas-relief of a golden train lined with gold acanthus leaves and an egg-and-dart molding with purple tiles.³² Ironically, the monument symbolizes both the great success the movement had in the downfall of the Qing dynasty and the great “failure” of early Republican Sichuan. From the early 1900s to 1952, the dream of a Chongqing-Chengdu Railway was never realized even though the monument was erected soon after the *Xinhai* Revolution in 1913. Although over \$15 million was eventually collected for construction,³³ the man responsible took control of the money for the project in the

³¹ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 244.

³² Graham Peck, *Through China's Wall* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 162.

³³ Franck, 555.

chaos of the 1911 Revolution and fled to Shanghai.³⁴ The planned railway project from Chongqing to Chengdu was originally supported by Sichuanese students studying abroad in Japan and later became funded by local Sichuan gentry, the most fervent of whom also had studied in Japan or new reform schools.³⁵ When the Qing government uncovered plans to nationalize the railroad fund as collateral for additional foreign loans, the resulting rebellion was able to overthrow the Qing government by uniting common people and gentry leaders to oppose perceived encroachment of foreign imperialism and governmental mismanagement. Historically, the modernization of transportation has heavy symbolic undertones as roads and railways represent a key source of legitimacy of governmental authority. Road building carries both spiritual (*jingsheng wenming*) and material (*wuzhi wenming*) connotations, linking an area to the wider world as part of larger civilizing process.³⁶ Road building therefore is more than just an economic or public venture; it carries with it a sense of progress by linking an area to a larger, centralized core. Transportation development remains a pivotal strategy for centralized government authorities to demonstrate modernity and its utility to its population. By building or improving transportation links, governmental authorities could improve transportation efficiency, justify taxation, and give concrete examples to the benefit of their rule. Unintentionally, road building also carried with it an implicit fear of foreign encroachment and imperialism that followed in the wake of modernization.

The early fear of foreign imperialism can best be explored in the transportation development in the Jiangbei region of Sichuan near Chongqing in the late Qing dynasty with

³⁴ Peck, 163.

³⁵ Xiaowei Zheng, "The Making of Chinese Politics: Political Culture, Protest Repertoires, and Nationalism in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement," (PhD diss., University of California San Diego, 2009), 175.

³⁶ John M. Flower, "A Road Is Made: Roads, Temples, and Historical Memory in Ya'an County, Sichuan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 3 (August 2004): 649.

repercussions that lasted into the Republican era. Chongqing became an official treaty port in 1891, and was soon explored by foreign companies looking for economic opportunity. Local gentry in the Jiangbei region had protested and petitioned the Qing government after Archibald Little, a British businessman, gained railway and coal mining rights in the region in 1904.³⁷ By 1907 Little began building roads from a coal mine in Longdangwang to the Jialing river. After protest from the local elite, the government bought out Little's mining and development rights for 220,000 taels in 1909, with the local Chinese-owned mining competitor only paying 70,000 taels of the total.³⁸ For several years the local Chinese mining company operated at a financial loss, surviving only by gaining governmental subsidies, and it continued operations not because it was potentially economically profitable, but because it allowed the local Chinese elite a modernizing discourse free of foreign entanglements. This modernizing discourse would later be developed by warlord regimes to legitimize forced evictions and new taxes for transportation improvements.

Railways symbolized progress and technological achievement, but they also required heavy capital investment and foreign technical expertise that could be found in the West. Transportation links did more than transport goods and people, as they could legitimize a government's authority through tangible development projects for citizens' welfare. Transportation development not only interwove regions with a more robust trade network, but they also became symbols of modernity. During the warlord era, Sichuan developed transportation networks based on local economic opportunity and warlord prestige rather than as centrally planned projects. The first railway built in Sichuan was completed in 1931 by the Min

³⁷ Danke Li, "Popular Culture in the Making of Anti-Imperialist and Nationalist Sentiments in Sichuan," *Modern China* 30, no. 4 (October 2004): 490.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 492.

Sheng Company connecting the Jiangbei Coal mine to the Yangzi; however, the history of transportation development in Sichuan shows a legacy of fear of foreign encroachment.³⁹ Sichuan developed aviation links before railway networks, not because it was leapfrogging technology, but because transportation development relied on expedient localized concerns rather than national or regional economic or transportation goals. When Chongqing became the wartime capital in 1938, the Guomindang government immediately set out to better connect Sichuan with other parts of China; however, warlord transportation projects often set out to better connect the internal links of a warlord controlled area. Local Sichuanese warlords were less concerned with connecting Sichuan with other regions and more concerned with developing internal transportation networks that would serve their own ends. By the 1930's aviation and water linked Sichuan to the Lower Yangzi region, but these inter-regional connections were not a major focus of Sichuanese warlord development activity, with the exception of Liu Xiang who controlled Chongqing, the main export center to the province.

Transportation as a Civilizing Project

Ethnic civilizing project models from Steven Harrell's *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* can be applied to larger modernization and civilizing models of early Republican China. Harrell lays out three civilizing projects: Confucian, Christian, and Communist, which each sought to "civilize" peripheral peoples.⁴⁰ The modernization models warlords utilized often mimicked these three project types because levels of culture and technology were measuring devices by which progressive warlords and modern elites judged

³⁹ James Mathews, "The Union Jack on the Upper Yangzi: The Treaty Port of Chongqing 1891-1943" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, Ontario 1999), 316.

⁴⁰ Steven Harrell, "Introduction," *Cultural Encounter's on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, ed. Steven Harrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 18.

elements of Chinese society. Yang Sen would attempt to change Chengdu materially through street widening and building public works, but he also attempted to change cultural practices such as foot-binding and wearing qipaos and traditional dress. Thus, transportation modernization was only one part of a larger warlord civilizing project which combined Confucian/Humanist, Christian/Moral, or Communist/Scientific elements to legitimize modernization projects. While elements of all three of these civilizing projects existed in Yang Sen's modernization efforts, he relied most on the Communist/Scientific project values to justify his modernization plans. He would often try to emulate Lenin, and allowed a large memorial funeral for Lenin in Chengdu after his death.⁴¹

Warlord road-building was sometimes part of a display of modernization for a warlord's regime with an underlying aspiration to end the era of warlord conflict. In an address to Chengdu's road-building committee, Yang Sen expressed this idea by saying, "Warfare has been going on in Sichuan for many years, and the people have suffered much. It is all due to the poor state of our roads. If we can complete the roads quickly, then we can concentrate the armies and transport military supplies very conveniently. War won't continue long after that."⁴² Yang Sen proposed in this speech that transportation development was a binding agent that would unite the province, sending it into a new age of peace. Liu Xiang echoed Yang Sen in an interview after the Chengdu-Chongqing highway was completed in 1933. When a reporter questioned whether the road would be of more benefit to his armies with the war between Liu Xiang and his uncle Liu Wenhui or the people of Sichuan, Liu Xiang answered, "Yes we have too much fighting. Of course roads may be used for armies. But after all they are principally for the people. They will

⁴¹ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 229.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 236.

bring enlightenment and peace. Then there will not be a need to fight.”⁴³ Ironically, it was the Sino-Japanese War that brought the province a degree of unity as the Guomintang capital, but echoes of transportation development as a civilizing discourse continued in both Communist and Guomintang transportation modernization rhetoric.

Warlord Transportation Development

To avoid a large capital outlay, warlords were keen to develop road and waterway links within their garrison areas, rather than with regional or national transportation goals. In addition, roads could provide immediate benefit for a warlord without a large unmovable investment that could become obsolete if a warlord lost his territory.

Peter Fleming describes several of the other advantages of bus over train service in his book *One's Company: A Journey to China in 1934*:

The bus service, as a Chinese institution, is both conceived and carried out on a far sounder basis than the railways. It requires a much smaller capital outlay, and therefore presents fewer opportunities for squeeze. A road is quicker as well as cheaper to build than a railway, and the Chinese talent for delay is accordingly a less operative factor. The running of a bus service, as compared with running of a railway, is not only easier but offers more scope for individualism and is therefore better suited to the Chinese character. Finally, in the event of political upheavals, a bus service is less vulnerable than a railway because its capital value is much smaller.⁴⁴

Road links provided much more benefit to individual warlords and alleviated the need to be fixed to a specific location. Many warlords, including Yang Sen, Liu Xiang, and Liu Wenhui, moved across these roads throughout Sichuan province, depending on their political and military fortunes.

⁴³ Gillman, 168.

⁴⁴ Peter Fleming, *One's Company: A Journey to China* (London: Jonathan Cap, 1934), 200.

Transportation links improved significantly under warlord rule. The Chengdu-Chongqing highway was completed in 1933, and by the mid-1930s, regular air service to Shanghai was established. Guomintang officials had almost no power in Sichuan until 1934 when Communists entered the province as part of the Long March. The Chengdu-Chongqing highway was built under Liu Xiang to connect his territory in Chongqing to that of his uncle Liu Wenhui, who controlled Chengdu. Liu Xiang built the highway to facilitate trade and to fight his uncle who challenged his rule. The building of the highway also had other motives. When the Chengdu-Chongqing highway was being built, thousands of famine refugees were provided jobs to construct the highway and alleviate famine suffering.⁴⁵ Local warlord participation in transportation modernization in Sichuan is largely ignored, even though great steps had been taken to integrate parts of the province prior to liberation, and even before GMD control. During warlord rule, steamship travel developed along the Yangzi River to link Sichuan to the Lower Yangzi region, and by the 1930s airline links connected Sichuan to Shanghai and other parts of China. These developments in transportation were encouraged and initiated by warlord administrations who wished to increase trade and open the possibility of financing further warlord development projects.

Inter-regional Transport Development

The most common transportation method in Sichuan was on its rivers. Sichuan has over 540 rivers, but only 90 are navigable.⁴⁶ Goods from Gansu and Shaanxi were connected to the Lower Yangzi region through the northern Jialing River while the Min River served as a main artery for western and southern regions in Sichuan. By the end of the nineteenth century more

⁴⁵ W. W. L., "Nanking Extends Control in Harassed Szechwan," *Far Eastern Survey* 6, no. 15 (July 21, 1937): 173, 174.

⁴⁶ Zheng, 28

than 20,000 boats arrived in Chongqing annually with more than 250 million kilograms of goods for import and export.⁴⁷ Besides waterways, Sichuan's land transportation relied on two types of roads: official provincial highways (*shengdao*) and local footpaths. Sichuan's provincial highways on average were 21 feet wide and paved with flagstones whereas most county roads were 6 to 9 feet wide and were mostly paved.⁴⁸ In the Qing dynasty, couriers could travel at three speeds depending on the importance of their messages. Covering distances of 300, 200, and 100 kilometers a day, they would reach Beijing in 9, 14, or 29 days.⁴⁹ Most export goods travelled by river rather than overland; however, provincial and village roads allowed the Sichuan region to be well connected internally.

Long distance travel in Sichuan developed from flagstone paths used mainly for local village fairs to a paved road network linking most major towns to Chengdu or Chongqing through long distance buses or commercial trucks. Due to the limited number of long distance buses, in Sichuan many people could travel in a truck carrying other goods. These trucks were known colloquially as a "yellow fish" and were known for being uncomfortable albeit quicker than walking.⁵⁰

Intra-regional Transportation Development

Internal Sichuanese trade and transportation were necessary for the vitality of village fairs. Village fairs were not exhibition events as in the West, but for marketing goods and services for rural areas.⁵¹ Most fairs occurred in villages with less than one or two thousand

⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁰Xie Kaiti, 'Cheng Yu lushang huangyu lei' (Tears of yellow fish on the road between Chongqing and Chengdu) Longmenzhen (Storytelling) no. 122(Feb 2000): 93-95.

⁵¹ Joseph Earle Spencer, "The Szechwan Village Fair," *Economic Geography* 16, no. 1 (January 1940): 48.

attendees, but most people would attend more than one village's fair in a given month. A village usually had nine or more fairs in a month usually following a 1, 4,7,10 pattern, with village fair every third or fourth day.⁵² These could be expanded if needs permitted or the fair could be abolished after a large enough market developed as the village became a town.

