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Qinghai Across Frontiers: State- and Nation-Building under the Ma Family, 1911-1949

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History

by

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Absract of the Dissertation

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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2013

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Located at the meeting ground of North China, Mongolia, Central Asia, and Tibet, the province of Qinghai is one of the largest and poorest administrative regions in China. With the recent advent of the PRC's northwestern development project, Qinghai and its neighbors now figure prominently in the Chinese media. Yet contemporary Qinghai rests on complex historical foundations rooted in the province's multi-ethnic population, frontier geography, decades of dominance by Sino-Muslim militarists, and the Republican governments' (1912-1949) border defense and development policies.

This dissertation will evaluate the methods through which Qinghai's government sought to control and develop its pastoral peripheries, including military force, agricultural colonization, and the development of modern education systems. It draws comparisons between the Muslim, agricultural center around the provincial capital and the Tibetan and Mongolian nomadic regions. This project's contribution lies not only in discussing an understudied frontier region, but also by connecting the issues of the transition from empire to nation, "warlords" and development, frontiers, and minority people who still inhabit the peripheries of this frontier Chinese province.

Introduction

It all started with a jade tree. At least, that is what I thought it meant at the time. It was early 2005 and I was a second-year graduate student in the modern Chinese history graduate program at University of California San Diego, slowly absorbing the overwhelming sight of the lower levels of stacks at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Strolling through the aisles, my eyes scanned title after title of early twentieth-century Chinese sources. And then I saw it. *A record of jade tree's recent events. A record of the recent events of jade tree?* Curiosity piqued, I opened the book. As it turned out, I was looking at an official account of a war fought between forces of the Qinghai provincial government and Kham Tibetans in 1932 and 1933. The “jade tree” was, in fact, the Chinese name for an area of northern Kham and southwestern Qinghai: Yushu. Where was this place? Why had I never heard of this war? Why was there next to no historical scholarship in English on Qinghai, let alone this place that for a moment I thought was a “jade tree”? My questions that day started the journey that has culminated in this dissertation.

And what a journey it has been! I came to UCSD in the summer of 2003 bright eyed and ready to study the Qing Dynasty's (1644-1911) multi-ethnic, federated empire. A research assistantship that summer with Professor Joseph W. Esherick opened my eyes to the complexity of the world historical significance of the transition from the Qing dynasty's continental, multi-ethnic empire to the multinational Republic of China. After a year of reading historiography of the Qing dynasty, my conviction grew that there was much to be done concerning Chinese frontiers with Inner Asia. A second seminar on the

history of the Republic of China (1912-1949) cemented my desire to study the early twentieth century, certainly helped by the dramatic growth in the Chinese publishing industry at that time, and the wealth of historical sources that were still available. At this point, I had a good idea what processes and themes I wanted to research—the transition from empire to nation, from frontier to border, and from imperial subject to national citizen. I was committed to studying the frontiers of modern China, but I still had not decided on the region. Then I saw the “jade tree.”

Under the guidance of Professor Paul G. Pickowicz, the *Record of Recent Events in Yushu* served as the basis for my first research paper on early twentieth-century Qinghai. Once my advisors gave the green light, I had the broad outlines of a dissertation topic. Qinghai has been at the center of my intellectual life ever since. I followed up the Yushu paper with a seminar on researching and writing about historical events, this time under Professor Esherick. This seminar paper continued my study of Republican-era Qinghai, and like the first project, focused on another understudied military conflict in northwestern China in the 1930s. Just as the Yushu conflict wound down in 1933, Qinghai’s armies combined forces with the militaries of Ningxia and Gansu provinces to block the advance of a notorious “warlord” appointed to agriculturally colonize western Qinghai. Despite the fact that *The New York Times* reported on this civil war, it had received very little attention in English historiography. The research for these initial papers opened my eyes to themes that are not only essential to this dissertation, but for understanding Qinghai in the early twentieth century, and the way that the modern Chinese nation-state has engaged its Inner Asian peripheries. These event-based research

papers also contributed to my personal commitment to historical narrative—writing that does not neglect to tell stories.

But back to my story. Did I not mention that this has been quite a journey? I also meant that in a literal sense. I made my first of four trips (and counting...) to Qinghai in the summer of 2005. After meeting with local professors, visiting the provincial library, and finally experiencing the place about which I had thought so much, I was convinced that there was a bright future researching the history of this frontier province. On the basis of these two research projects, I was fortunate to receive a Pacific Rim Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship in 2006. After qualifying in January 2007, I left San Diego for the People's Republic of China, my sights set on Xining, the provincial capital of Qinghai province, and a position as a visiting research scholar at Qinghai Normal University.

Although I first decided to research the history of Chinese frontiers in the transition from the Qing empire to the Chinese nation-state, before figuring out the region upon which my research would focus, that all changed once I reached Xining. At first, it was like living a dream. Personally experiencing the places that one has researched is a true joy. More than just the places—Xining, Huangyuan, Qinghai Lake, Yushu—came to life for me. I could see many of the processes described by historians in person; I came to viscerally experience the theoretical approaches to understanding how such regions are middle grounds between different peoples and cultures. My initial desire to research frontiers as sites of imperial expansion and redefinition of communities was quickly replaced by a commitment to understand *this* frontier, *this* place: Qinghai. A noble goal, I think, and still a necessary focus for local historical research. But once the political winds

shifted in early 2008, my commitment to research this one particular place became more challenging, to say the least.

Qinghai has long been a politically sensitive region, most notably because of the large population of Tibetans there. Although not entirely unexpected, the politics of historical and contemporary Sino-Tibetan issues greatly affected the process of researching this dissertation. The most obvious example is the lack of archival sources used for this project. Despite scholarly due diligence and the best efforts of colleagues and mentors in Xining, it was made very clear by the summer of 2007 that Qinghai provincial archives would not be available to me. My desire to write a history of Qinghai, made all the more alluring by the volumes of fresh materials in the provincial library, kept me in Xining. Political issues appeared in full force during the spring of 2008, when at times violent political protests erupted in Lhasa and around the Tibetan world on March 14 of that year. Although rioting did not reach Xining (as far as I could tell), the effects were chilling. The normal multi-cultural bustle of Xining's daily life ground to a halt, and almost no Tibetans were visible on the streets for months afterwards. After being "checked on" by a "leader" while researching in the provincial library, I was informed that I could no longer use the older, unpublished sources in the local historical collection.

My original plans for more complete social history of early twentieth-century Qinghai, therefore, had to change. Fortunately, my previous work on the Yushu borderland war and the conflict over Sun Dianying addressed key issues surrounding new forms of territoriality and political control, as well as the voluminous contemporary literature on Chinese frontier issues. I was also able to secure a wealth of primary sources

on Qinghai's modern education system from the provincial library. Education was an important topic of discussion and debate in writings about Chinese frontiers in the first half of the twentieth century. Thus the focus of this dissertation quickly turned to intimate connection between territorializing state-building and educational nation-building along a multi-ethnic frontier like Qinghai.

A fascination with the complex interactions and pluralistic possibility of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural middle grounds drew me into this project. Curiosity about this understudied frontier province developed into a deep connection to Qinghai and a commitment to make its histories better known. Conflict over national identity and political representation nearly derailed this research yet fundamentally shape the arguments and findings presented below. A frontier is both a place, and a process. It offers opportunities for learning, adaptation, and inclusion, but is also a site of political expansion, conflict, and domination.

In his magisterial survey of the Qing expansion into Central Asia, Peter C. Perdue identifies the challenge and necessity of “fixing” people territorially and psychologically.

Fixing people in place territorially requires material and organizational resources: armies, border guards, passports, visas. Fixing people psychologically requires intellectual and cultural resources: nationalist symbols, rewritten history. Both strategies contest natural human urges to move, to change, to evolve, but they are supported by equally natural human urges for security, fixity, and stability...All states, including the Qing and modern China, struggle to find the appropriate balance between stability and freedom.¹

¹ Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard Belkap, 2005), 43-44.

Twentieth century authorities in Xining, Beijing, or Nanjing shared these fundamental goals, faced challenges similar to the Qing dynasty two centuries earlier.

The history of the modern world saw a dramatic shift in the perception of what represented the proper relationship between the state and its people. This transition saw massive land-based empires give way to the new form of the modern territorial nation-state. Over the last decade especially, scholars have turned their attention to the transition from empire to nation and have argued for its centrality to the making of the modern world. Unlike contemporary empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman, and the Russian Empire, the 1911 Revolution in China over through the Qing dynasty and instituted the world's first multinational republic.²

This was a challenging and contested process. Two aspects of the modern nation-state, in particular, proved vexing for nationalist leaders. James Leibold succinctly describes them as the frontier question and the national question. The frontier question refers to a new form of territoriality inherent in the structure of the modern nation-state. This new territoriality sought to turn the fuzzy frontiers of empire into the hardened borders of the nation-state. On the other hand, nationalism, and the national question it created, confounded national leaders as they sought to integrate former frontier regions.³

Twentieth century leaders used preexisting strategies for frontier control and integration, which Perdue identifies as “repression, settlement, state simplification,

² Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, eds. *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003). Prasenjit Duara, “The Multi-National State in Modern World History: The Chinese Experiment,” *Frontiers of History in China* 6.2 (2011), 285-295. Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924*, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

³ James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing and Its Indigenes Became Chinese*, (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

migration, and commercial integration.”⁴ But they also reconceptualized and intensified another long-standing strategy for cultural transformation: education.

The first chapter of the dissertation, “Frontier Militarists in a Transfrontier Province,” argues that the region that became Qinghai had undeniable geographical and environmental frontiers. Indeed, one could say that these frontiers defined the region itself. Long a region contested by imperial Chinese dynasties and non-Chinese pastoral populations, Xining represented the edge of direct imperial control. Ecological and historical factors shaped dual administrations in Xining, one for the pastoral population and one for inhabitants of the agricultural regions. The Ma family used their local influence to build a center of military power in Xining, a power geared toward enforcing the imperial (then national) core’s interests and policies over Mongolian Banners and Tibetan chieftain and religious authorities.

Chapter Two bases its narrative upon the official Qinghai provincial government’s account of the 1932-1933 borderland war with an army of Tibetans. Interspersing government communications, investigations and reports with oral histories recorded by participants at later dates, the narrative highlights the obstacles to effectively controlling, let alone governing, Qinghai’s southwestern borderland. Thematic discussions interspersed through the war’s narrative highlights issues like the daunting physical geography of Yushu, the multiple religious, tribal, and political loyalties among Yushu’s population, early Republican administrative wrangling over controlling this region, the slow growth of local government, and projecting Xining’s military power into the highlands of Yushu. Although Xining’s authorities had claimed control over Yushu since

⁴ Perdue (2005), 314.’

the very beginning of the Republic, the 1932-1933 borderland war illustrates just how tenuous Xining's control actually was. Ma Bufang's military was able to overcome these obstacles during the war, but Qinghai's control of the region largely relied on military threat and/or actions, at least up until 1933.

With the loss of much of northeast China to the Kwantung Army in 1931 and the corresponding explosion of interest in shoring up control of the northwestern Chinese frontier, the Xining Ma family was able to equate their own territorial ambition with Chinese national sovereignty, thus making their battle to maintain control of Yushu into an issue of national importance. Although the peace treaty at the end of this war only reinstated the pre-war status quo, Ma Bufang was able to assert his importance to the nation by maintaining Chinese territorial integrity within his province.

Only two months after the peace treaty ending the military conflict in Yushu was signed, Chiang Kai-shek appointed the notorious tomb-looting general Sun Dianying as Agricultural Colonization Commissioner for Western Qinghai. This appointment set in motion political and then military conflicts that threatened to plunge northwestern China into civil war. Chapter Three tells the story of this relatively unknown war, one that highlights themes of ecology, northwestern development projects, and regionalism within a centralizing state.

Sun Dianying's appointment in Western Qinghai was a product of the northern expeditions incomplete dismantling of regional militaries. The conclusion of this conflict in favor of the northwestern opposition was a result of unified rhetorical and military resistance by northwestern Ma militarists. All involved parties (the central government, leaders of Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai, and Sun Dianying himself) agreed on the need to

develop the northwest, and Qinghai's government also actively promoted the spread of agriculture to certain pastoral areas of the province. Qinghai's leaders asserted their local expertise and recently proven role as Nationalist point-men vis-à-vis the region's Mongol and Tibetan pastoralists against the agricultural colonization order. And all sides strenuously argued that they were the loyal ministers of the Nationalist state, while violating central government orders. In the end, this was a battle over political and military control of northwest China, but one that reaffirmed plans for increasing government control and stimulating local economies through the spread of agriculture.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six turn the dissertation's focus onto nation-building through institutions of modern education. "Schooling at the Frontier" integrates Qinghai into the familiar story of the growth of modern, public school education in Republican China. From the cancellation of the imperial civil service examinations and the corresponding growth of academies in the first decade of the twentieth century, this chapter traces the difficult process of building such a school system in the agricultural regions around the river valleys of what would become northeastern Qinghai. Challenges included the province's small population, tenuous financial situation, dearth of qualified teachers, and perception as a poor, backward frontier region. Despite the aforementioned obstacles, public schools in Qinghai province integrated students into the rhythms, rituals, and rules of the schoolhouse, thus connecting Qinghai's schools with the politicizing and modernizing project of education in Republican China. Classes, drills, and activities taught students about their responsibilities as active citizens in the Chinese Republic.

Chapter Five traces the development of three systems of "frontier education" in the first half of the twentieth century in Qinghai. Originally named "Mongol and Tibetan

education” by authorities in Xining, these schools were intended as vehicles for bringing “modern” education to inhabitants of Qinghai’s pastoral areas. The first category of frontier education in Qinghai were hybrid institutions, in which local leaders, often including monks or local Tibetan elites, took the initiative to build schools that attempted to bridge the linguistic, cultural, and religious differences in the region. The Xining Tibetan Language Research Council, founded in 1920, was the first such hybrid institution in Qinghai, dedicated to translation between Tibetan and Chinese, as well as training government workers and teachers able to move between different cultures in Qinghai. Other “hybrid” frontier schools will be discussed throughout this chapter, although a paucity of available historical records limits the discussion.

Qinghai’s own “Mongol and Tibetan” education system is the second form of frontier education discussed in this chapter. Although constantly challenged by deep connections to the Ma family’s military and political establishment, Qinghai’s frontier schools nevertheless laid the groundwork for future developments in frontier education enacted by the Nationalist central government. Most of the strategies chosen by Xining’s education authorities would be continued by the third kind of frontier education initiatives—those run by the central government beginning in the mid-1930s.

Nationalist government frontier schools successfully centralized control over Qinghai’s “Mongol and Tibetan” education system from the 1930s onwards. By distancing education from the rule of Ma Bufang, central government frontier schools were able to recruit more students and spread schools farther into the highlands of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau than before. These schools also continued and improved upon the strategies started by Mongol and Tibetan schools in Qinghai. But just like the Xining

Tibetan Language Research Council and Mongol and Tibetan schools under the Ma family's control, central government frontier schools were political institutions—sites of Nationalist party factionalism, political activism, and even intelligence gathering.

Thus two trends dominate the history of Qinghai's frontier education for "Mongols and Tibetans." Throughout the Republican period, adaptation to the specific needs of inhabitants of this multi-cultural, poly-linguistic frontier region certainly increased, even as the Nationalist government actively centralized its control over frontier education.

Chapter Five discusses the militarized form of Muslim modernism taught in Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council schools. This chapter discusses Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council schools in light of two main lines of contemporary critiques directed at that school system. Although the IPC was building a school system along the lines that the central government and Party commentators advocated, these schools' connection to the Ma family's semi-independent power base raised the hackles of many politically-motivated commentators, some of whom appear to have felt threatened by these schools for Sino-Muslims. Critiques often focused on the religious identity of schools for Sino-Muslims, as well as the Islam Progressive Council's close connections to Ma Bufang's powerbase.

This chapter analyzes the nature of the relationship between Ma Bufang and the Islam Progressive Council Kunlun school system. It will do so by establishing the funding and infrastructural advantage enjoyed by IPC schools. Secondly, the discussion addresses student life in IPC/Kunlun schools, illustrating that the new behaviors taught to IPC students were in fact the same as the lessons from standard, Chinese public schools.

Students and graduates of IPC schools, however, did practice a form of political citizenship that invoked their ethnic and religious loyalties. But, the ways in which they practiced politics celebrated the contributions of Sino-Muslims to Republican China.

Chapter One

Frontier Militarists in a Transfrontier Province

On June 6, 1936, thousands of people gathered in Xining, the capital of Qinghai province in northwestern China. A ceremony was taking place, honoring the military leader of the region, Ma Bufang (1902-1975), for his appointment as acting Chairman of the Qinghai provincial government. The young military commander was the third member of a family lineage that had exercised political and military power in and around Xining since the early twentieth century. His father before him, Ma Qi (1896-1930), had been a military commander under the failing Qing dynasty (1644-1911) and had also held the position of government chairman since Qinghai became its own province in 1929. Ma Bufang's uncle, Ma Lin (1873-1945), took over the temporary chairmanship in 1931, but was retiring from politics due to old age and illness. This day in 1936 was devoted to honoring the new political leader of Qinghai, Ma Bufang.

The new Chairman Ma would rule over a recently formed province of the Republic, one that was defined by its location on the ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontier of northwestern China. Fortunately for us, the political theater on display that day has been memorialized in collection of photographs and speeches—*Commemoration of Receiving Orders to Temporarily Manage Qinghai's Government.*

The visual and textual sources included in this volume speak to the ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontiers inherent in Qinghai province.¹

The new acting Chairman entered the ceremonial grounds in a handful of automobiles, flanked by a contingent of soldiers surrounding his cars. Photographs of Ma Bufang, with soldiers standing behind him on the reception stage, emphasized his credentials as a military leader. Two civilians in Western dress sat to his left and right on the stage, most likely Nationalist Party special envoys sent to represent the central government's political confirmation of Ma Bufang's military power. Further demonstrating his close connection to the region's military, Ma Bufang held separate, much more intimate, speeches for the officers under his command. Instead of the massive ceremonial grounds crowded with onlookers, Chairman Ma held this talk in a secluded, tree-lined, courtyard.² Military power had been and continued to be essential for ruling this diverse frontier region. To this end, the ceremony honoring the new Chairman Ma took on a distinctively military flavor. Uniformed soldiers marching in formation demonstrated the training, discipline, and power of the Sino-Muslim military from which Ma Bufang and his family's power grew.³

¹ *Fengming zanli Qing zheng jinian* [Commemoration of accepting the order to temporarily manage Qinghai's government], (Xining: Gu Baoniugongdetang, 1936). Hereafter, FMZLQZJN (1936).