Village life on non-fair days would be slow since most transportation and goods and services were offered only on fair days. Trade was done both in cash and barter systems, fulfilling localized needs and wants with the seasonal products of local farmers. A fair usually could be found within a five mile radius to allow for easy transportation option for local farmers and producers. Roads for market fairs were described by Quaker missionaries Robert Davidson and Isaac Mason, who wrote in 1905, "The whole of the province is supplied with main roads between the chief centers, and smaller ones to all the towns, villages and markets. [...] [T]hey are roads, exceedingly useful, and well-worn by the thousands who travel long distances, and the tens of thousands who ply hither and thither in pursuit of a living."⁵³ Fairs were the main economic and transportation driver and allowed for information and goods to spread with surprising speed around a province.

Long-distance buses, steamships, and airplanes replaced litters and sedan chairs for long distance travel, while cars, bikes, rickshaws, wheelbarrows, and buses gradually replaced sedan chairs for inner-city transportation systems. Despite the great improvements in transport in Chengdu and Chongqing, many continue to see the warlord transportation modernization efforts as a failure. Robert Kapp notes that in 1935 there were only 1,600 kilometers of paved roads in an area the size of France.⁵⁴ However, by 1937 an additional 1,376 kilometers had been paved,

⁵² Spencer, "The Szechwan Village Fair," 52.

⁵³ Adshead, 6.

⁵⁴ Kapp, 58.

using both provincial and national funds.⁵⁵ This later improvement took place under the administration of Liu Xiang, but a small number of Guomindang officials had moved to Chongqing to provide political and technical support for Liu Xiang's municipal administration. Most of these paved improvements tended to be on the Chengdu plain. Paved roads could be found from Chengdu to Chongqing as well as other market towns such as Loshan, Langzhang, and Chuxian, and they followed merchant trade routes. Even though these paved improvements seem small, most of these road building efforts grew organically based on warlord and economic needs to transport troops, opium, or weapons. When the nationalist government relocated to Chongqing in 1938, it immediately began plans for regional highways linking Sichuan to Shaanxi, Xinjiang, and Yunnan, for national needs, but these improvements were not necessary for the local Sichuan region.

One of the first city roads was constructed by the warlord Yang Sen to Guanxian, fifty-five kilometers west of Chengdu. The road to Guanxian had been attempted twice before in 1915 and in 1922, but the attempts failed due to continued fighting.⁵⁶ Yang Sen was unable to complete the road when he was driven out of Chengdu in 1925, but because he sold exclusive rights to the road to an affluent merchant, the road was completed in 1926. While this project may not have been a warlord accomplishment in transportation development, it demonstrates how warlord plans influenced the eventual construction of new transportation networks. The first automobile in the province would travel this packed-earth road that connected Chengdu to the important Dujiangyan waterworks site that irrigated much of the Chengdu plain and prevented flooding. Road-building projects were often financed through new tax systems and

⁵⁵ W.W.L., 173, 174.

⁵⁶ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 225.

forced labor. Liu Wenhui constructed a road from Yazhou to Chengdu in the late 1920s and was remembered by locals for using ruthless methods.⁵⁷

Long Distance Transportation Modernization

Long distance travel modernization was not confined to road-building; aviation and water links also developed at an astonishing pace. Transportation outside of Sichuan mainly used water links for bulk transit. Steam ships travelled year round starting in 1922 (before that ships could only sail from the spring to fall). Liu Xiang invested heavily in the Min Sheng Corporation which ran steamships from Chongqing to Hankou (often with opium as its main cargo). Liu Xiang's investments in transportation modernization likely had personal financial motives. Opium produced in Chongqing needed to be shipped to the Lower Yangzi region to realize a profit, while modern weapons could be imported from Shanghai, and this could be better accomplished through a more modernized trade network. While the improved steamship transportation served the immediate needs of Liu Xiang, the growth of this transportation network also reaffirmed his important status in the region as a trade broker and potential military ally of Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang government.

Aviation in China also saw major extensions from Chengdu and Chongqing in the 1930s under warlord rule. Warlords capitalized on new transportation methods for additional revenue, but they also began developing aviation networks for possible military motives. Aviation development occurred late within the warlord period, but it played a decisive role in the conflict between Liu Xiang and his uncle Liu Wenhui.

⁵⁷ Flower, 661.

Sichuanese warlords built the first airports for transportation and military uses. For example, in an interview by William Gillman with Liu Xiang, Gillman learned that Liu Xiang had not seen an airplane until 1930. After seeing one, Liu purchased four antique German Junkers with questionable sales advice that planes required a “breaking-in period of two-years” so it was best to buy older rather than new planes.⁵⁸ Liu Xiang also had a warehouse made to house egg-shaped aviation bombs. Other Sichuanese warlords attempted to buy airplanes as well, but they could be confiscated by Liu Xiang in the key port city of Chongqing. Because of this, Liu Wenhui attempted to fly his planes from the south over Guizhou, but unfortunately his planes crashed on route.⁵⁹ This seizure of airplanes and arms would spark a major war between Liu Xiang and his uncle Liu Wenhui who each had an estimated army of over one hundred thousand men. Nevertheless, aerodromes had been constructed linking key cities by air, which would later be used by Guomindang and Communist forces.

There were three large aviation corporations that operated in China in the 1930s. The first aviation company in China was a joint American and Chinese venture called the Chinese National Aviation Corporation (CNAC) which started a line from Shanghai to Hankou in 1929.⁶⁰ This line was then extended to Chengdu shortly after its founding. In 1934 the new Southwest China Airline was established out of Canton with services to Chongqing.⁶¹ The third largest aviation company, Eurasia, was founded as a Sino-German aviation company based out of Shanghai in 1931 with the purpose of connecting China to Europe through western China.⁶²

⁵⁸ Gilman, 168

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Russell Hall, “Expanding Airways in the Far East,” *Far Eastern Survey* 6, no. 9 (April 28, 1937): 96.

⁶¹ Ibid., 96.

⁶² Ibid., 97.

These corporations were some of the first international and interregional connections for Sichuan and outside of the Upper Yangzi River macro-region.

As western sections of China became connected by air, merchants and passengers jumped at the opportunity to fly goods and utilize passenger services. Traditionally, Sichuan was a difficult place to reach. However, in the 1930s the daily flight circuit from Shanghai-Nanjing-Hankou-Yichang-Chongqing-Chengdu took only 8 hours. Madame Jiang is quoted as saying: “Of all the inventions that have helped to unify China perhaps the airplane is the most outstanding.”⁶³ Rates for goods by air were cheaper than for goods transported by land routes at 10 cents per mile, and they arrived faster.⁶⁴ By 1948, cargo air rates were equal to roads and rails transport.⁶⁵ Planes, however, were notorious for being over booked months in advance. H.L. Richardson describes a saying about long distance travel in China,

If you were really in a hurry to go anywhere, the quickest way was to walk: it might take a week or two but you would be sure to get there in that time. If you wanted to go by bus it might take a fortnight for a ticket and then spend a week on the road because of breakdowns; if you flew, the journey would certainly take only an hour or two but you would have to wait a month for a place on the plane.⁶⁶

Aviation never replaced Yangzi water transport as the main freight transit, but its development within Sichuan depended on warlord administration who sought military uses for aviation development.

Aviation and road building activities by Sichuanese warlords followed certain development patterns. Due to the tremendous burden of finding liquid capital, warlords could

⁶³ Frank Dikotter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), 106

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Richardson, H. L. “Szechwan during the War, *The Geographical Journal* 106, no. 1,2 (July/August 1945): 14.

only invest in the most affordable modernization projects with the most perceived benefit. Without foreign bank investment little could be accomplished in transportation development with limited warlord means. Despite this fact, warlords such as Liu Xiang and Yang Sen saw themselves as progressive, and they thought foreigners should invest in their modernization efforts. During Liu Xiang's interview with Gillman he spoke with pride about the newly-constructed Chongqing-Chengdu highway in 1935. Long distance travel changed radically from 1911 to 1937 with a large increase in paved roads, buses and trucks for transportation, and new year-round steamer and aviation service. These developments were only part of the major transportation developments, as inner-city transport systems also modernized under several warlord administrations.

When Sir Mayrick Hewett first visited Chengdu as a British Consul he described Chengdu's urban transportation in 1916:

When I was there no wheeled traffic, not even a rickshaw, was allowed inside the city. The mode of conveyance was by sedan-chair and the chair coolies of Szechuan were famous. The main streets of the city were stone-paved, wide and flanked by shops on either side completely open to the road. As the shops displayed their shop-signs on large boards of scarlet or black with gold Chinese characters on them, the effect in the main streets was of passing through a long arcade of Oriental beauty.⁶⁷

Meyrick's description mirrors many other early travelers' accounts of Chengdu's early transportation network. On one of the first trips through Sichuan by a Westerner in 1883, future British Consul Alexander Hosie described Chengdu as, "...without exception the most exceptional city I have seen in China; Peking and Canton will not bear comparison to it. The streets in the Chinese quarter are fairly broad, paved with stone and slope gently on either side.

⁶⁷ Sir Meyrick Hewlett, *Forty Years in China* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1943), 89.

They are clean and in excellent repair.”⁶⁸ Bicycles imported from abroad could be found in Chengdu by 1909, but at the cost of \$150 most of the population could not afford this luxury.⁶⁹ Inner-city transportation links developed quickly in the Republican era under warlord administrations. When visiting southwest China in the early 1920s, Harry Franck noted that even horses were relatively rare. When entering a city many would call out “*Ma lai le*” to alert others that a horse was approaching, sending many people into panic as horses were mostly unknown in Sichuan.⁷⁰

Despite this perceived backwardness, when Franck entered Chengdu, the warlord Yang Sen was in the midst of many large urban modernization projects. Franck reacted to what he saw of Yang Sen’s improvements: “Things move fast sometimes in slow-moving China; an American city that had its improvements thrust down its throat as rapidly as this would develop nervous prostration. Every day we went into the city a new street was sure to have fallen victim to forced widening.”⁷¹ Yang Sen cut the streets to common level and widened them with flagstones to allow for rickshaw and automobile drivers. If shops cropped too far into the street he would cut them down by sending out men to mark new wall and roof lines. This sent many merchants scrambling to save what materials they could before having to sometimes reduce their house and shops by half. Yang Sen even began tearing down the city walls around the city to allow for more traffic. One of his more ambitious plans was to create a street-car public transportation

⁶⁸ Hosie, Alexander and H. P. King. “Steam Traffic on the Yangtze: Population of Szechwan.” *The Geographical Journal* 64, no. 3 (September 1924): 86.

⁶⁹ Fu Chongju. *Chengdu Tonglan* (A Comprehensive Guide to Chengdu), 2 vols. Originally published in 1909-1911 (Chengdu: *Chubanshe*, 1987), 230.

⁷⁰ Franck, 544.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 549.

system in the city on top of the walls in the city, but foreign banks would not lend him the capital needed for the improvements, to Yang Sen's disbelief.⁷²

In the warlord era, Chengdu's transportation system changed radically from Maveriyk's description in 1916. Rickshaws were invented in 1868 in Tokyo by John Goble, but by the 1930s 400,000 operated within China.⁷³ In Chengdu many luxurious rickshaws had fur cushions, and pullers ran with great pride.⁷⁴ More luxurious rickshaws in Chengdu had bells while poor ones put wire in the spokes to create noise.⁷⁵ Also rubber tires were introduced to reduce noise and wear and by the 1930s most rickshaws had rubber tires in Chengdu.⁷⁶ By the 1930s taxis were preferred to rickshaws in Chengdu because male and female riders could ride together for company.⁷⁷ When bicycles were first introduced to Sichuan they were also seen as a luxury. Men could be seen in Chengdu wearing full foreign suits riding a bicycle to a wedding as it was a source of pride and a symbol of modernity. Both private and public transportation had undergone a revolution in the Republican period, and in Sichuan this occurred with active warlord participation through modernization efforts.

Transportation Development Obstacles

Public transportation systems improved with widened streets under warlord modernization projects, but the improvement efforts were prone to many obstacles. When buses

⁷² Franck, 550.

⁷³ Dikotter, 82, 83.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 93.

were first introduced into Chengdu in 1924, there were several accidents with local rickshaw drivers. Interestingly, both rickshaws and buses were introduced through warlord administrations. When a bus hit a city stele in northern Chengdu, local elites asked for the buses to be removed and buses were banned for a short time.⁷⁸ Warlords had to navigate between perceived transportation modernization improvements, but also experience pushback from cultural norms and habits. Buses catered to a male customers and could seat about 20 people. Rich female customers preferred private travel to these crowded conditions, and working women's wages were so low that they could not afford the bus fare. Buses therefore fared much better as a long distance mode of transportation while rickshaws, wheelbarrows, and taxis were preferred modes within the city. Warlord transportation developments could only be successful with local participation, but warlords sometimes forced Sichuanese to participate in their modernization projects.

Despite pushback from some local elites, warlord projects were often completed through a combination of subtle collusion and forced coercion. Yang Sen's street reforms in Chengdu forced shopkeepers to reduce the size of the front of the stores to allow for wider streets. Yang Sen's largest street project widened one of the Chengdu's busiest streets, Great East Street, which ran from the city's commercial center to the East Gate.⁷⁹ This renovation was accompanied by the making of a new model street over the main *yamen* compound. The new road was christened as "*Chunxi Lu*" in reference to the *Daodejing's* allusion to the pleasures of the common people.⁸⁰ The road faced a serious diplomatic obstacle when builders planned to destroy a local pharmacy owned by the French Consulate General's chief translator. With the

⁷⁸ Dikotter, 94

⁷⁹ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 224.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 225.

help of a local merchant named Fu Fenggang who owned prime real estate in other parts of the city, Yang Sen was able to relocate the pharmacy to a suitable area and avoid diplomatic repercussions. To reward Fu Fenggang, Yang Sen offered to sell him much of the new storefront property on *Chunxi Lu*. This would subsequently greatly profit Fu Fenggang as *Chunxi Lu* became one of the most commercially profitable areas in the city, comparable to Nanjing Road in Shanghai.⁸¹ Local elite participation was key to a warlord's success because it was through private funding that a warlord was able to equip and pay his armies as well as finance and implement his modernization projects.

Urban road-building was a major part of warlord modernization projects, but the projects were part of a larger civilizing discourse. In April of 1924, Chen Weixin, a member of Chengdu's Road Building Association, published what he thought were the eight priorities city administrators should implement:

1. Remove parts of shops and houses that encroach on the streets
2. Fix the city's sewer system
3. Construct new tree-lined streets, with benches along them
4. Open new public toilets with attendant to collect fees and provide toilet paper (women's toilets were to be free, however, since only poor women would use them)
5. Establish official farmers' markets to get stalls out of the intersections and raise revenues
6. Turn temple grounds throughout the city into small public parks so children are not obliged to play in the streets,
7. Encourage public lectures so that people will understand the intentions of the government

⁸¹ Ibid., 240

8. Set up a rickshaw company with 2,000-3,000 rickshaws⁸²

Interestingly, five of the eight priorities deal directly with city transport. Rickshaws are also an interesting feature as they were considered a new modernized mode of urban transportation. All eight of Chen Weixin's proposals required municipal administrative action. Because warlords controlled and initiated key municipal measures, Chen's call for action could be seen as a plea for new warlord modernization projects to address these problems. These eight proposals also show how Chen perceived the government's new role in society. According to Chen, the local warlord-led government should facilitate improved inner-city transport, improve trade, and provide new public spaces for the benefit of its citizens.

Yang Sen was not the first warlord to try to implement transportation improvements in Chengdu. When Liu Xiang had control of the city in 1921, he attempted to widen some city streets and constructed the first ring road around the city walls.⁸³ Liu Xiang set up a Beijing-styled city administration office (*shizheng gongsuo*) and began to build a central park in the city center. These early efforts were funded by a new "city administration benefit" lottery, which warlords used for both military and civilian purposes.⁸⁴ Liu Xiang's ring road was quickly destroyed by heavy cart traffic, but his efforts mark a continuing reform effort by warlord city administrations. These efforts were not always successful, and many projects such as the park and city street widening would be continued and completed by later warlord regimes.

The failure of railway construction by the warlord regimes was used as a propaganda tool by the Communists despite great strides taken in transportation development within warlord-

⁸² Ibid., 234.

⁸³ Ibid., 230

⁸⁴ Ibid., 230.

controlled areas and later under Guomintang wartime government. The warlords had accomplished much in just a few decades: Sichuanese warlord administrations transformed cities such as Chengdu and Chongqing by widening roads, building new public parks, creating new public markets, and regulating city traffic. Transportation was also improving outside of cities, although at a slower rate. Sichuan was already approved for a \$40 million loan in 1938 by a French bank to construct a Chongqing-Chengdu railroad, but because of World War II, the final construction of the line was delayed indefinitely.⁸⁵ Communists used the completion of the railway in 1952 as a central symbol of economic and political reconstruction and modernization over the Guomintang or warlord era modernization efforts, specifically those tied to transportation, but the evidence shows that warlord administrations accomplished a wide range of modernization projects.

Some of the challenges of building a railway in Sichuan became apparent after Communist liberation in 1949. When the Communists took control they immediately set out to legitimize their authority in Sichuan through railway development. Communists boasted that by 1950 Chinese railways handled 510% more freight from that of 1935 pre-war levels. This increased over 50% from the first half of 1951 to that of 1950, mostly due to constant railway construction.⁸⁶ In 1952, the 313 mile stretch from Chongqing to Chengdu railroad was finally completed after two years by over 100,000 civilian workers and an additional 25,000 People's Liberation Army soldiers.⁸⁷ The construction required 970 bridges and 40 tunnels, moved 20.2 million cubic yards of earth, and in one stretch of the railroad tunneled through 812 yards of solid rock.⁸⁸ Most of the materials were sourced locally, and the Communist work teams prided

⁸⁵ Matthews, 313.

⁸⁶ "First Trains in Szechwan," *China Reconstructs*, (March 1952): 34

⁸⁷ Chang, Li, "Railway Construction in China," *Far Eastern Survey* 22, no. 4 (March 25 1953), 38.

⁸⁸ "First Trains in Szechwan," *China Reconstructs* (March 1952): 33.

themselves by setting new building pace records. The railroad needed extensive repairs almost immediately after it was built because the poorly designed gravel tracks easily washed out. However, the construction created many patriotic stories such as local communities coming together to rescue barges that ran aground or postponing weddings to finish construction.⁸⁹ The Communists contrasted their success to perceived Guomindang and warlord failures, but these comparisons fail to account for the great modernization efforts made in warlord Sichuan from 1910 to 1938. The transportation systems of both inner city and intra city had transformed under warlord administrations. The mechanization of transportation could only be possible with public support of improving infrastructure. While these improvements during the warlord era may have been motivated to improve warlord resources and political administration rather than for public benefit, they would forever change how Sichuanese saw the role of government in society and in how both goods and people moved in the province.

Although Sichuan continued to be seen as “backward” in comparison to the development of parts of eastern China, warlord regimes were not idle but were active investors in transportation modernization projects. Warlords such as Yang Sen and Liu Xiang constructed new roads and highways, invested in steam ship and aviation links, and kick-started some of the first urban development projects in Sichuan. These improvements included the Chongqing-Chengdu highway, which linked Sichuan’s two main commercial and administrative centers. Steamships companies such as Liu Xiang’s Minsheng Corporation linked Chongqing to the Lower Yangzi River and operated even in the winter months. Yang Sen’s street widening program transformed Chengdu’s city streets and allowed for motorized transport. Public transportation developed so that one could travel by bus or plane to other parts of Sichuan or

⁸⁹ Ibid., 33.

China. These improvements did encounter problems as a result of stretched resources and an unstable political environment. Despite these setbacks, it can be argued that the future successes of the Guomindang and Communist modernization projects owe much to the initial development projects implemented by warlords. For instance, in Chengdu, *Chunxilu* continues to be a thriving commercial district, but few realize its beginnings as a warlord-led modernization effort.

Chapter 3

Civil Governance: Warlord Realities and Utopian Dreams

"Civil officials, come down from your sedan chairs; military officials, descend from your steeds."

--a cry from the 1911 Sichuan Railway Protection Movement⁹⁰

The cry for egalitarian concepts of universal citizenship in the 1911 Sichuan Railway Protection Movement echoed in the epigraph above created an interesting conflict of identity for many Sichuanese warlords. Many acted and tried to emulate former administrative styles of the Qing, while others tried new approaches of administrative rule. At one point local Sichuanese warlords came together to attend a conference to end further political conflict and create a more lasting peace. While "utopian" or at least idealized efforts like this failed due to warlord factionalism, the Republican values that prompted them became evident in many warlord actions. These actions were at times contradictory as they contained both traditional and progressive notions of identity. This chapter examines how Republican values and idealized notions of civil discourse interacted with Sichuanese warlord realities. This chapter does not seek to prove that Sichuanese warlords were on the whole progressive, but that progressive

⁹⁰ Mary Backus Rankin, "Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics: Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing," *Modern China* 28, no. 3 (July 2002): 337.

values and become further cemented with Chinese Republican society, and these notions had direct influences on how Sichuanese warlords acted with each other and with larger nationalist organizations such as the Guomindang or the Communists.

Sichuan may have been isolated geographically from the Lower Yangzi Valley, but it mirrored a political consciousness and Republican values found in many other Chinese regions. Although other Chinese considered Sichuanese as “backwards,” and several warlords flirted with the idea of Sichuanese independence, Sichuan was linked to other regions of China through a common cultural identity and common national experiences, which prevented any determined independence movement. Sichuanese students participated in national events such as the May 4th Movement of 1919, Japanese boycotts, and remembrance of Sun Yat-Sen’s death in 1925. Warlords in Sichuan had to be mindful of anti-foreign, nationalist sentiment expressed by many local students, while at the same time placate foreign powers to secure weapon purchases and avoid foreign interference. Warlords could be reactionary but at the same time sometimes were promoters of Republican values and discourses. One would err toward false dichotomy if one depicted warlords merely as advocates for progress or as highly superstitious and traditional. Later national narratives would characterize warlord efforts as shallow and self-serving while ignoring the many modernization projects directly led by warlord administrators. The complexity found among many warlords has been lost as the redefinition of Sichuanese warlords often has been subverted by nationalist discourses. When the Guomindang forces consolidated their power over Sichuan in 1938, local warlord modernization efforts became wrapped up in a parallel Guomindang modernity rhetoric.

Sichuan’s complex cultural identity did not remain constant but shifted according to the environment. Sichuan’s complex cultural identity was only one layer of many smaller sub-

regional identities which also underwent various changes. Examples of this can still be seen in the region today as Chongqing has become its own administrative district. In wartime Sichuan, many smaller sub-region identities were sometimes ignored by both outsiders and by local Sichuanese. A key example of this can be found in how the Sichuanese referred to those not born in Sichuan. Sichuanese called outsiders “downriver people” (*xiajiangren*) while non-Sichuanese referred to Sichuanese as “natives” (*bendiren*).⁹¹ Ironically, these terms would expand when Chongqing became the wartime capital in 1938. “Downriver people” was redefined as anyone not from Sichuan, including northerners from Beijing, whereas even refugees or workers from other parts of Sichuan within Chongqing were defined as “natives.” Historian Lee McIsaac argues that the Guomindang-led wartime administration used this projection of Sichuan’s “backwardness” and identity as the “other” as a way to legitimize its authority by emphasizing its modernization projects and de-emphasizing local initiatives and prior warlord modernization projects responsible for much of the physical and cultural changes in Chongqing.⁹² By weaving a national narrative of progress, Guomindang and later Communist discourses could downplay the great changes that occurred outside of their control and therefore they could take credit for any perceived improvements.