² "Huanyinghui cuoying" [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), specifically including "Ma daizhuxi ru huanyinghui zhi sheying" [Photography of acting chairman Ma entering the welcome ceremony], "Zai huanyinghui shang Ma daizhuxi" [Acting chairman Ma at the welcome ceremony], "Ma daizhuxi canjia huanyinghui shi dui shibu zhongyao guanzuo xunhua, yi" [Acting chairman Ma's speech to the important division officers while at the welcome ceremony, 1], "Ma daizhuxi dui shibu zhongyao guanzuo xunhua, er" [Acting chairman Ma's speech to the important division officers, 2], "Ma daizhuxi canjia huanyinghui shi yu shibu zhongyao guanzhang sheying" [Photograph of acting chairman Ma and important officers of the division while at the the welcome ceremony].

³ "Huanyinghui cuoying" [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), specifically "Canjia huanyinghui zhi bai shi budui" [Troops from the 100th division at the welcome ceremony] and "Huanying huichang zhi zhongbu" [Middle section of the welcome ceremony grounds].

If one stopped reading this source at this point, it would be easy to assume that the Ma Bufang depicted at the ceremony in 1936 was a typical provincial militarist, or warlord, a local military leader who ruled a specific territory in the name of the central government but who was really only out for his own benefit. These kinds of historical characters are all too familiar for those versed in the history of early twentieth century China. Led by renowned scholars like James Sheridan and Lloyd Eastman, so-called English language “warlord studies” enjoyed a heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, producing classics of Republican-era historiography that deepened scholarly understanding of China the whole through the sum of its regional parts.⁴ This body of literature offers fruitful avenues for comparisons with different regions, although these works tend to focus on the warlord’s relationship with the central government. While this is undoubtedly an important topic of inquiry, focusing solely on regional militarists’ relations with the central government privileges nationalist teleology to the exclusion of historical contingency and sub-national narratives. It has also been done before.

The only English language history of Republican-era Qinghai province, and Ma Bufang in particular, takes just this analytical approach. Merrill Ruth Hunsberger’s 1978 doctoral dissertation, *Ma Pu-fang in Chinghai Province, 1931-1949*, is an important first step in understanding this forgotten northwestern frontier, and the man that controlled the province for over two decades. A product of its time, Hunsberger’s research focuses on

⁴ James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966). Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974). Diana Lary, *Region and Nation: The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974). James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949* (New York: Free Press, 1975). Donald S. Sutton, *Provincial Militarism and the Chinese Republic: The Yunnan Army, 1905-25* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1980).

the relationship between this warlord and the Chinese central government under Chiang Kai-shek. Hunsberger argues that Qinghai's remote location and relative lack of importance placed on Qinghai by Nationalist authorities allowed for Ma Bufang to resist many centralizing reforms, thus making Ma Bufang an example of a "residual warlord."⁵

Much more historiography on Republican-era Qinghai exists in Chinese, although political considerations sometimes lead to jaded portrayal of "warlords" as one-sided impediments to national unity.⁶ Nevertheless, important ground has been broken by Chinese scholars⁷ often enriched by personal experiences working within the Qinghai government,⁸ focusing on the relationship between Ma militarists and the central government,⁹ or the nature of Chinese Muslim society.¹⁰ Excellent recent works by historians at universities and research institutes in Qinghai province has moved historical scholarship toward a deeper understanding of the nature of the Ma family's rule in Qinghai.¹¹

⁵ Merrill Ruth Hunsberger, *Ma Pu-fang in Chinghai Province, 1931-1949*, Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 1978, 5.

⁶ Chen Shaomei, *Xibei junfa ji* [Record of northwestern warlords], (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhicheng chubanshe, 1987).

⁷ Yang Jiuping, *Ma Bufang jiazhu de xingshuai* [Rise and fall of Ma Bufang's lineage], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987).

⁸ Chen Bingyuan, *Ma Bufang jiazhu tongzhi Qinghai sishi nian* [Forty years of Ma Bufang's lineage controlling Qinghai], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1986).

⁹ Gao Yi, *Jiang Jieshi yu Xibei xi Ma* [Chiang Kai-shek and the four northwestern Ma's], (Beijing: Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993). Liu Jin, *Guomindang zhengquan yu Gan Ning Qing de zhengzhi he shehui* [Nationalist party government power and the politics and society of Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai], Ph.D dissertation, Zhongshan University, 2003.

¹⁰ Xu Xianlong, *Zhu Ma junfa jituan yu xibei Musilin shehui* [The Ma warlord group and northwestern Muslim society], (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2001).

¹¹ Cui Yonghong, Zhang Deshan, and Du Changshun, *Qinghai tongshi* [Complete history of Qinghai], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2002). Cui Yonghong and Zhang Shengyan, *Mingdai yilai Huanghe shangyou diqu shengtai huanjing yu shehui bianqian shi yanjiu* [Historical research on natural environmental and social changes of the upper Yellow river since the Ming dynasty], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2008).

One important aspect of the Ma family militarists that Chinese scholars have long investigated is the role of their religious and ethnic identity as Sino-Muslims (Ch. Hui). No scholar has done more to bring this essential aspect of the Xining Ma family's rule to English-language readers more than Jonathan N. Lipman. Anyone who seeks to research on Chinese frontiers, northwestern China, or Chinese Islam must find new ways to build upon his scholarship, which sets the benchmark for studies of Chinese Muslims' creative interactions with the Chinese state. As a model frontier study, Lipman engages with Gansu's ecological, ethnic, and socio-cultural makeup.¹² Yet Lipman confines his monograph's discussion to Gansu province, leaving space for a similar study of Qinghai.

One of Lipman's earlier articles that does address the Ma family lineage in Xining, along with lineages in Gansu and Ningxia, focuses on their ethnicity as it related to Chinese politics in the Republican era. He finds that Ma family warlords had long-standing relationships with the Qing state, could support themselves economically, and forwent separatism in favor of political integration, thus "draw[ing] closer to China in order to remain semi-independent of China."¹³ Lipman has offered an excellent study of Chinese Muslims on the Gansu frontiers with China. He has also deepened Hunsberger's disintegration / integration, warlord / central government analysis by adding the important category of ethnic identity into the discussion.

Hunsberger and Lipman have both made important contributions to the study of Republican-era Qinghai, and the Xining branch of Ma family militarists that controlled the province. In a sense, Hunsberger offers a negative explanation for the relative

¹² Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997).

¹³ Jonathan N. Lipman, "Ethnicity and Politics in Republican China: The Ma Family Warlords of Gansu," *Modern China*, 10.3 (July 1984), 312.

autonomy of Ma Bufang's rule—Qinghai was too far away and the central government was too preoccupied. Lipman enriches our understanding of the Xining Ma family by bringing religion and ethnicity into the discussion. This chapter seeks to take the discussion one step farther by emphasizing the important political and military position that Xining Ma family occupied. The ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontiers of Kokonor defined their role as military, and hence political, rulers in Xining.

Ma Bufang's welcome ceremony in 1936 was a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural affair, befitting of a region that had long been a meeting ground of different ethnic groups. Han Chinese, Sino-Muslims, and Tibetans are apparent in photographs of the ceremonial ground. The new acting Chairman and other dignitaries also gave speeches in the different languages of this multiethnic province. Some of these speeches, in Chinese, Arabic, Mongolian, and Tibetan, were printed in the *Commemoration of Receiving Orders to Temporarily Manage Qinghai's Government*. Particularly interesting are the photographs of local Mongol and Tibetan elites, who are said to have come to the ceremony to pay their respects to the new Chairman Ma. Although one image shows Tibetans at the welcome ceremony,¹⁴ most of these photographs show groups of Tibetans standing in formal poses on the grasslands, with mountain scenery behind them. There are 27 of these photographs, representing Mongol Banner leaders,¹⁵ Tibetan tribal

¹⁴ “Huanyinghui cuoying” [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), “Huanying huichang zhong zhi Meng Zang guanmin” [Mongol and Tibetan officials and people at the welcome ceremony grounds].

¹⁵ “Huanyinghui cuoying” [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), “Zuo yi mengzhang ji qi jiashu wan sheng fu zhao dai chu” [Welcome site for the Zuoyi confederation commander and his household] and “Lai sheng jinhe zhi Maicang lanqie dameng qianhu” [Maicang lanqie large confederation battalion commander coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations].

chieftains¹⁶ (Ch. *tusi*), and Tibetan Buddhist monastic elites.¹⁷ Although none of these photographs definitively prove or disprove that the Tibetan elites depicted in them actually came to Xining on that day in 1936, they are nevertheless indicative of literal and figurative distance between Ma Bufang's military and political establishment in Xining and the pastoral peoples that his, and previous, governments, sought to rule.

Indeed, Uradyn E. Bulag has suggested that Chinese Muslim control over Mongols and Tibetans was the key to maintaining the central government's support of Chinese Muslim dominance in Xining.¹⁸ Deepening Bulag's description of the relationship between Xining and the Mongols and Tibetans of Qinghai, this chapter argues that Ma Bufang, like his family before him, was a frontier militarist. That is to say, Ma Bufang was a military and political leader ruling an ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontier region. More than just controlling Mongols and Tibetans, the Ma family was trying to build Qinghai province by projecting the power of Xining onto Kokonor. In order to better understand the process of ruling Qinghai, let us first look in depth at some frontiers that defined this complex place.