Republican values were not only imported or did not merely spread from more developed areas to isolated areas such Sichuan; these values also sprang up in Sichuan through a natural progression of cultural and political thought. Warlords had to navigate through a difficult contradiction of values by upholding traditional models of authority and tradition while incorporating Republican notions of a new civil discourse and new ideas of equality and

⁹¹ Lee McIsaac, “Chapter 11, City as Nation: Creating a Wartime Capital in Chongqing,” *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity 1900-1950*, ed. Joseph Esherick (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 189.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 191.

femininity. For instance, the warlord Yang Sen often tried to recruit young intellectuals while at the same time keeping many “progressive” concubines who were expected to express Yang Sen’s reformed sensibilities through modern dress and fashion. These women were expected to learn English from an American missionary woman every morning. The concubines also had unbound feet, learned to ride bicycles, and two even had bobbed hair.⁹³ However, in a famous instance, one of Yang’s concubines refused to swim during Yang’s program to encourage woman’s physical education, so he forcibly threw her in the water.⁹⁴ In another instance, his soldiers beat to death a student who allegedly was involved with one of his concubines, whom he also killed.⁹⁵ In a similar vein, Liu Xiang’s advisors wished to modernize Chongqing on a Shanghai model, but Liu was heavily influenced by a soothsayer named “Fairy Liu” regarding decisions on battle military strategic advice. Warlords, therefore, demonstrated conflicting values, which they acted on depending on specific circumstances.

Sichuan’s warlord regime legitimation and ruling styles in part depended upon how warlordism developed within its provincial political system. Jerome Ch’en classifies four main types of warlord provincial developments: provinces where revolutionary parties were strong and the army weak (Sichuan, Guizhou, Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Hunan); provinces where revolutionary parties were weak and the army strong (all provinces in the north except Shanxi and Shaanxi); provinces that had roughly equal strength of revolutionary parties and army (Shandong and Jiangsu); and those in which both the revolutionary parties and army were both weak (Anhui and Jiangxi).⁹⁶ Ch’en goes on to show that in areas such as Sichuan where the military was weak,

⁹³ Franck, 556.

⁹⁴ Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu*, 243.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁶ Jerome Ch'en, “Defining Chinese Warlords and Their Factions,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London 31, no. 3 (1968): 566

rulers tended to have backgrounds in and support from revolutionary parties or secret societies; however, in other provinces where the military was much stronger than revolutionary parties, experienced senior military officers who could gain the respect and authority of the army tended to rise to power.⁹⁷

Provincial autonomy as political rhetoric could only replace nationalism to a certain degree, and often warlords' arguments of political legitimacy crumbled under notions of self-interest. Ch'en convincingly argues that warlords were not "created" by the 1911 Revolution but the 1911 Revolution "facilitated their birth."⁹⁸ Even though only roughly 30% of Chinese warlords were well-educated, many were highly superstitious, and in addition they relied on Confucian discourses of loyalty and values for political legitimacy.⁹⁹ Warlords typically used hypocritical didactic arguments in the Confucian tradition and avoided self-incrimination for selfish military actions and instead always rested on denouncing their rivals. However, this Confucian-influenced discourse proved to be shallow as warlords were not loyal to a centralized leader, nor were they loyal to their own definition of Chinese nationalism. Ch'en therefore labels warlords as both "bad Confucians" and "bad Nationalists," trapped in a self-defeating struggle of identity and for prestige.¹⁰⁰ These dual forces induced warlords to rely on personal ties for loyalty, but warlord relationships were unstable due to personal greed and ambition.

Ch'en goes on to argue that, after the 1928 Northern Expedition, the only warlords remaining relied on a reformist nationalist model or they simply were residual warlords without a coherent political ideology. In Sichuan, Ch'en argues, the weakness of any coherent political

⁹⁷ Ibid., 566, 567.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 566.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 569, 570.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 580.

discourse resulted in large gains for Communist or Nationalist forces at the expense of local warlord power when confrontations occurred.¹⁰¹ However, while warlords on the whole lost many military engagements when confronted with Communist or Guomindang troops, their lack of supplies and military training may have had a larger impact on their failure than Ch'en credits. Recent scholarship surrounding warlord participation in reform movements such as the May 4th Movement have also challenged some of Ch'en's conclusions. For instance, in "The May 4th Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination," Zhongping Chen challenges certain notions of anti-warlordism rhetoric found within the May 4th Movement's principles. Chen argues that anti-warlordism within the May 4th Movement had been constructed after the event, and instead the movement targeted specific anti-reformist northern warlords instead of warlordism as a whole.¹⁰² Key in this criticism is Yuan Shi-kai's acquiescence to the Twenty-One Demands in 1915 and Feng Guozhang's Sino-Japanese Military Mutual Assistance Conventions in 1918.¹⁰³ Provincial southern and southwestern warlords who clashed with the actions of the northern faction supported popular protests and in some case joined them. In Sichuan, warlord Xiang Kewu issued a telegram in support of the May 4th protests. With his support, in Chengdu there were two large meetings on May 25th and June 8th attended by 10,000 and 20,000 participants denouncing the Versailles Treaty.¹⁰⁴ Zhongping Chen's article reevaluates the anti-warlordism discourse in the May 4th Movement. The rejection of the Versailles Treaty was a response to the strong popular sentiment, but also actively encouraged by certain warlord factions. While Sichuanese warlordism can be viewed as a type of "residual"

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 585.

¹⁰² Zhongping Chen, "The May Fourth Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination," *Modern China* (2011), 136.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 139,140.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 146.

warlordism after Guomindang success in the Northern Expedition, its warlords engaged with reformist ideas well before and after 1928. Sichuanese warlords navigated a difficult balance between support of student and popular nationalism while also trying to preserve their personal power over their armies and territories.

Sichuanese who participated in the May 4th Movement would continue to influence foreign actions specifically through the use of boycotts. In Tanjiazhen village near Chongqing, after the May 4th Movement, the anti-Japanese boycotts were led by students and encouraged by patriotic shop-clerks.¹⁰⁵ If a breakable item manufactured by Japanese was found in a shop by roving bands of students, it was broken on site, but if it was too big to break, it was brought to a local temple to be burned. In this way many Japanese goods such as mirrors, ashtrays, matches, toothpowders, silk umbrellas, or clocks were either burned or broken.¹⁰⁶ The 1919 protests destroyed an estimated 10,000 taels worth of goods in Chongqing.¹⁰⁷ Local students also forced Japanese owners to sell the steamship *Lienhua* to a Chinese company.¹⁰⁸ Warlords had to be careful to use nationalism and anti-imperialism to their own advantage. On one hand they struggled throughout the 1920s to engender anti-foreign sentiments, but on the other hand they controlled protests before they became a potential threat.

A communal national experience or national political consciousness would not be cemented in Sichuan until the Sino-Japanese War, but nonetheless it had precedents throughout the late Qing and Republican periods. Problems with supporting and regulating anti-imperialist sentiments had a long history in Sichuan before the warlord period. In the late 1800s Sichuan

¹⁰⁵ Deirdre Chetham, *Before the Deluge: the Vanishing World of the Yangtze's Three Gorges* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 95.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁷ Matthews, 346.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 346

experienced several anti-Christian riots, most of which were directed at Catholic missionaries and the Qing government. One of the most violent riots occurred in 1898 near Chongqing where a local rebel leader named Yu Manzi expressed his disgust with the current government:

The Europeans are rich, they buy our officials and soldiers who aren't ashamed to sell the empire for a few taels. The Christians threaten to overrun everything, the officials are their protectors, and before long you will all be their slaves! The Emperor and officials do not see anything, do not hear anything, do not understand anything. There is no hope left in the people who govern us. They are sell-outs, renegades!¹⁰⁹

Although Yu Manzi killed many local Chinese Catholics and kidnapped foreign priests, the local government offered him an official rank and pardon if he put down his arms, but the two sides could not agree on how much the ransom or what rank should be conferred. This growing disgust with the Qing government and its unequal relationships with Western countries became a catalyst of localized rebellions that lingered long into the Warlord era. Warlords in Sichuan had to balance notions of protecting the nation while also negotiating for foreign weapon imports. The conflicts the Qing encountered with foreigner powers and domestic concerns would be felt throughout the warlord era.

As a form of protest in the Railway Protection Movement, many people in various locales constructed new ways to protest the elite while still remaining loyal. One of these ways involved creating altars to the deceased emperor Guangxu and burning incense in front of them.¹¹⁰ Officials could insult Guangxu's memory by riding past, but if they got down off their horses they would also be silently acknowledging protest placards placed next to the altars that promoted their cause. One placard read, "National policies should follow public opinion. Let the

¹⁰⁹ Matthews, 175-177.

¹¹⁰ Rankin, 337.

railway return to merchant management.”¹¹¹ This idea of serving the public through a new view of equality rankled officials but was carried into the warlord period.

Two of the most notorious anti-imperial events occurred near Wanxian in 1926 and 1928. In the first incident, an American foreign merchant named Hawley decided to load tung oil onto a British steamer, the *SS Wanliu*, but there was an unspoken agreement among Chinese that raw bulk goods such as tung oil, cotton, and tobacco were to be transported by local Chinese junks in order to provide local employment.¹¹² Because he was breaking conventions, local Chinese attacked and killed the American merchant. In the second incident, the *SS Wanliu* refused Yang Sen’s soldiers passage on the river and collided with several smaller sampan boats while the crew was trying to escape from being coerced into service. The British claimed no one was hurt, but the warlord soldiers claimed 56 men were killed and 85,000 silver dollars were lost in transport. In response to the attempted seizure of the steamer by Yang Sen’s warlord forces, British gunboats fired on the city, killing hundreds. Yang Sen’s response was a swift condemnation of the foreign actions, and was supported not only by local Sichuanese but by many Chinese as far away as Shanghai. Communist and Guomintang officials condemned the British actions, and Yang Sen sent Zhu De, who was a Guomintang representative (at the time the CCP and GMD were collaborating) to declare allegiance to the Guomintang government.¹¹³ The anti-foreign sentiment had been brewing in Sichuan long before the incident, but the incident demonstrates how these sentiments could be further inflamed. Warlords needed to appear to align with common people in order to build legitimacy for their regimes. As many lacked formal state recognition by foreign powers the warlords had to negotiate internal

¹¹¹ Ibid., 337.

¹¹² Chetham, 97.

¹¹³ Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: The Life and Times of Chu Teh (Zhu De)* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1956), 175.

legitimacy with personal ambitions. When Yang Sen sided with the Guomindang (at the time allied with the Communists), he chose formal subjection to a more recognized power. This subjection was voluntary, but also meant that Yang Sen now must follow orders and lose some of his local autonomy to act in ways to preserve his own power.

One of the other key national events of the mid 1920s was the death of Sun Yat-sen, which ushered in a five day mourning period in Chongqing. Many students added to the memorial services with speeches that included anti-Christian and anti-imperial rhetoric, and after another incident involving British police in Shanghai (May 30th Movement) many began to protest British rather than Japanese goods. These boycotts were at times encouraged by warlords who also were swept up with nationalistic sentiment. In the memorial services for Sun Yat-sen, students demanded an end to extraterritoriality and a reclamation of customs control.¹¹⁴ In 1926, several radical students managed almost to shut down West China Union University in Chengdu, but failed due to lack of support from local warlord administrators.¹¹⁵ Warlords could use nationalism to thus further legitimize their own regimes, but at the cost of increased instability with foreign relations.

However, not all warlords supported anti-imperial discourses. In 1927, when many Communists held a rally in Chongqing against Chiang Kai-shek and imperialism, Liu Xiang secretly infiltrated the crowd before opening fire and killing the student leader Yang Angong and other leftists before the crowd trampled over 200 people in an attempt to flee.¹¹⁶ The actions of Liu Xiang against the Communists in Chongqing were followed up in the nearby towns of Fuling and Wanxian. Warlords used popular sentiment to build legitimacy when it served their needs,

¹¹⁴ Matthews, 353.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 354.

¹¹⁶ Chetham, 100.

but they were not afraid to quash any potential political threats or to gain political points when it was advantageous to do so.

Sichuanese independence could never be realized as it contradicted nationalism which drove much of the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord popular sentiment. Edward McCord describes the impossibility of independence:

The reluctance of Republican-era warlords to declare full independence or claim full sovereignty over their territories can be attributed in part to the rising and pervasive power of Chinese nationalism. There is no reason to believe that the warlords were any less susceptible to the power of nationalism than their fellow citizens. If nothing else, in the context of this nationalism, even the most ambitious of warlords also realized the weapon any declaration of independence would give his enemies to use against him.¹¹⁷

However, the impossibility of declaring independence did not stop warlords from trying to institute measures to make Sichuan more self-reliant or create an atmosphere of relative stability. Warlords often switched to independence or nationalist discourses when trying to subdue a rival, or when actions by the Beijing or Guomintang governments took unpopular measures. Through this denunciative discourse, warlords could claim to reject even the notion of a centralized governmental system and advocate for a new confederation or provincial autonomous state system.

The warlords' hypocritical use of denunciative rhetoric sometimes backfired on supporters. Liu Xiang's uneasy relationship with Chiang Kai-shek demonstrates how Liu wished to use Guomintang support for his own ends. In fact, when Chiang Kai-shek was kidnapped in the Xi'an incident, Liu almost had the Guomintang delegation in Chongqing killed. This was only prevented because of Chiang's release, but demonstrates how warlords tried to play political games using independence/nationalist discourses for their own benefits. It

¹¹⁷ Edward A. McCord, "Synarchy and the Chinese People: A Plea for Internationalization in Warlord China," *Modern China* 39 (2013): 481.

can be argued that one of the reasons Mao rejected a federal or confederate political system was his experience with warlords in Hunan. Edgar Snow's interview with Mao shows how this developed:

Tan Yankai was driven out by a militarist called Zhao Hongdi, who utilized the "Hunan independence" movement for his own ends. He pretended to support it, advocating the idea of a United Autonomous States of China, but as soon as he got power he suppressed the democratic movement with great energy. [...] Some of the demonstrators had attempted to raise the Red Flag at that meeting [...] They then pointed out that, according to Article 12 of the (then) Constitution, the people had the right to assemble, organize, and speak, but the police were not impressed. They replied they were not there to learn the Constitution, but to carry out the orders of the governor, Zhao Hongdi. From this time on I became more and more convinced that only mass political power, secured through mass action, could guarantee the realization of dynamic reforms.¹¹⁸

Mao's experience with warlord hypocrisy may have changed his attitudes on constitutionality and application of political power.

In Sichuan, the invasions by Yunnan and Guizhou warlords eventually forced Sichuanese warlords to come together to draw up a plan for province-wide political system to drive extra-provincial forces out and maintain military balance in Sichuan. One of the key developments in 1920s Sichuan was the growing discontent with selfish warlord interests and warlord armies from other provinces. The idea of "Sichuan for the Sichuanese" took hold during the federalist movement that lasted from 1920 to 1921 after the May 4th Movement. Sichuanese junior warlord officers issued a telegram to the two leading warlords, Xiong Kewu and Liu Cunhou, advocating neutrality from the larger northern-southern conflicts and increased local autonomy as a prerequisite for any further national participation.¹¹⁹ Four of the five warlords who would control the province after 1927 signed the telegram, including Liu Xiang, Yang Sen, Deng

¹¹⁸Jean Chesneaux, Françoise Le Barbier, and Marie-Claire Bergere, *China from the 1911 Revolution to Liberation*, trans. Paul Auster and Lydia Davis (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 131.

¹¹⁹ Kapp, 20.

Xihou, and Tian Songyao. Liu Xiang in particular advocated a German-style confederation with limited connections to a Peking or Canton government. Although the Sichuan Provincial Assembly declared independence in 1921, by 1923 any indication of an autonomous political solution shifted into ambiguity as warlord factions continued fighting.

On October 25, 1925, Liu Xiang called for a Sichuan Rehabilitation Conference hoping for province-wide peace.¹²⁰ There had been a bitter civil war between Liu Xiang and Yang Sen, who briefly controlled Chengdu and Chongqing, but a coalition of warlords led by Liu Xiang dashed any hopes of unifying the province through warfare. The Conference lasted from December of 1925 to February of 1926. The Conference was attended by all of the leading warlord factions of Sichuan as well as by respected civilian gentry, such as Shao Minshu, who participated in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement.¹²¹ The Conference also included former respected warlords such as Zhao Daogang, who lived in Chengdu. The committees, made up of warlords and respected civilians, put forth a wide range of proposals to ensure citizen protection from warlord army abuses, but the Conference broke down when a war began with Liu Xiang and Yunnanese warlord Yuan Zuming, plunging Sichuan back into warlord politics. However, even though the Chengdu Conference of 1925 was a failure, Yuan Zuming was eventually driven out Sichuan, and by 1927 all external warlord forces were driven out. The Conference may not have achieved its aims at creating a political equilibrium and establishing civilian rights, but it did show that both Sichuanese citizens and warlords wished to alleviate the unstable political environment which caused local Sichuanese hardship.

¹²⁰ Kapp, 21.

¹²¹ Ibid., 22.

The Republican values found within the Chengdu Conference of 1925 had their origins in the late Qing dynasty. Two of the driving ideals of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement were to protect local citizens from centralized governmental power while at the same time to protect the nation from entanglement with foreign powers. The Sichuanese Railway Protection movement wished to return control of the railway company to private merchant management, but also was against nationalizing railways as collateral for foreign loans. These issues roused not only the Chengdu elite, but also commoners who formed Railway Protection branches based on occupation and location. In her article “Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics: Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing,” Mary Rankin argues that the right recovery movements developed new open public forums, democratic venues of expression, and a new forms of public activity by citizens.¹²² The spread of Republican values created new connections between different provinces and show that Sichuan was engaged with a wider rights-recovery movement.

The Sichuan Railway Protection Movement may have had localized reasons for its success and political potency, but similar railway rights recovery movements occurred in various parts of China during the early 1900s. Other large railway rights recovery movements occurred in Guangdong-Hunan and Zhejiang-Jiangsu.¹²³ The Sichuan Railway Protection Movement reached out to these other railway rights groups around China for support. For example, in 1907 some of the Sichuanese stockholders reached out the Zhejiang and Jiangsu Railway stockholders to form a citizen’s assembly (*gongmin gonghui*) to discuss common interests in mining and railway rights recovery.¹²⁴ By 1911, several elites in other provinces such as Hebei and Hunan

¹²² Rankin, 316.

¹²³ Ibid., 318.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 334.

supported and met with the local Sichuan railway representatives.¹²⁵ The struggle of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement may have had unique local manifestations, but it can be viewed as a wider movement of Republican values for grassroots democracy and a new type of civic discourse.

For Sichuanese warlords this movement toward Republican values and grassroots democracy manifested itself in several ways. Yang Sen would often wear ordinary clothes and a straw hat when he attended a public lecture, and some could not recognize him.¹²⁶ Kristen Stapleton argues that Yang Sen's use of this type of authoritarian populism was a direct result of the larger Republican social movements.¹²⁷ In one instance, a foreigner at a restaurant saw Yang reveal himself during an argument between a waiter and two warlord soldiers. Yang executed the two soldiers because they were not willing to pay their bill.¹²⁸ This protection of civilian rights by warlords was by no means universal and examples of incidents involving warlord protection of common civilians were uncommon. However, Yang Sen wished to be viewed as a defender of the people, even though this was not always the case with Sichuanese warlords. In addition to wearing common clothing when in public, Yang Sen sat in the audience when attending theatre shows.

Other warlords who were less progressive still dealt with conflicting identities and Republican values. Liu Xiang, in an interview, complained that a merchant trade union held a one day strike because they "objected to progress" in Chongqing.¹²⁹ At the same time he

¹²⁵ Ibid., 334.

¹²⁶ Kristin Stapleton, "Chapter 6, Yang Sen in Chengdu: Urban Planning in the Interior," *Remaking the Chinese City: Modernity and National Identity 1900-1950* ed. Joseph Esherick (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 95

¹²⁷ Ibid., 229.

¹²⁸ Matthews, 298.

¹²⁹ Gilman, 168.

revealed a rare piece of artwork on silk he had acquired, the opulence of which both disgusted and marveled foreign interviewer.¹³⁰ Liu Xiang demonstrates here conflicts in values—promoting progress and sacrifice while exhibiting expensive art reserved for the elite. Warlords often wished to be seen as part of the traditional elite as much as they wanted to also be seen as a local champion of the people. Examples of warlords in retirement or in defeat also demonstrate their elitism. In Sichuan, when a warlord was defeated or wished to retire he could go to Emeishan (a sacred Buddhist mountain) and build up a new reputation as a pious man or an intellectual before returning to Chengdu or into service of a new warlord.¹³¹ In another example, Yang Sen offered Zhu De the opportunity to leave the Yunnan Protection Army after its defeat, but Zhu De instead chose to go study abroad in Germany.¹³² Warlords could therefore reinvent themselves and become part of the traditional elite under certain conditions, but they also had several alternatives.

One of the reasons why Sichuanese warlords could reinvent themselves was the fluid political relationships that existed in Sichuan prior to 1911. Although centralized governmental institutions in Sichuan were relatively weak, Sichuan had one of the most powerful secret societies, which bound individuals irrespective of blood ties. Many men joined a shadowy organization called the Robed Brothers (*paoge*) also known as the Sworn Brotherhood (*gelaohui*) or more informal Gold and Orchid brotherhoods (*bai lanjiao*).¹³³ These brotherhoods were based on those found in Chinese classical literature such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* or *The Water Margin*.¹³⁴ Members belonged to one of five lodges that had branches within many of

¹³⁰ Ibid., 168.

¹³¹ Smedley, 139.

¹³² Ibid., 139.

¹³³ Lee McIsaac, "Righteous Fraternities and Honorable Men: Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 2000): 1643.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 1643.

Sichuan's cities and villages. Often the branch office would be within a teahouse with a hierarchical organizational structure with each member given a particular rank.¹³⁵

The reason the Robed Brothers and other such organizations had such power in Sichuan was their widespread membership among the lower classes. Membership offered protection from forced conscription (whose agents were often Robed Brother elders) and immunity from theft.¹³⁶ One sailor who worked on the Yangzi recalled the protection offered by the Robed Brothers,

Most sailors joined the Robed Brothers [...] If you didn't you couldn't get by. [...] If you weren't a Robed Brother, when you arrived at the dock someone would ask if you wanted to die. They would kill you [...] They all had guns! [...] But if you joined the Robed Brothers they wouldn't shoot you. Robed Brothers didn't shoot Robed Brothers.¹³⁷

The Robed Brothers provided security for its members and required membership fees. The Robed Brothers was instrumental in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement, but afterwards the Robed Brothers also offered warlord administrations an easy way to control the populace through local pressure: Robed brother leaders could be counted on by political leaders to control their factions in their lodges. The Robed Brothers elders could be pacified, and in its highly hierarchal structures orders could be carried out. Yang Sen had directly participated in a Robed Brothers ceremony as a boy.¹³⁸ The ability of the Robbed Brothers to control their member and influence they had on everyday life may be one of the key reason Yang Sen did not try to reform prostitution or opium consumption, as it was a key revenue source for Robed Brothers leaders.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1646.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1646.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 1647.

¹³⁸ Stapleton, "Chapter 6, Yang Sen in Chengdu: Urban Planning in the Interior," 102.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 102.

Sichuan's cities in the 1920s and 1930s may have been considered backward by many in the Lower Yangzi Valley, but Sichuanese values and internal tensions and conflicts show its own political consciousness that mirrored many other parts of China. These internal conflicts can best be illustrated by the controversial figure, Wu Yu. In 1926, Xi Zixiu refused an appointment to Chengdu University because Wu Yu was on its faculty.¹⁴⁰ Wu Yu's internal conflicts with the traditional patriarchal system made him a celebrity as well as infamous among many of Sichuan's traditional Confucian elite. Wu Yu first published an article in 1916 titled "Sentiment Coercion, and Law," lambasting Confucian views of hierarchal relationships.¹⁴¹ After Wu Yu's father got an issue for his arrest, Wu Yu took refuge with the Robed Brothers outside of Chengdu.¹⁴² His famous article "One Family's Bitter Story" on his dysfunctional family caught the attention of many. In 1921, he went to Beijing University by invitation of Hu Shi, but soon fell out of favor for his classical type of education and his involvement with teahouses and brothels.¹⁴³ Wu Yu's many daughters made him reconsider his newfound Republican values. During his tenth daughter's wedding, he criticized Mencius's and Confucius's notion of family values furthering the nation, and instead reversed the argument, saying that the nation should come before family values.¹⁴⁴ By adhering to the New Life Movement's tenets of propriety, righteousness, integrity, and sense of shame, Wu Yu continued to see himself as a revolutionary, even though his troubled family life led many critics to cry "hypocrisy" in many of his writings.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴¹ Kristin Stapleton, "Generational and Cultural Fissures in the May 4th Movement: Wu Yu (1872-1949) and the Politics of Family Reform," ed. Kai-wing Chow *Beyond the May 4th Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Rowman and Littlefield, 2008) 132.