¹⁶ Some representative examples include "Huanyinghui cuoying" [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Shenzang si qianbaihu" [Shenzang monastery battalion and company commanders coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations], "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Saile si qianbaihu" [Saile monastery battalion and company commanders coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations], "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Gonggongma zu qianbaihu" [Gonggongma clan battalion and company commanders coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations], "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Heri qianhu ji Sichuan Songpan qianhu" [Battalion commanders of Heri and Sichuan's Songpan coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations].

¹⁷ Representative examples include "Huanyinghui cuoying" [Welcome ceremony group photographs], FMZLQZJN (1936), "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Shenzang si huofu Banzhida deng quanti" [Shenzang monastery living Buddha Banzhida et al. coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations], "Lai sheng jinhe zhi Sailehe si huofu sengren" [Living Buddha and monks of Sailehe monastery coming to the provincial capital to offer congratulations].

¹⁸ Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and Politics of National Unity*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 45.

Kokonor: A Topographical, Ecological, and Ethnic Frontier

As the Tibetan highlands descend into northwest China, they meet the Central Asian desert, the Mongolian steppe, and the loess soil farmland of northern China, forming a crossroads of four major topographical regions.¹⁹ Qinghai province straddles this topographical crossroads, making the geographical and ecological frontiers a defining characteristic of Qinghai.

The dominant features of Qinghai's topography are mountain chains and river systems. Four major mountain chains, mostly eastern branches of the mighty Kunlun Mountains, cross through the province, roughly from the northwest toward the southeast. The Qilian Mountains form the northeastern border of Qinghai, marking the dividing line between the province and the Gansu corridor. Moving southwest through the province, the next major mountain chain is the Amne Machin range, which roughly separates the province's northeastern, lowland river valleys from the pastoral regions of Golok (Ch. Guoluo). In this high plateau springs the source of the Yellow River (Ch. Huanghe), and the southeastern terminus of the Amne Machin Mountains is where the Yellow River has its first extreme bend, turning nearly one hundred and eighty degrees to the north, before flowing through northeast Qinghai into Gansu province. Continuing past Golok toward the southwest, the next mountain chain, the Bayanhar mountains, divides the upper reaches of the Yellow River drainage from the region that holds the sources of two of Asia's other mightiest rivers: the Yangzi (Ch. Chang Jiang; Tongtian River in Qinghai) and Mekong (Ch. Lancang jiang; Zaqu River in Qinghai). The famous Kekexili (T. Hoh Xil) region, now a national nature preserve, lies to the northwest of the sources of the

¹⁹ Lipman (1997), 6.

Mekong and Yangzi rivers. The Tanggula Mountains rise in southwestern Qinghai, and mark the borders between today's Qinghai province and the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Overall, northeastern Qinghai, the so-called "lowland river valleys," have the lowest elevation in the province. From the Qilian Mountains in between Qinghai and the Gansu corridor, elevations sharply increase as one passes through the Amye Machin, the Bayanhar, and finally the Tanggula Mountains, before reaching Tibet.

Elevation is one of the most important factors for understanding Qinghai's ecology and economy. Qinghai's average elevation is nearly 10,000 feet (3,000 m.) above sea level. Average elevation can give a general sense of this region, but Qinghai's jagged topography creates major changes in elevation, especially between mountain peaks and the valleys in between. Qinghai's topographical diversity creates several major regions within the province. These regions are loosely based on geographical location, natural ecology, and the resulting mode of economic livelihood. Northeastern Qinghai's river valleys formed the province's lone agricultural region. The areas north and south of Qinghai Lake offered a balance of some river valley, irrigation agriculture with pastoralism on the higher mountain slopes. Although southwestern Qinghai, including the Golok and Yushu Tibetan regions, had some limited agriculture in river valleys, the high elevations and imposing mountain ranges made pastoralism the prime mode of economic production. Finally, northwestern Qinghai's Qaidam (Ch. Chaidamu pendi) formed the final region.²⁰

²⁰ Qinghai sheng tulang pucha jianding gongzuo weiyuanhui bangongshi, ed. *Qinghai tulang* [Qinghai's soil], (Xining: Qinghai sheng tulang pucha jianding gongzuo weiyuanhui bangongshi, 1960), "Qinghai sheng ziran quhua caotu" [Sketch map dividing Qinghai province's natural regions].

Qinghai's location, elevation, and topography as part of the northeastern Tibetan plateau produced a continental climate. In general, this kind of climate is dry, with low precipitation, and intense sunshine. The elevation and bright sunshine creates drastic differences in temperature, depending on whether one is standing in the sunshine or in the shade. Similar temperatures changes can be felt between daytime and nighttime. The summers tend to be warm, but the winters are bitterly cold. There are also extreme differences in temperature between the short summers and long winters.²¹ Although generalizations like the boundary between agricultural and pastoralism and average elevations are on the whole accurate, major differences exist within Qinghai. A more fruitful way to approach the topography and climate of the province is through the major regions.²²

Lower elevations and ample river irrigation characterize the northeastern agricultural region. The river valleys are at an average elevation of 5,500 to 8,500 feet above sea level (1,700-2,600 m). The Datong, Huangshui, and Yellow river valleys in this region can be as wide as 1.9 to 3.1 miles (3-5 km), or as narrow as 650 to 1,000 feet (200-300 m). They are generally surrounding by mountains rising between 6,900 and 8,800 feet above sea level (2,100-2,700 m). The highest mountains in the northeastern agricultural region are higher than 8,500 feet above sea level (2,600 m). Annual temperatures deviate based on the elevation within the region. The Huangshui river

²¹ Li Tongsheng and Liu Xiaoming, "Qinghai", in Y.M. Yeung and Shen Jianfa, *Developing China's West: A Critical Path to Balanced National Development* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 304.

²² "Qinghai sheng qiyue pingjun zuigao qiwen fenbu tu," "Qinghai sheng yiyue zuidi qiwen fenbu tu," "Qinghai sheng nian pingjun qiwen fenbu tu," "Qinghai sheng nian jiangshuiliang fenbu tu," Qinghai tulong (1960), 3-6. Merrill Ruth Hunsberger's dissertation divides Qinghai into three distinct regions: northeastern, agricultural river valleys, Tsaidam Basin in the northwest, and Tibetan Plateau in the south and southwest. Hunsberger (1978), 10.

valley has an average temperature between 35 and 46 degrees (2-8 degrees C) and receives 11.8 to 15.7 inches (300-400 mm) of precipitation annually. The Yellow River valley has an average temperature of between 41 and 46.5 degrees (5-8 degrees C) and 7.9 to 11.8 inches (200-300 mm) of precipitation per year. Smaller mountains under 8,850 feet (2,700 m) above sea level have average temperatures between 35 and 39.2 degrees (2-4 degrees C) and tend to have around 15.7 inches (400 mm) of precipitation per year. Mountains under 9,840 feet (3,000 m) high, average between 32 and 35 degrees F (0-2 degrees C) and 17.7 to 23.6 inches (450-600 mm) of precipitation per year.²³

The south of Qinghai Lake is dominated by the Yellow River after it makes its first major northward turn around the Amne Machin Range. The region's river valleys, mountains, and mountain peaks average between 7,874 and 9,840 feet (2,400-3,000m), 9,514 and 11,154 feet (2,900-3,400 m), and over 13, 123 feet (4,000 m) to as high as 16,000 to 19,685 feet (5,000 to 6,000 m), respectively. The region's average annual temperature is between 32 and 35 degrees (0-2 degrees C). Average annual precipitation increases as you go farther southwest; areas south of Qinghai Lake but north of the Yellow River, like Gonghe for example, average between 7.9 and 11.8 inches (200-300 mm) of precipitation per year, while the higher elevations to the southwest have between 7.9 and 15.7 inches (300-400 mm). The provincial government classified this region as a semi-pastoral, semi-agricultural area in 1960.²⁴

A second semi-pastoral, semi-agricultural region north of Qinghai Lake has high, dry grasslands in the north and semi-irrigated grasslands in the south near the lake itself.

²³ Qinghai tulang (1960), 8.

²⁴ Qinghai tulang (1960), 9.

The high, dry grasslands in the north range between 11,154 and 16,000 feet (3,400-5,000 m) above sea level, from 11.8 to 15.7 inches (300-400 mm) of precipitation per year, and average temperatures around 28.4 degrees (-2 degrees C). The high, semi-irrigated grasslands have elevations between 8,530 and 11,154 feet (2,600-3,400 m), average precipitation from 15.7 to 23.6 inches (400-600 mm) and annual temperatures averaging around 32 degrees (0 degrees C).²⁵

The Golok and Yushu pastoral regions in the southwest of the province are in general higher and colder than the agricultural northeast of the province, but also include river valleys cut by the upper reaches of the Yellow, Yangzi, and Mekong rivers. This region amounts to nearly half of the province's total territory, but is sparsely populated. This region's elevation is highest in the northwest (16,000 feet / 5,000 m) and lowest in the southeast (11,154 feet / 3,400 m). The higher northwest has much less precipitation than the southeast, with 7.9 inches (200 mm) and over 23.6 inches (600 mm), respectively. The annual temperatures range from 17.6 to 32 degrees (-8 – 0 degrees C), but average annual temperatures can be as warm as 35.6 to 37.4 (2-3 degrees C) in the river valleys.²⁶

Qinghai's namesake, Qinghai Lake, or Kokonor, sits in the northeastern section of the province, but represents the doorway to another of the province's topographical regions: northwestern Qinghai's Qaidam Basin (also written as Tsaidam; Ch. Chaidamu pendi). The Qaidam Basin is a relatively low-lying region, hemmed in by the Kunlun mountains to the north and northwest, the Tanggula Mountains to the west, and the

²⁵ Qinghai tulang (1960), 9-10.

²⁶ Qinghai tulang (1960), 10.

mountain chain that roughly bisects the province from north to south: the Burhan Budai Mountains (Ch. Bu'erhan buda shan). This range divides the western portion of the province into the Qaidam basin in the north from Golok and Yushu in the southwest. North of the Burhan Budai range, the Qaidam Basin is known for its lakes and salt flats. The only major settlement in this region, Golmud (Ch. Ge'ermu) is the final stop before entering Tibet on the recently opened Beijing-Lhasa railway.

The eastern section of the Qaidam Basin was uninhabited grasslands, averaging around 9,842 feet (3,000 m) in elevation. This region received around 3.9 to 7.9 inches (100-200 mm) of annual precipitation and had an average annual temperature between 32 and 35.6 degrees (0-2 degrees C). The western Qaidam Basin is lower, warmer, and drier than the east. This subregion is between 8,202 and 9,842 feet (2,500-3,000 m) above sea level, annual temperatures between 35.6 and 39.2 degrees (2-4 degrees C), but only had less than 1 inch (50 mm) of annual precipitation. The mountainous region to the north of the basin is over 13,123 feet (4,000 m) high, with average temperatures around 32 degrees (0 degrees C), and under 2 inches (100 mm) of precipitation per year.²⁷ As Chapter Three will show, policy-makers and scholars dreamed of the Qaidam Basin as the perfect site for agricultural colonization, but his dream was often out of reach.

As the above discussion of Qinghai's topography and climate indicates, the majority of the region is more suited for pastoralism than agriculture. Local historical records from within Qinghai likewise emphasize the differences between agricultural and pastoral areas, economies, and lifestyles. Almost all local gazetteers make references to the pastoral regions within their territory. Kang Furong's *Qinghai Gazetteer* includes

²⁷ Qinghai tulang (1960), 9.

sections devoted to Tibetan pasturelands, and Mongol and Tibetan livestock.²⁸ The *Draft Gazetteer of Guide County* discusses the agricultural and pastoral economies of that area, including tribute by Tibetans, the traditional tea for horse trading centers, and even memorializes local pastoral products with a bit of poetic verse.²⁹ An investigation into local customs in Gonghe County also describes the area's agricultural and pastoral products, but notes that roughly eighty percent of the county's land was used for pastoralism.³⁰

Riyue Mountain (Ch. Riyue shan), near the eastern shore of Qinghai Lake (Ch. Qinghai hu), is generally taken to mark the boundary between these two lifestyles. The provincial capital, Xining, is at a breath-taking 7,464 feet (2,275 m.) above sea level. In the fewer than sixty miles (100 km) it takes to travel west from Xining to Riyue Mountain, the elevation rises to 16,000 feet (4,877 m) above sea level, at the mountain's peak. On average, peaks surrounding Riyue Mountain, part of the Qilian range, are over 13,000 feet (4,000 m.) high. Riyue Mountain has long been considered as the dividing line between the agriculture of eastern Qinghai and the pastoral western regions of the province.³¹

The northeastern, "lowland" river valleys formed the agricultural core, and resulted in the highest population density. Qinghai's overall population was, and remains,

²⁸ Kang Furong, comp. *Qinghai zhi* [Qinghai gazetteer], (no date, Qing). Xuxiu siku quanshu bianmu weiyuanhui, ed. *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 649, (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1995), 3-5, 11. Hereafter, XXSKQS.

²⁹ Yao Jun, comp. *Guide xianzhi gao* [Draft gazetteer of Guide], 1930, Li Qing, ed., *Qinghai difang jiuzhi wuzhong* [Five kinds of old Qinghai gazetteers], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 728-730, 748-750, 756-757. Hereafter, QHDFJZWZ.

³⁰ *Gonghe xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs of Gonghe county], 1932, in Guojia tushuguan difangzhi he jiapu wenxian zhongxin, comp. *Xiangtu zhichao gaoben xuanbian* 15, (Beijing: Xian zhuang shuju, 2002), 632-633. Hereafter, XTZHGBXB.

³¹ Lecture by Professor Ma Wei of Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining on July 7, 2009, for which I served as interpreter.

quite low in relation to provinces in central or eastern China [See Table 1.1: Qinghai Population Statistics, 1853-1949]. Scholars estimate that in the 1930s and 1940s under three percent of Qinghai's land contained over 56% of the province's population. The northeastern agricultural areas in the Huangshui and lower Yellow river valleys had an average of nearly 36 people per square kilometer. In the largely pastoral or uninhabited 97% of Qinghai, there was an average of 0.8 people per square kilometer.³²

However small it was, Qinghai's population was quite diverse. Hui and Han people pre-dominated in the agricultural zones along the northeastern river valleys. The Salar people (Ch. Sala) were centered in two areas along the lower Yellow River, Xunhua and Hualong. Monguors (Ch. Tu) were concentrated in Huzhu county, northeast of Xining along the Datong River. Mongols were traditionally the majority surrounding Qinghai Lake and in the province's west, although as Mongol Banner populations declined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Tibetans slowly moved into their former territories. Tibetans occupied the highlands along the Yellow River and in the province's south and southwest.³³

Kang Furong's Qing-era gazetteer discussion of Qinghai's population largely focuses on Mongol Banners and Tibetan tribes.³⁴ Guide county's records mainly discuss Tibetan inhabitants.³⁵ Huangyuan county's gazetteer listed Han, Mongol, Tibetan populations.³⁶ Xining County's sources list Han, Hui, Tibetans, and Monguors (Ch. Tu)

³² Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 748.

³³ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting, ed. *Zuijin zhi Qinghai* [Most recent Qinghai], (Nanjing: Xinyaxiya xuehui, 1932), 245.

³⁴ Kang Furong, 5-11.

³⁵ Yao Jun (1930), 714-720. Zhang Zuozhou, ed. *Guide xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs of Guide county], (1932) XTZHGBXB, 4b-5a.

³⁶ Yang Zhiping, 316-319.

living within the region,³⁷ as do local historical sources from Datong,³⁸ Huzhu,³⁹ Minhe,⁴⁰ and Ledu counties.⁴¹ Hualong County listed Han, Hui, Tibetan, and Salar in 1930.⁴² Tibetans, Mongols, and Monguors are included in Gonghe County's gazetteer.⁴³ Many gazetteers also discuss customs, habits, and occupations according to ethnic group.⁴⁴ Xining County's investigation into local customs from 1932 also discussed customs, habits, and occupations by ethnic groups. But this was only source to also distinguish between "urban" and "rural" populations.⁴⁵

Han Chinese had grown to become the ethnic group with the largest population by the early to middle part of the twentieth century. Han accounted for 54% of the population in 1931 and just less than half in 1949. Sino-Muslims and Tibetans alternated between second and third most populous ethnic groups during the same time period. The remaining groups, Monguor, Mongol, Salar, and Kazakh all accounted for 5 % of the population, or less [See Table 1.2: Qinghai Population by Ethnic Groups, 1931 and 1949].

³⁷ *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Xining county], (1932), XTZHGBXB, 274-275.

³⁸ *Datong xianzhi* [Datong county gazetteer], (1919), 511-516.

³⁹ *Huzhu xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Huzhu county], (1932), XTZHGBXB, 619.

⁴⁰ *Minhe xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Minhe county], (1932), XTZHGBXB, 651.

⁴¹ *Ledu xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Ledu county], (1932) XTZHGBXB, 395-396.

⁴² *Qinghai sheng Bayan xian fengtu diaocha gaikuang* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Bayan county], (1930), 3b.

⁴³ *Gonghe xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), 632.

⁴⁴ *Qinghai sheng Bayan xian fengtu diaocha gaikuang* (1930), 5a. *Gonghexian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 642, 647. Zhang Zuozhou (1932), XTZHGBXB, 7b-8a. *Huzhu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 621. *Ledu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932) XTZHGBXB, 399-401. *Menyuan xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 677-678. *Minhe xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 661-662.

⁴⁵ *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 281-284.

Local historical sources always focused on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the people within the region covered by the gazetteer. Huangyuan County's name itself is evidence of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region; Huangyuan's old name, Dan'ge'er, is itself a transliteration from the Mongolian original name.⁴⁶ Certain sources point to ways in which customs blended in this cultural meeting ground. One Datong gazetteer from 1926 devotes a section to cultural exchanges smoothed by ritual interactions.⁴⁷ A Gonghe county source detailed how increased presence of Han Chinese had caused some local Tibetans to change their burial customs, from the traditional sky burial to in-ground burials.⁴⁸ Such historical evidence allows to see the ways in which Kokonor a cultural middle ground, "where people following radically different ways of life adapted to one another and to the environment."⁴⁹

The region known as Qinghai province enclosed a complex mixture of religions, most notably including different sects of Islam and Tibetan Buddhism. Islam flourished in Qinghai, although its adherents were concentrated in northeastern Qinghai around Xining, closer to the Sino-Muslim center of Linxia in Gansu. Much like the Sino-Muslim communities in Gansu and northeastern Qinghai, the Tibetan population was fractured by geography and sectarian diversity.⁵⁰ Gazetteers from the late nineteenth and early

⁴⁶ Yang Zhiping, 140 note 1.