¹⁴² Ibid., 136.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 134.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 131

The conflicting values found within Wu Yu's works and within warlord discourses convey the multifaceted aspects of Republican period. Progressive warlords such as Yang Sen had limited success in some of their modernization projects, but they experienced pushback from the traditional elite. For instance, Chengdu's traditional Confucian elite were known in 1920s Chengdu as the Five Elders and Seven Sages (*wulao qixian*).¹⁴⁶ When the warlords were petitioned by merchants against road widening measures, Yang Sen sent out runners to cut down the fronts of shops before the meeting was over, humiliating them.¹⁴⁷ Although the Five Elders and Seven Sages never directly confronted Yang Sen, their resistance to Yang Sen's measures show that warlord governance even in a progressive discourse faced unspoken resistance.

Some warlords were often conflicted because they were part of two worlds. On one hand they were born into the traditions and practices of the Confucian elites. The Five Sages and Seven Elder Sichuan schools educated many of the first Republican leaders, including Sichuan's first military governor Yin Changheng, Nationalist Dai Jitao, Communist Wu Yuzhang, and Shanghai mayor Zhang Qun.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, Sichuan warlords also were part of a new Republican and nationalist world. Warlordism in Sichuan was effectually ended when Liu Xiang sent the majority of his forces to fight the Japanese in the Battle of Shanghai and the Nationalist government relocated to Wuhan and then Chongqing. This change was gradual as Nationalist ties to Chongqing had been developing since the Communists entered Sichuan during the Long March in 1934, but characterizing warlords as simply "residual" or "progressive" after the Northern Expedition in 1928 oversimplifies the complex political environment and local conditions that allowed warlordism to flourish in Sichuan for more than twenty years. The

¹⁴⁶ Stapleton, "Chapter 6 Yang Sen in Chengdu: Urban Planning in the Interior," 99.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

failures of warlordism in succumbing to Communists can in part be attributed to poor leadership. For instance, Liu Xiang's general Liu Tsun-yun used witchcraft to divine even the proper hour in which to cook food.¹⁴⁹ The warlord traditionalist mode of warfare could not compete with guerrilla warfare or more modern methods.

Later national narratives, whether Communist or Nationalist, wished to tie Sichuan warlordism to imperialism and "backwardness." Sichuan's geographic isolation may have hampered economic development, but its own political system mirrored and contained core Chinese values with unique Sichuanese traits based on its pre-1911 political landscape. Warlord complexity lies in how warlords could act on selfish but also on progressive/nationalist influences to preclude military conflict. The political development of Sichuan throughout the warlord period shows that modernization projects were not just superficial manifestations of vanity, but had common roots in Republican society.

Warlords in Sichuan juggled with complex notions of legitimacy and personal identity. In this transitional period, warlords were pulled multiple directions while trying to preserve and expand their personal power. Warlords tried to create and contribute to notions of legitimacy by experimenting with new visions of authority, allying with more recognized governments, and using nationalism as a tool to solidify their rule. In this transitional stage of Sichuan's history, warlords embodied and practiced conflicting ideas of Republican values.

¹⁴⁹B. Perlin, "Soviets Struggle for Szechwan," *China Today* (March 1936): 115.

Chapter 4: Warlord Funding and Economic Growth

Good iron does not make nails; good men do not make soldiers¹⁵⁰

-A Chinese Proverb

Sichuan's economy in the warlord period has often wrongly been characterized as stagnated and underdeveloped due to warlord politics. While warlords may have inhibited certain industries, they partnered with merchants and encouraged farmers to grow marketable cash crops to create more revenue in their respective garrison areas. One of the key features of the Sichuanese economy was its widespread production of opium in the late Qing period until its official ban in 1906, and the resurgence of opium production as one of the most important cash crops in the warlord period. The rise of warlordism often has been associated with a rise in rents collected from farmers leading to widespread poverty. While this narrative seems persuasive, warlordism in Sichuan did not radically change the amount of tax collection, but rather who controlled the majority of capital and land and how capital was reinvested into the economy.¹⁵¹ Warlord-merchant partnerships produced some of the first successful modernized corporations in Sichuan with modernized machinery and factories. Sichuan's economy transformed from 1911 to 1938 from a completely nineteenth-century Qing agriculture-orientated economy to one which had a few urbanized centers of industry with new tradable cash-crops that evolved to meet the needs of international trade after the Great Depression. Sichuan never industrialized under

¹⁵⁰Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), i.

¹⁵¹ Richard Gunde, "Land Tax and Social Change in Sichuan 1925-1935," *Modern China* 2, no.1 (1976): 23.

warlord regimes, but it created a new base of development that would be fully utilized under the Guomindang wartime government.

Even though warlordism contributed to economic advancement, this does not mean that it did not inhibit economic growth in some ways. Many Sichuanese warlords used common fiscal methods such as currency manipulation and toll checkpoints to raise revenue, and much of governmental revenue was spent on weapons and soldier salaries. Although these destructive fiscal methods were common, warlords often financed their own independent companies to form private monopolies. Economic growth within transportation or banking corporations could be funneled back to the benefit of a warlord's personal use or for the benefit of his personal and familial ties. However, the most prevalent way of wealth redistribution could be achieved through targeted taxes on the traditional landed gentry.

Richard Gunde's study, "Land Tax and Social Change in Sichuan, 1925-1935," found that while tax rates and land holding percentages of the land owning class in Sichuan remained relatively stable, the transfer of land and capital from the older landed class to the newer warlord class through taxes and levies was significant. In this process, the new warlord land owning class exempted itself from its newly imposed taxes, exacerbating the tax burden on older landed gentry, especially landlords with smaller holdings, through increased land confiscation. Gunde writes, "By freely wielding their power as a political elite, then, the warlord and bureaucratic landlords constructed a system of taxation that oppressed some landlords, but left others—namely themselves—untouched."¹⁵² Multi-year taxes were imposed, so much so that by 1935 some areas had paid future taxes to the year 2000.¹⁵³ Despite the increased rate and

¹⁵² Gunde, 33.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27.

frequency of taxes, most of the burden fell on the older landed class who were forced to sell or give land to those who wielded political power.

Even after severe new tax measures were put in place after the Two Liu's War in 1933, when Liu Xiang fought his uncle Liu Wenhui for control of Chengdu, many still considered Sichuan better off than other provinces. One Chinese journalist at the time commented that life in Sichuan was better than that in Hubei, Hunan, or Hebei.¹⁵⁴ The deterioration of the Sichuanese political environment did not occur until 1934 when the Long March came into Sichuan, prompting national involvement. In the meantime, personal affiliations with a particular warlord was the best way to secure opportunities to grow rich. Most of the warlord holdings were in centralized richer areas. Many of the larger estates of the late Qing-landlords fell to warlords or bureaucrats in warlord governments, while smaller landlords were pushed to less productive land in the periphery.¹⁵⁵

The increasing use of political power to enrich one's family holdings is probably best illustrated by Liu Xiang and Liu Wenhui's family member Liu Wencai. Liu Wencai's branch of the Liu family owned only 30 to 40 mu near Chongqing in the early 1920s. When his relatives rose to power, he worked in public finance sector of the government. When he retired in the early 1930s he had amassed over eight million yuan in silver, and his land holdings had increased to 12,000 mu.¹⁵⁶ The case of Liu Wencai points to wider trends happening in Sichuan from the 1920s to the 1930s. Often landholdings became larger as it was easier for warlords to control land with a few larger land-renting tenants. These larger tenants would then sublet smaller holdings to smaller tenants. Thus the owner-cultivators holdings decreased by 8% from 1912 to

¹⁵⁴ Kapp, 61.

¹⁵⁵ Gunde, 30.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

1933 while tenant households increased.¹⁵⁷ Ironically, this process led to further urbanization as 6% of all peasant families fled their land, with 61% moving to cities in 1933.¹⁵⁸ Life remained hard for those with small landholdings, but the transfer of older to newer landlord holdings were the most significant development during the warlord period. The new warlord landed class did not wish to tax itself, even though its land holdings were profitable, so new commercial pursuits needed to be developed to make up for warlord governmental revenue.

Thomas Rawski's in his book *Economic Growth in Prewar China* outlines a taxation model of Sichuan in the early 1930s. While many historians such as James Sheridan characterize warlord Sichuan as, "long years of incredible tax exploitation," the actual figures of Sichuanese governmental expenditure show that exploitation was relatively low.¹⁵⁹ Given an estimated total provincial expenditure of about 94 to 100 million *yuan* in 1931 (of which Liu Xiang controlled about a third), the total taxation in Sichuan would be equivalent to only about 12% of rice production or about 3% of total provincial agriculture production.¹⁶⁰ While Sichuanese tax per capita would be almost double Guomintang-controlled areas, it still only amounted to about 1.80 *yuan* per person. Trade continued to grow at a steady pace, despite being under warlord control. Custom duties from Chongqing, Wanxian, and Yichang increased 75% between 1921-24 and 1929-1932.¹⁶¹ Despite localized political upheavals, trade continued to grow in warlord areas through partnerships of merchants and warlords.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵⁸ Gunde, 45.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Rawski, *Economic Growth in Prewar China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 44.

This is not to say that warlords did not exploit or loot common people when the need arose. Diana Lary notes that the most dangerous time for looting was during an evacuation or occupation of a local area.¹⁶² After an occupying force entered a new *xian* there were usually new taxes imposed for one or two years.¹⁶³ After order was restored, the rich tended to hire guards for their walled-off compounds while common people without walled compounds were more easily exploited. Wealthy people also tended to move their capital to more secure locations under foreign control in order to avoid confrontations with warlords. In Chengdu, many soldiers simply carried off stools and tables from the many local teahouses to furnish their barracks. One Christian teahouse owner complained that he had lost 69 stools, 24 tables, and other furnishings under Yang Sen's warlord armies in Chengdu.¹⁶⁴ Such conflicts often hurt commerce and sent promising firms out of the province. When two American-educated Chinese brothers surnamed Yang opened modern banking offices in Chongqing, Yang Sen arrested one of the brothers for ransom, forcing them to move to Hankou.¹⁶⁵ In this way, warlords secured a power monopoly in an area, taxing or arresting competitors or potential competitors, and ensured that they would be paid from any existing businesses.

Interestingly, foreigners were not exempt from harassment and warlord confiscation of property despite having treaty-port rights and privileges. When Liu Xiang took Chongqing in 1926, his men quickly seized Asiatic Petroleum's and Standard Oil's *Longmenhao* installations. His men proceeded to sell the oil (worth hundreds of thousands of dollars) as well as seized cigarettes and candles under the foreign chamber of commerce's name.¹⁶⁶ Liu Xiang would later

¹⁶² Lary, *Warlord Soldiers*, 80.

¹⁶³ Kurt Bloch, "Warlordism: A Transitory Stage in Chinese Government," *American Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 5 (March 1938): 697.

¹⁶⁴ Franck, 550.

¹⁶⁵ Matthews, 311.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

apologize and provide some compensation, but his actions show how Sichuan warlords created internal monopolies and exploited the wealth of existing institutions.