⁴⁷ Nie Shouren, *Gansu Datong xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation into local customs in Gansu's Datong county], (1926), XTZHGBXB, 337-338.

⁴⁸ *Gonghexian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 639-640.

⁴⁹ Quote from Perdue (2005), 41. The concept of the "middle ground" is drawn from Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Regions, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Qinghai sheng minzheng ting (1932), 302. Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu fushe bianshi yuekan she, ed. *Yushu jinshiji* [Record of recent events in Yushu], (Xining: Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silinbu fushe bianshi yuekan, 1933), vol. 1, 24. Lipman (1997), 20.

twentieth centuries devote much attention to the location, size, sectarian loyalty of mosques⁵¹ and Buddhist monasteries.⁵²

Thus, Qinghai province as a whole was certainly a topographical and ecological frontier region. Differences in geography, elevation, and climate in a large part determined the kinds of economic activities that could be conducted in a given region. The most important distinction was between agricultural in the northeastern river valleys, and pastoralism at higher elevations. But, as local historical sources demonstrate, all of the above forms of diversity could be seen at the local levels as well. Different peoples inhabited the region, practicing different economic lifestyles and bringing different cultural beliefs and practices with them. Much of this ethnic and cultural diversity was rooted in a long history of exchange and conflict over the Kokonor frontier.

Kokonor Contested through History

Different nomadic confederations have competed with Chinese dynasties for control of the Kokonor region over the course of Chinese history. When the Qin built the first unified Chinese empire in 221 BCE, its control did not extend past modern-day Gansu province. This left the Kokonor region under the sway of the nomadic groups including the Xiongnu, Yueshi, and Qiang peoples. A combination of these three nomadic groups attacked the Han frontier with around one hundred thousand men at arms

⁵¹ Kang Furong, 27-28. Nie Shouren (1926), XTZHGBXB, 333. Zhang Zuozhou (1932), XTZHGBXB, 5b. *Huzhu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 619-620. *Ledu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 396-397. *Menyuan xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 676. *Minhe xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 652-656. *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 276-277.

⁵² Kang Furong, 28-38. *Datong xian zhi* (1919), QHDFJZWZ, 515. Nie Shouren (1926), XTZHGBXB, 333. Yao Jun (1933), QHDFJZWZ, 745-747. Zhang Zuozhou (1932), XTZHGBXB, 4b, 5b. *Ledu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 394. *Huzhu xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 619-620. *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZHGBXB, 276-277.

in 112 BCE. The Han dynasty's counter attack the following year would bring imperial Chinese power to the Xining region for the first time, pushing the Qiang west to Qinghai Lake. Fifty years later, in 61 BCE, the Han dynasty set up agricultural colonies in the Huangzhong region, near Xining. Westward expansion into the Kokonor region would continue under the Western Han, when it set up the Xihai administrative district in 4 BCE. Control of the Kokonor region vacillated between the Qiang and Han Chinese during Wang Mang's interregnum, and the Qiang would retake the territory surrounding the lake after his fall in 23 CE. The Eastern largely followed the administrative structure of the Western Han dynasty, but would slowly lose influence in the Kokonor region.⁵³

Kokonor would continue to be the site of military and political competition through the first millennium of the Common Era. As the Eastern Han dynasty's power waned in the second century, nomadic confederations once again came to dominate the region that would become Qinghai province. One such group was the Xianbei, which established several small kingdoms that ruled parts of China proper during the Sixteen Kingdoms period. One of the offshoots of the Xianbei confederation would come to rule the Kokonor region from the 3rd century through the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the Tuyuhun. The Tuyuhun established their empire in the late third century, an empire that would spread through modern-day Gansu, Qinghai, and Xinjiang provinces. Their state would survive until expansionist pressure from both the Tibetan Empire under Songstan Gampo and the Tang Dynasty proved too much.⁵⁴

⁵³ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 850-852. Cui and Zhang (2008), 13-14.

⁵⁴ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 852-872. Cui and Zhang (2008), 14.

As the Tuyuhun power structure disintegrated, a group related to Tibetans, the Tubuo, took control of Kokonor. After the fall of the Tang Dynasty, successive regimes of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period projected power into the region, but always had to deal with the Tubuo tribes occupying Kokonor. The northwestern frontier of the Northern Song (960-1127) reached out to the Huangshui and Yellow river valleys in today's Qinghai. After conquering the Huangshui River valley in 1104, the Song created Xining prefecture. The Mongols, and later Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), would incorporate Kokonor into their massive empire.⁵⁵

Up until the Yuan Dynasty, control of the Kokonor region had shifted between powerful Chinese dynasties and various nomadic confederations of Mongols, Tibetans, and Mongols again. The Northern Song Dynasty, not known for its land-based territorial expansion into Inner Asia, was able to claim the Datong, Huangshui, and Yellow River valleys as its northwestern frontier, and created the prefecture named Xining, meaning "western tranquility." More often than not, pasturelands surrounding Qinghai Lake, remained under the control of pastoralists. The Yuan dynasty's administration of the Kokonor region seemed to recognize this fundamental frontier between agriculture and pastoralism. Shaanxi and Gansu retained administrative power over much of the upper Yellow River, but the pastoral regions to the west and southwest of Xining were under the control of the Yuan Ministry of Tibetan Governance (Ch. Xuanzheng yuan), the central dynastic ministry for governing Tibet.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 878-880. Cui and Zhang (2008), 15.

⁵⁶ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 881-882. Cui and Zhang (2008), 15.

The Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) continued the Yuan's provincial administration system, with some adjustments. Upon conquest of Xining, the Ming dynasty placed Xining under the administration of Shaanxi. Southern Qinghai fell under the control of Duogandu, and the Qaidam Basin was split among at least four different regional governments. Qinghai's Mongol tribes would begin a long period of conflict with Ming officials stationed in Xining beginning in the early sixteenth century. Conflict between Mongols led by Gushri Khan and Tibetans began in the 1630s,⁵⁷ and lasted through the mid-seventeenth century Ming-Qing transition.

Peter Perdue has shown that the initial incorporation of the Kokonor/Qinghai region came under the Yongzheng Emperor in the early eighteenth century. After several rounds of military campaigns against the Zunghars, struggles between military leaders of some of the region's Khoshot Mongols pulled another Qing army into the region that would become Qinghai. Led by General Nian Gengyao, Qing forces defeated Lobzang Danjin (T. Blo-bzan-bstan-dsin) at Kumbum monastery on November 16, 1723. In the following month, the Qing again overcame Lobzang's armies in Kokonor and the Gansu corridor. Although conflict among regional leaders would frequently occur, Nian Gengyao's victories in the 1720s led to the incorporation of Kokonor into the Qing Empire as Qinghai. In order to secure the newly established Qing rule in Kokonor, Nian Gengyao imposed new administrative geographies on the region's Mongol and Tibetan inhabitants. For the Mongols surrounding the lake, Qing officials enforced the banner system of administration, which the dynasty had recently enacted in Mongolia. Local

⁵⁷ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 886-887.

Tibetans, on the other hand, would be ruled by tribal chieftains “watched over by Qing garrisons.”⁵⁸

Banners, Tribes, and Counties: Multiple Administrative Geographies in Qinghai

The space that became Qinghai province contained multiple frontiers, including those of ecological, economic, and ethnic natures. Different military and political powers had controlled Kokonor over centuries. Even when a single administrative entity incorporated the region, as in the case of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty and the Manchu Qing, administrative frontiers persisted. The administrative structure of Qing rule in Gansu (including Qinghai and Ningxia) appears to have recognized the distinction between the agricultural zones around Xining and highlands of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau.

Justin Tighe’s monograph on the short-lived Suiyuan province is among recent works of scholarship on Chinese frontier history that focus on the changing conceptions and implementation of new forms of territoriality as a key aspect in the creation of the modern Chinese nation-state.⁵⁹ This dissertation follows Tighe’s observation that “administrative geography—the way a state divides spaces—can also tell us much about conceptions of political community and its modes of inclusion and exclusion.”⁶⁰ To this end, the multiple administrative geographies of Kokonor were products of the indirect

⁵⁸ Perdue (2005), 243-247.

⁵⁹ Other recent works sharing this focus on territoriality include James Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing and its Indigenes Became Chinese* (New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Xiuyu Wang, *China’s Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan’s Tibetan Borderlands* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011).

⁶⁰ Justin Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan: The Politics of Northwestern Territory and Development in Early Twentieth Century China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 1, 5. Other recent works sharing this focus on new forms of territoriality include Leibold (2007) and Xiuyu Wang, *China’s Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan’s Tibetan Borderlands*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2011).

rule of the Qing dynasty's federated empire. Overcoming these administrative frontiers would be a challenging mission for provincial authorities under the Ma family.

As previously noted, the Datong, Huangshui, and lower Yellow river valleys were the only mainly agricultural regions of Qinghai, and therefore had the highest population concentration. It should come as no surprise, then, that the earliest Chinese-style administrative units developed in this area when the Northern Song Dynasty first established Xining as a prefecture in 1104. The Qing dynasty established the counties that have lasted until today in the Huangshui and Datong river valleys. Ledu (1725), Xining (1725), and Datong (1761) all became counties in the eighteenth century [See Table 1.2: Administrative Regions of Qinghai, 1725-1949]. From north (bottom) to south (top), the Datong, Huangshui, and Yellow Rivers were the lifeblood of most settlements in the region. Towns on the Yellow River valley would not become counties until 1913, with Xunhua and Guide. Huangyuan County, a major pastoral trading center 45 kilometers west of Xining, opened also opened that year. Civilian authorities in Xining, although part of Gansu province until 1929, administered these agricultural counties.