One of the most harrowing accounts of how far this monopoly would go was the story of Elly Widler, who was an arms smuggler in Chongqing. Yang Sen arrested Widler and held him prisoner for six months without trial, before releasing him due to increasing foreign pressure. Elly Widler's book, *Six Months Prisoner of Szechwan Military*, details his experience as prisoner of Yang Sen. Many foreigners openly admitted that Widler was guilty, but Yang Sen offered to free Widler if he could provide 200 German Mauser pistols.¹⁶⁷ When Widler did not provide any weapons and demanded he be tried by the Swiss or French consul in Shanghai, Yang Sen simply kept him a prisoner near his headquarters. This included moving him when he had to retreat from Chongqing to Wanxian. Many of the other prisoners Widler met in prison were former officers who were accused of stealing money. As most warlords' officers took some money, those in prison were deemed as taking too much and could be released only if they provided a ransom. One of the other prisoners, Liu Zi Se, a corrupt local warlord bureaucrat, was ordered to pay \$60,000 or be killed. When his friends and family only raised \$20,000 he was held and then transferred to a civilian jail for further questioning.¹⁶⁸ Widler's stories from the jail show how warlords used ransom as additional revenue source. Warlords had to be careful to target only those who were guilty of the most egregious crimes, as looting was a common way of paying or enticing a soldier to stay with a particular warlord. Warlords used their personal connections with particular people to build up a more loyal army and also to build businesses, which in turn could be trusted to pay materials and money to their benefactors.

¹⁶⁷ Elly Widler, *Six Months Prisoner of the Szechwan Military* (Shanghai: China Press, 1924), 69.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 85

One of the most infamous companies started by Liu Xiang was the Min Sheng Corporation. Min Sheng transported goods (often illegally) from Chongqing to as far as Shanghai. Liu appointed his friend and confidante Lu Zuofu to lead the Min Sheng Corporation. Min Sheng quickly expanded its operations and began mining coal in the Jiangbei region (they were the first to construct a completed railway in the province).¹⁶⁹ By 1935 they had completed an electric power station, a small arsenal, a steel mill, and even a cement works, which provided revenue and supplies to Liu Xiang's army in the Chongqing area. The Min Sheng Corporation grew rapidly, and by 1937 consisted of three branch companies, six offices, four agencies, and 47 steamships that operated on the Yangzi River.¹⁷⁰ These included three routes to Shanghai and five routes to the upper Yangzi. Lu Zuofu was enterprising and went on to found the Minsheng Machinery Company, Shanxia Dye and Weave Company, and the Hechuan Water and Electric Company.¹⁷¹ Min Sheng Corporation played a major role in transporting machinery and equipment during the retreat of Nationalist forces from Wuhan in 1938, but could only do so as an established warlord-created corporation.

These examples of capitalistic enterprises, along with coercion and corruption, demonstrate that warlords did not inhibit the economic growth of Sichuan, but rather that because they saw great benefit to themselves, warlords modernized some aspects of industry. Warlords may have had self-interested reasons for profit or to enhance their war capabilities to modernize certain industries, but this modernization would be the basis of further developmental growth in Sichuan's economy. Monopolistic umbrella corporations such as Min Sheng were

¹⁶⁹ Matthews, 316.

¹⁷⁰ Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 13.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15

only possible with warlord political and economic investment, and warlord economic development extended beyond Sichuan’s urbanized centers.

Even trade in Sichuan’s highly agricultural economy benefited under warlord rule. Warlords encouraged local farmers to grow opium and profited greatly from its refinement and distribution. Opium operated as a kind of both liquid and fixed capital source. Opium was used to pay troops in lieu of salaries, and profits from opium were reinvested in opium production, refinement, and distribution. British consul Sly stated that opium was “the provinces’ most valuable developed asset, and to Sichuan, opium is money, for the whole trade of the province with other worlds practically was an exchange in kind in the hands of the merchant capitalists who control the import of yarn and export of opium and silk.”¹⁷² Liu Xiang invested heavily in distribution companies, and the Min Sheng Transportation Company transported opium into other provinces, thus providing capital to buy additional weapons.

A look at Liu Xiang’s revenue streams display how important opium was to a warlord’s garrison area. Jerome Ch’en but your footnote 23 credits Rawski estimated the revenue information for Liu Xiang’s Twenty First Army in Sichuan:¹⁷³

	1930	1931	
Cruel Taxes (Land Rent and Looting)	11.0	8.5	(in millions of <i>yuan</i>)
Opium	13.6	10.6	
Salt	4.8	3.9	
Stamp, tobacco and wine taxes	-	3.4	
Other	-	0.1	

¹⁷² Xiaoxiong Li, *Poppies and Politics in China: Sichuan Province, 1840s to 1940s* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 52.

¹⁷³ Rawski, 18.

Total	31.3	33.4
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Thus, opium profits made up over 40% of Liu Xiang's revenue in 1930, and 30% of his revenue in 1931. Ironically, opium was almost stamped out at the end of the Qing dynasty, but this trend was reversed due to the great opportunity for warlord revenue that opium presented.

In the late 1890s, Sichuan produced about 40% of China's total opium output.¹⁷⁴ However, because of Qing opium repression measures, opium production dropped rapidly. By 1910 Sichuan exported only 10% of what it had exported in 1908, at 1,056 piculs.¹⁷⁵ Large-scale opium production was reintroduced by Yunnan warlord Tang Jiyao, who realized that opium could be bought in Yunnan for 4.2 Chinese yuan per ounce and resold in Sichuan for 15 yuan per ounce.¹⁷⁶ He imported more than 1000 chests containing one million ounces and made a large profit. His success would be repeated by other invading warlords, such as Guizhou warlord Wang Wenhua.¹⁷⁷

By the early 1920s opium cultivation was being encouraged by local warlords to boost revenue. When government authorities tried to enforce the opium ban, warlords attacked. In one case, Sichuanese warlord Liu Cunhou killed fourteen opium repression officials, ending any further attempts to stop opium production in his garrison area. This "encouragement" of production eventually became enforced by instituting a "laziness tax" to farmers who chose not to grow opium. Ironically, opium took much more manpower to produce with over 180 days per mu but only 16 per mu on corn and 10 to 20 on wheat.¹⁷⁸ This meant that cultivating opium

¹⁷⁴ Li, *Poppies and Politics in China: Sichuan Province, 1840s to 1940s*, 16.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

instead of grain was 13 times more costly and carried a greater risk due to volatile local market prices. Nevertheless, warlords profited greatly from the cultivation, refinement, and distribution of opium to other provinces and opium became a cornerstone for revenue increases to wage war with other garrison areas.

One of the most poignant examples of the power of opium revenue can be found in Liu Xiang's rise to power in Chongqing. After defeating Yang Sen in 1928 Liu Xiang's troops collected about 900,000 yuan from the production of opium. By 1930 this amount was 11.2 million yuan, and the revenue allowed Liu Xiang's army to grow from 50,000 soldiers to about 190,000 in 1931.¹⁷⁹ Liu Xiang worked with the Guomintang government to facilitate the sale of opium in the Lower Yangzi valley in exchange for weapons. Liu Xiang was given a two million yuan advance by the Guomintang government in Hankou in 1930 and was allowed to keep 20% of all duties to Hubei.¹⁸⁰ Graham Torrible remarked at the time,

The transportation of opium, allegedly suppressed, seemed to become [the Mingsheng Company's] official duty. The Nationalist Government's Anti-Opium Bureau had the reputation of controlling shipments rather than suppressing them and on the Upper River where smuggling had long since passed from any need for foreign involvement, [it] now ceased (except for home consumption) to interest even the Chinese crews. The power of the Anti-Opium Bureau was too great to be challenged.¹⁸¹

These massive profits from opium allowed Liu Xiang to gain dominance in eastern Sichuan until the Guomintang and Communist forces entered the province in 1934.

In addition to taxing the growing and transportation of opium, some warlords began to start manufacturing facilities to turn opium into morphine. By 1930 twenty-one facilities

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹⁸¹ Matthews 323.

operated around Chongqing and paid monthly protection fees to Liu Xiang.¹⁸² Many of these facilities could only produce a crude morphine product that needed further refinement in Shanghai. Because many Sichuan warlords distrusted the Shanghai morphine dealers and the fact that morphine could be more easily smuggled out of their control because of the absence of a strong scent, morphine production was never actively encouraged by key warlords such as Liu Xiang, but nonetheless the refinement of opium pointed to an increasing industrial growth within Sichuan in the warlord period. The modernization of opium refinement facilities was only one part of several new factories in various industries such as textile, ceramic, oil, and tobacco.

Besides taxation and opium production, another way warlords accumulated wealth was to partner with merchants in redevelopment projects in urban areas. In Chongqing, Liu Xiang began actively redeveloping streets by the early 1930s. Chongqing sits on a peninsula between two rivers in a very hilly area, and due to its winding streets to follow contours of geography, the streets became narrower and the houses higher with increased population.¹⁸³ Chongqing was one of the most densely populated cities in China before the Sino-Japanese war, with 104,400 people per square mile.¹⁸⁴ To the west of the city, outside the gates, there were several cemeteries, which stifled growth. Liu Xiang relocated cemeteries to other areas to allow for further growth outside of Tongyuan Gate. This new land was renamed New Business District (*Xin shichang*) and businesses were encouraged or coerced to move there.¹⁸⁵ By selling or renting this new land, merchant speculators and Liu Xiang realized new streams of profit. Yang Sen's redevelopment

¹⁸² Li, *Poppies and Politics in China: Sichuan Province, 1840s to 1940s*, 98.

¹⁸³ Joseph Earle Spencer, "Changing Chungking: The Rebuilding of an Old Chinese City," *Geographical Review* 29, no. 1 (January 1939): 50.

¹⁸⁴ McIsaac, "Chapter 11 City as Nation: Creating a Wartime Capital in Chongqing," 175.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 181

of *Chunxi Lu* in Chengdu from a new benefit lottery to allow Yang Sen to finance his troops and his modernization projects. These projects included building new city parks and schools.

However, not all warlord initiatives were beneficial to the merchant community. Another revenue source for warlords was issuing their own currencies and forcing the populace and merchants to trade in it. The warlords could then either debase the copper coins issued, or pay their troops with bank notes with little to no precious metal to back it.¹⁸⁶ Soldiers could therefore set their own personal prices for certain commodities by paying with warlord-issued currency. Liu Xiang issued a new fiat currency after his victory over Liu Wenhui in 1933, and even the General's own banks shorted his currency to that of Shanghai in Chengdu.¹⁸⁷ By 1935 Liu Xiang's currency had to be depreciated by 20% in order to allow trade with the Guomindang's new national currency. At this time many Chengdu bankers made a great profit by cashing in their exchange contracts. Warlords also took their profits and created their own banks as entrepreneurial ventures.

Some of the warlord entrepreneurial projects failed due to mismanagement and a complete ignorance of good business practices. One of Liu Xiang's lieutenants once saw that Shanghai opera actors made huge profits in Chongqing due to the higher skills than the local competition.¹⁸⁸ The lieutenant wagered that if Shanghai opera actors could make such large profits in Chongqing then Chongqing opera actors could also make large profits by playing in Shanghai. Needless to say, the actors could not even meet their expenses and the whole operation ended in failure. This did not mean that Liu Xiang's warlords did not make huge

¹⁸⁶ Bloch, 697.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 698.

¹⁸⁸ Peck, 147.

profits on other ventures. One of Liu Xiang's generals named Yang built a glassed-in tennis court for his seven wives, one of which was a tennis champion.¹⁸⁹

One of the biggest detriments to the growth of the Sichuanese economy in the warlord area was the many toll checkpoints setup to impose taxes on any transport goods. Each warlord garrison had a different currency, which wreaked havoc on interior and exterior trade. One missionary to Sichuan in 1929 wrote that his recent experience shipping \$2500 of freight from Chongqing to Chengdu resulted in \$3500 in additional taxes through a series of seven toll checkpoints.¹⁹⁰ The number of checkpoints and the amount collected by each warlord depended on the desperation and greed of those collecting the tolls. The tolls were one of many different forms of taxes on every commodity made or farmed in a warlord's territory.

These tolls could be evaded through various means, but one of the reasons Liu Xiang was so successful was his control of the arms trade from Shanghai. One popular way to avoid tolls was to ship goods using foreign steamers or to merge with a company with foreign ownership.¹⁹¹ Sensitive loads such as weapons or ammunition could be transported in this way by using foreign intermediaries. Western weapons often found their way to China through Japan or Shanghai from French, German, Czech, Italian, or British firms. Yang Sen dealt directly with Russian, French, and German salesmen, while Liu Xiang's orders sometimes came directly from Germany

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁹⁰ S. C. Wang, "The Revolution in Szechwan 1911-1912," *Journal of the West China Border Society*, (1933-1934): 58.