The newly formed Qinghai provincial government expanded counties almost immediately in 1929. Gonghe County, west of the Riyue Mountains and south of Qinghai Lake, was the first stop along the roads to Yushu in the southwest and Dulan to the west. The far southwestern Yushu also opened county government offices in 1929. Dulan would open its county government a year later in 1930. Counties continued to expand along Qinghai's frontier transportation routes. Nangqian (1933), Tongde (1935), and Chengduo (1938), and Xinghai (1943) all opened along the Xining to Yushu road in the two decades before 1949. While expanding new county governments northwest and

southwest, growth also intensified in the northeastern river valleys. Huzhu and Minhe established new counties along the Huangshui River in 1930. Hualong County opened between Xining and Xunhua in 1931.

Multiple administrative geographies— counties in the agricultural northeast, banners for Mongols in the northwest, and tribal chieftains and monasteries for Tibetans in the southwest—continued into the first half of the twentieth century. A rough map from 1919 can illustrate these administrative frontiers [See Figure 1.1: Zhou Xiwu, *Yushu tusi diaocha ji* (1919)]. The territory from Qinghai Lake west to the Qaidam Basin was inscribed as belonging to the “24 Mongol peoples” (Ch. Menggu ershisi zu). The region directly south of the lake was the “pastureland of the eight peoples of Gangza” (Ch. Gangza bazu mudi). Golok Tibetans controlled the upper reaches and source of the Yellow River, north of the Bayanhar Mountains. Southwest of the Bayanhar range, the “25 peoples of Yushu” [Ch. Yushu ershiwu zu] occupied upper reaches of the Yangzi and Mekong Rivers. Since this map was produced a decade before Qinghai became its own province, the seven counties of the Xining circuit in the lowland river valleys were still part of Gansu.

The Qing dynasty’s military conquest and political governing system mainly for Mongols and Manchus, the confederation and banner system (Ch. mengqi zhidu), was the administrative structure under which Qinghai’s Mongol populations lived. Banners were a Qing administrative innovation, which integrated preexisting tribal structures into the Qing system.⁶¹ Upon Nian Gengyao’s conquest of Kokonor Mongols in the early eighteenth century, preexisting Mongol power structures were incorporated into the

⁶¹ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 761-765.

Banner system. Mongol princes thus became banner commanders (Ch. *zhasake*), but were placed under the supervision of Qing military commanders. The Qing also separated rival Mongol groups in Kokonor into different banners.⁶² The 1919 map referred to these Mongol Banners as the “24 Mongol peoples,” but the most local historical sources list them as the “29 Mongol Banners” and devote significant attention to these political institutions.⁶³

Another complex administrative geography oversaw Tibetans in Qinghai. This administrative structure, also applied to the southwestern Qing frontier, recognized local structures of political, economic, and religious power. This system of indirect administration acknowledged the influence of monasteries and tribal chieftains.⁶⁴ Much like Mongol Banners, local historical sources described Tibetan territory and political power according to tribes, chieftains, and monasteries.⁶⁵ Administrative geography of the “25 peoples of Yushu” and the one hundred monasteries in the same region will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

From its very inception as a province in late 1928 to early 1929, ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontiers were built into Qinghai. A central government order on October 17, 1928 determined that Qinghai’s provincial territory would include the seven agricultural counties formerly controlled by Xining as well as the Mongol and Tibetan areas overseen by the Qinghai amban (Ch. *Qinghai banshi dachen*) and his

⁶² Perdue (2005), 246-247.

⁶³ Kang Furong, 2-3, *Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu* (1933), chart insert “Menggu ershijiu qi yi lanbiao” [Chart of the 29 Mongol banners].

⁶⁴ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 758-761. Wang (2011), Location 445.

⁶⁵ Kang Furong, 3-5, 12-13, 28-38. Zhou Xiwu (1919).

military garrison.⁶⁶ One contemporary observer's take on the creation of Qinghai province actually questioned its status as a coherent administrative unit. His somewhat acerbic comment was that "back when Qinghai became a province, there was no [one that] researched [the matter] fully. [They] only took the original 7 counties of the [former] Xining Circuit and attached large but independent (Ch. wu dang) Mongol and Tibetan pastoral areas, to force it to become a province."⁶⁷ It is quite interesting that this commenter described the integration of multiple administrative geographies as "forcing" the creation of Qinghai province. As the next section will show, military power was a key to the rise of the Ma family militarists, and the creation of Qinghai province itself.

Xining Ma Family: Frontier Militarists in a Transfrontier Province

When telling the history of the Xining Ma family, most historians start their accounts after the northwestern Muslim rebellion, one of the horribly destructive mid-nineteenth century rebellions that nearly brought down the Qing dynasty.⁶⁸ This is indeed a logical beginning to the story of the northwestern Sino-Muslim militarists. Not only do local historical sources devote substantial attention to this event,⁶⁹ but also it was a watershed in the history of northwestern China and Chinese Islam.⁷⁰ Ma Zhan'ao, Sino-Muslim military commander of Hezhou, after defeating Qing general Zuo Zongtang in 1871, immediately surrendered his forces and declared loyalty to the Qing. With Qing

⁶⁶ Qinghai sheng minzheng ting (1932), 1. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 497-498.

⁶⁷ Chang Jiang (Fan Xitian), *Zhongguo de xibei jiao* [China's northwest corner], (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1936), 145.

⁶⁸ Hunsberger (1978) and Lipman (1983), 294 are good examples of this.

⁶⁹ Yang Zhiping (1910), QHDFJZWZ, 164, 186-191, 204-210. Yao Jun (1930), QHDFJZWZ, 736, 762-764, 768-769, 800-803. Zhang Zuozhuo (1932), XTZHGBXB, 10b.

⁷⁰ Hodong Kim, *Holy War in China: The Muslim Rebellion and State in Chinese Central Asia, 1864-1877* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

recognition of his authority in Hezhou, Zhan'ao passed his position onto his son, Ma Anliang. Ma Haiyan (1837-1900), founder of the Xining Ma lineage and father of Ma Qi and Ma Lin, was a subordinate to Ma Zhan'ao and his son Anliang. The northwestern Muslim between in the 1860s and 1870s time gave Ma Zhan'ao a chance to prove his loyalty, and usefulness, to the Qing Dynasty; intra-Muslim violence in 1895 allowed Ma Qi the same opportunity. By siding with the Qing and quelling the Sino-Muslim sectarian violence, Ma Qi secured imperial approval for his military position in Xining.⁷¹

There had been a major Qing military presence in Xining since the Shunzhi Emperor (1638-1661) stationed twelve thousand soldiers there in 1658. Although the number of soldiers would decrease over the course of the Qing, Xining remained an important military outpost.⁷² This was the same garrison that the Qinghai Affairs Commissioner ("amban," Ch. Qinghai banshi dachen) had used to govern Mongol Banners and Tibetan chieftains and monasteries under the Qing. The Ma-family militarists built their power base out of the military garrison in Xining. The new Republican government named Ma Qi as Xining Garrison Commander (Xining zhen zong bing) in 1912. Two years later in 1914, the Beiyang Republican government appointed him to the new post of Mongol and Tibetan Pacification Commissioner (Meng Zang xuanwei shi). At the same time, Ma Qi received the title of Xining Affairs High Official (Xining banshi zhangguan), thus beginning the process of concentrating military and political power in the hands of the Ma family. This process continued into 1915 when

⁷¹ Lipman (1983), 295, 298-300.

⁷² Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 349-351.

he built the foundations of the Sino-Muslim Ninghai army that would come to dominate the province and much of northwestern China.⁷³

Ma Qi used his Ninghai Army to project his power from Xining into southern Gansu in the following years. In 1917 and 1918 he sent troops into southern Gansu province to force an end to hostilities between two Tibetan leaders around Labrang Monastery.⁷⁴ Built in 1770, Labrang Monastery (Ch. Labuleng si) was one of the centers of the Gelug Buddhist sect in Amdo and northwestern China. With several thousand monks in residence,⁷⁵ Labrang was a religious, cultural, economic, and political locus of power, and one that Ma Qi would repeatedly attempt to bring to heel. In 1921 the famed explorer Eric Teichmann observed that Labrang's monastic leadership had recently fallen "under the influence of Mahomadens of Ho Chou [sic]."⁷⁶ Hezhou, current Linxia in Gansu province, was Ma Bufang's family home. Beginning with Ma Qi's early military appointments just after the fall of the Qing Dynasty, Ma family political power rested on their ability to project military power into the pastoral peripheries of what would become Qinghai province.⁷⁷

The importance of frontier military control to the careers Qinghai's future leaders is evident in the pattern of the Ma family cutting their teeth in military appointments to control "restive" Tibetan regions.⁷⁸ Ma Qi named his younger brother, Ma Lin, as the

⁷³ YSJSJ 1, 1.

⁷⁴ YSJSJ 1, 11-14.

⁷⁵ Sheng Jingxin, "Jiefang qian chaungban 'guoli Guoluo xuexiao' de jingguo" [Process of setting up the 'national Guoluo school' before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 17 (1988), 115-124.

⁷⁶ Eric Teichmann, *Travels of a Consular Official in North-west China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 144.

⁷⁷ Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 54-55.

⁷⁸ Hunsberger (1978), 33 also recognizes the important role that military experience played in the careers of Ma Haiyan and his son Ma Qi.