¹⁹¹ Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*, 13.

to Shanghai on the SS *Sophie Richmers*.¹⁹² In one transaction in 1930 Liu Xiang received 600 machine guns and 8 million rounds of ammunition from a British firm.¹⁹³

When possible, many warlords tried to hire foreigners or foreign-trained staff to build arsenals or mints capable of building their own currency or military equipment. When Harry Franke visited Chengdu, Yang Sen's arsenal could produce 100 guns and 20,000 cartridges per day.¹⁹⁴ Yang Sen's superintendent studied six years in Germany and two in Sweden and had worked for Yuan Shi-kai and Japanese arsenals.¹⁹⁵ His arsenal was therefore modern with long lines of belts, wheels, and modern machinery quite different from other Chinese family-run industries. This industrial development may have been much smaller than those operations in Eastern China, but by the 1920s Chengdu and Chongqing had several more modern industrial operations.

Sichuan's industrial development began in the late Qing but increased over the warlord period. By 1921, Chongqing had 10 silk filatures employing 3000 people with a combined annual capacity of 1000 *dan*. Other Chongqing operations in the 1920s included a chinaware factory with \$30,000 capital employing over 100 people, as well as six small glassware plants, sixteen leather factories, nine match works, and several small hosiery factories.¹⁹⁶ Under the leadership of Liu Xiang, Chongqing saw several urban development programs. Public utilities such as a modern waterworks were modernized, electric and telephone services were expanded, and radio broadcast towers were installed. For the first time many Chongqing residents had 24-

¹⁹²Anthony B. Chan, *Arming the Chinese: The Western Armaments Trade in Warlord China, 1920-1928*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 105.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹⁴ Franck, 530.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 531.

¹⁹⁶ Matthews, 305.

hour electricity service and running water.¹⁹⁷ Factories grew and expanded as Chongqing became more modernized. By 1931 Chongqing had 415 registered factories and by 1937 it had 563 factories before becoming China's leading industrial city during the Sino-Japanese War.¹⁹⁸ The technological advances and encounters with modernity laid the groundwork from which further GMD or CCP progress was based and these changes occurred on many levels.

The advent of electricity brought sweeping changes to many in Chinese society. For the first time people became directly exposed to Western technological advances. In Chengdu many people finished their dinners and brought stools to a department store to watch the lights being switched on. The local teahouse nearby would fill up with countryside spectators. When the moment finally arrived many would cheer and shout, "It's bright!"¹⁹⁹ Electricity was more than just a spectacle as it allowed the first night markets encouraging people to stay out and conduct commerce. Streetlights even became a measure of how much sedan-chair carriers would charge their patrons.²⁰⁰ These reforms in Sichuan all occurred under warlord modernization projects.

By the 1930s Chengdu's street life had radically changed from that of the late Qing dynasty. When Graham Peck visited Chengdu, he described what life was like on the streets,

About a mile and a half in from the gate, the street widened and the traffic quickened with the shoals of rickshaws, weaving bicycles, and a considerable number of new foreign automobiles. [...Open] ground floors were big bazaars full of fine silk or china; also clothing-stores with complete stocks of foreign apparel; bookstores hung with patriotic, educational, and seductive posters; drugstores selling such Western products as Baby's Own Tablets, Ordorono, contraceptives, Pinkettes, and gas-masks.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 314.

¹⁹⁸ Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*, 15.

¹⁹⁹ Dikotter, 139.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 141

²⁰¹ Peck, 161.

While Chengdu may have been less developed than Shanghai or Nanjing, it nonetheless embodied many of the Republican trappings found in other areas of eastern China.

Foreign goods were also not confined only to Sichuan's urban areas but could be found with surprising speed in rural villages. For example, at one of the local Sichuan village fairs in 1937, one could buy an ink-barrel fountain pen which had been introduced into the American market only three or four years prior at the cost of twenty cents.²⁰² In larger cities such as Chongqing, one could find many poor imitation Western goods, from alarm clocks to phonographs to even perfumed toiletries of every sort by the 1930s.²⁰³ The popular use of cigarettes was only one part of a growing attachment to all things Western. People bought tortoise-rimmed spectacles with clear glass or sometimes no glass simply because they thought they looked modern.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, wealthy prostitutes rode bicycles wearing bloomers and middy-blouses, while sporting glasses as a mark of exotic beauty, much as a Western woman might wear Eastern clothes as a symbol of exoticism.²⁰⁵

Western influences in Sichuan were not only cultural, but also engendered new dangers and opportunities for international trade. Shortly after the Great Depression, silk prices plummeted and were shortly followed by a fall in production. In 1930 Sichuan produced more than 13,500 *piculs* of silk, but by 1935 this had dropped to 2000 piculs, less than one-tenth of the silk it had produced previously.²⁰⁶ The fall in silk production followed a steep price reduction from \$1000 per *picul* in 1930 to only \$600 per *picul* in 1932.²⁰⁷ However, the drastic reduction

²⁰² Spencer, "Szechwan Village Fair," 57.

²⁰³ Peck, 142.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁰⁶ Wright, 719.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 719.

in silk production in Sichuan only moderately affected the economy, as silk made up only 1.5% of the gross provincial product.²⁰⁸ Many local farmers chopped down mulberry trees for firewood and grew grain or switched to weaving linen cloth.

The decline of silk production came at an increase in tung oil production, later becoming China's largest bulk export. In 1913, tung oil accounted for less than one percent of China's exports, but by the 1930s it constituted ten percent of the tonnage of China's exports to America. Tung oil ranked first in the value, with Chinese merchants shipping over 200 million pounds at a value of 20 million USD by 1937. China possessed a virtual monopoly on tung oil. Sichuan benefited from the increased trade in tung oil, as 80-90% of all tung oil was shipped along the Yangzi River to Hankou before going to Shanghai for export. While most of the domestic economy remained agricultural in nature, the increase in specific exports such as opium and tung oil increased warlord revenues. This dramatic change in trade shows how the economy of Sichuan was far from stagnant, as warlord management moved with the needs and wants of the domestic and international markets.

Although the actions of some Sichuanese warlords negatively affected the economy in certain ways, many historians such as James Sheridan often ignore or deemphasize warlords' contribution to economic development and growth within Sichuan. Historian Robert Kapp takes a more nuanced view by acknowledging economic progress made under warlord regimes, but largely attributes this to the consolidation of warlord power that brought about a degree of stability after 1927.²⁰⁹ This view is reinforced by impressions of a British diplomat who in 1930 described Sichuanese modernity:

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 721.

²⁰⁹ Kapp, 57.

A striking feature of present-day Sichuan is the surprisingly modern and up-to-date appearance of many of the large towns. Under the leadership of Chengdu, the majority of the towns in the northern part of the province appear to have undergone a wholesale reconstruction within the past few years [...] In one instance—that of Tungan—the craze for modernity has even been extended to the construction of tennis and basketball courts in the middle of the city square. [...] A military patrol in Chengdu inflicting corporal punishment on householders for leaving refuse outside their front doors is an eloquent enough testimony to the revolutionary changes which have taken place.²¹⁰

Kapp's view is somewhat contradictory in that he acknowledges progress made under warlords, but then goes on to disparage warlord modernization and developments as often shallow and self-serving. Kapp's assessment is highly problematic as it reinforces Western and nationalistic discourse on warlord politics in the Republican period.

The Guomindang's nationalistic rhetoric discounts or ignores warlord participation and contributions to the Sichuanese economy before its own power was consolidated in the province after 1938. Western observers at the time also criticized the opulence of warlord households compared to the poverty of many common citizens. William Gilman interviewed and described Liu Xiang by writing:

A bloody warrior and connoisseur of beauty! My eyes sought his for explanation. Who was this man and who were his parents? Their slate depths revealed nothing. Only, it seemed, they were too unblinking, too appraising. The Oriental slant was there, but I have seen it otherwise, not so tigrish, in the gentle placidity of the scholar and inarticulate misery of the coolie. The eyes from which I quickly looked away could order killing because they knew futility and could not pardon for they knew not despair.²¹¹

In this way, Gillman condescendingly mocks Liu Xiang as unsympathetic to the misery of common people and blames him for the warlord political system. However, if one removes judgment on warlords for the existing political situation, one would admit that they made the best of almost insurmountable odds. Just because warlords were inherently self-serving did not mean

²¹⁰ Kapp, 57-58.

²¹¹ Gilman, 168.

that they could not better the economy or help modernize cities. This is not to say more could have been accomplished, but their contributions have often been ignored.

The warlord era economy in Sichuan was undergoing great change throughout the Republican era. Although warlords did not always contribute to its improvement and often had self-serving ends, the economy developed mostly through warlord leadership. This growth and development had taken place from a very low baseline of development and occurred with almost no foreign financing. Whereas Shanghai and Eastern China had foreign investment and a technological edge, the Sichuanese economy developed with models of interpreted Chinese modernity, but through an alternative form of governance. Traditionally, warlords have been blamed for holding Sichuan back from development, but as one observes the many improvements that took place under warlord leadership, it is clear that Sichuanese warlords improved the local economy with self-serving ends. The Sichuanese warlord-era economy did not hold Sichuan back, but rather the warlord-era economy allowed warlords to make improvements that benefited the whole society through their self-serving goals. Thus the warlords prepared Sichuan to be fully integrated with Republican values found in other parts of China.

Conclusion

Although Sichuanese warlords may have been uneducated, untraveled, and obsessed with personal ambition, their efforts to change and modernize Chinese society should not be ignored or undervalued. Many of the Sichuanese warlord modernization projects became part of the fabric of later modernization schemes and discourses. This thesis does not try to argue that warlords modernization efforts were in any way systematic or that they were entirely successful, but it argues that the changes that occurred in Chinese society had taken full root by the end of the Republican era. Sichuan is an interesting case-study because it was largely left outside of the northern and southern military conflicts. It developed independently from any unified centralized administration. One would think that this lack of centralized political authority would contribute to an era of economic and technological stagnation. However, this line of reasoning overlooks the tremendous change that occurred in Chinese society and in the Sichuan region. By the end of the warlord era, Sichuan was less developed than many of the coastal areas of China, but this did not mean that it did not significantly modernize, and this happened without foreign or national aid.

The context of Sichuan warlordism shows that the late Qing period was a transitional period in which values and technology transformed Chinese society. Rather than stopping or stifling the change, warlords often encouraged it. Warlordism in the 1920s and 1930s

demonstrated that Republican values had taken hold in society and were now part of Sichuanese identity. One of the most prominent ways that these changing values was displayed was improvements in transportation. Transportation development not only was a catalyst for the end of the Qing dynasty, it was also a catalyst for shaping Republican values in Sichuan. The Republican values instilled in the warlord period would carry on throughout transportation modernization discourses well into the Communist era.

Warlords not only used transportation as a modernizing discourse, but they also tried to construct a politically-stable system. Although these political systems were unstable and also failed, the efforts at modernizing the political systems shows the change in the ways citizens would view authorities. Warlord modernization projects attempted to take these notions of Republican egalitarianism and implement them in public policy.

The final chapter set out to advance counterintuitive notions of economic progress during economic turmoil. Even though Sichuan was never unified under warlords, its economy grew in certain sectors due to warlord influence. This may not have benefited common citizens on the whole, but it did advance certain industries, which would be later exploited by Guomindang and Communist authorities.

This thesis is not necessarily revolutionary in its conclusions, but it provides further insight into Sichuan's warlord era. Robert Kapp's book, *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic*, laid the groundwork for understanding how the political system changed in Sichuan during the 1920s and 1930s. This thesis reexamines Kapp's presuppositions: that warlord modernization projects were ultimately failures and that these projects were merely motivated by vanity and egocentrism. This thesis challenges some aspects of Kapp's conclusion that the sporadic efforts and occasional failures of warlord modernization projects resulted in superficial changes in

Sichuan. Instead, this thesis makes the case that warlord modernization projects, although they were subsumed by Guomindang and Communist discourses later, had their own merit outside the national narrative.

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