Yushu Defense Brigade Officer (*Yufang zhidui siling*) in 1915 and the “Conquer Guoluo Officer” (*Zheng Guoluo siling*) in 1920. Ma Lin would become provincial governor upon Ma Qi’s death in August, 1931. Similarly, one of Ma Bufang’s early positions was the officer in charge of the Qinghai Southern Border Region Garrison Commander (*Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei siling*) from 1932 onwards.⁷⁹ The Ma family’s power certainly grew out of its military command, and the family’s three provincial governors all began their careers commanding troops in the Tibetan pastoral regions that constitute the majority of the province. Ma Biao, who gained nationwide fame leading Qinghai troops in battle against the Japanese in late 1937, was also appointed to the command of the Yushu Defense Brigade (*Yushu zhidui siling*) in 1931.

Conclusion

Qinghai is a name of one of the largest lakes in Eurasia as well as the surrounding province in the People’s Republic of China. As such, Qinghai signifies both a geographical and administrative meaning. While Qinghai Lake, Kokonor in its Mongolian incarnation, certainly predates written history, Qinghai did not become a province in its own right until 1929. Yet Qinghai also had an administrative history, as Xining had been an imperial frontier garrison for centuries and remained a sub-provincial political and economic center in Gansu province after 1911. Kokonor was and is a transitional zone between pastoralism of the Qinghai-Tibetan highlands and dry agriculture common to northwestern China—an ecological frontier conditioned by a

⁷⁹ Cui, Zhang, and Du, 901-911.

complex topography and resulting climate patterns. Xining represented an administrative frontier—the edge of direct political control by the imperial, and then national, center.

When Ma Bufang officially took over the reigns of provincial government on that day in June of 1936, he was the next in a long line of military and political leaders in Xining tasked with overseeing the relationships between settled agriculture and mobile pastoralism, Chinese style political administration and indirect, tribal rule. Like his father and uncle before him, he was certainly a military man first and foremost—a warlord or militarist, depending on one’s political perspective. He and his family were also Sino-Muslims, an aspect of their personal identities that played a key role in developing their local support and the ways in which Chinese authorities perceived their rule. Previous scholarship has focused on these two important aspects of the Ma family—the military and Sino-Muslim nature of their rule. But that is not the whole story.

In his discussion on the autonomous borderlands and the limits of GMD state authority, James Leibold takes a comparative look at different military and political powerbases in Chinese borderlands. Noting that state and nation building took place at the same time in China, Leibold calls for a reassessment of the relationship between regionalism and national sovereignty. In this discussion, Leibold contrasts the military regimes of Fu Zuoyi in Suiyuan and Liu Wenhui in Xikang with Ma Bufang in Qinghai. Following Friedman, Leibold characterizes the autonomous regimes of Fu and Liu as “‘parasitic’ or ‘predatory’ polities within the seams of large states and empires.” Conversely, Leibold sees the “Sino-Muslim warlords of Gansu” as something of an anomaly because of their “ethnic self-interest intersected with the movement for regional

autonomy.”⁸⁰ Lipman’s work has also shown that the convergence of ethnic and national interests was essential to the northwestern Ma militarists’ ability to maintain a kind of cultural autonomy while politically drawing closer to China.⁸¹

By analyzing the topographical, ecological, ethnic, and administrative frontiers within Qinghai, this chapter has sought to deepen the understanding of the Xining Ma family by discussing their role as frontier militarists controlling, and helping to build, and transfrontier province. By shifting the analytical focus from the militarist to the province, this chapter also hopes to move beyond “warlord studies” of the 1970s and 1980s.

John Fitzgerald’s rethinking of the relationship between the provincialism and Chinese nationalism in the twentieth century offers a more fruitful way to understand the Ma militarists and Qinghai province. He suggest that “provincialism would be best described as neither hostile to nationalism nor transitional to it, nor even embedded or clustered within in it, but as an *aspect* of nationalism—an integral part of the processes involved in creating the modern Chinese state.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Leibold, 77-78.

⁸¹ Lipman (1983).

⁸² John Fitzgerald, “Administration and Autonomy: A History of Bureaucratic Provincialism in 20th Century China,” Shu-min Huang and Cheng-Kuang Hsu, eds. *Imagining China: Regional Division and National Unity*, (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1999), 93.

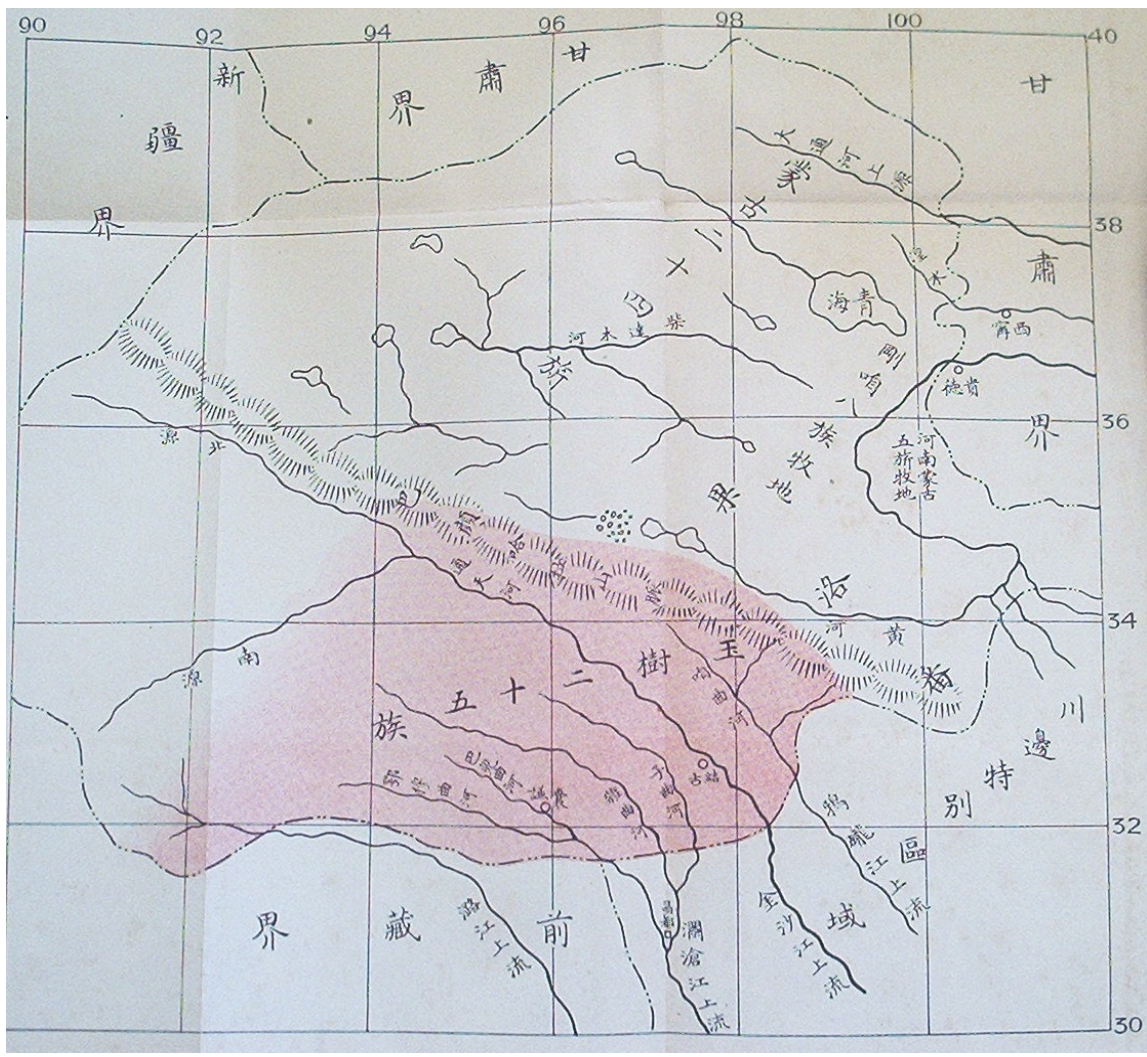


Figure 1.1: Map of river systems in Qinghai. Zhou Xiwu, *Yushu diaocha ji* [Record of an investigation of Yushu], (1920), 35.

Table 1.1: Qinghai Population Statistics, 1853-1949⁸³

Year	Area Included	Population
1853	Xining fu	874, 418
1908	Xining fu	361, 255
1921	Xining dao	450, 297
1931	Qinghai Province	637, 965
1936	Qinghai Province	1, 196, 054
1942	Qinghai Province	1, 512, 823
1949	Qinghai Province	1, 483, 282

Table 1.2: Qinghai Population by Ethnic Group, 1931 and 1949⁸⁴

Ethnic Group	Population, 1931	Pop. %, 1931	Population, 1949	Pop. %, 1949
Han	368, 390	54.84 %	709, 200	49.6 %
Tibetan	111, 028	16.53 %	438, 500	28.8 %
Hui	121, 476	18.08 %	231, 859	15.2 %
Tu	36, 552	5.44 %	47, 891	3.1 %
Mongol	20, 150	2.99 %	22, 474	1.5 %
Salar	14, 222	2.12 %	25, 184	1.7 %
Kazakh	0	0	955	0.1 %
Total	671, 809		1, 476, 100	

⁸³ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 746-747. N.B. Qinghai provincial government only began recording province-wide population statistics in 1944.

⁸⁴ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 748-749.

Table 1.3: Administrative Regions of Qinghai, 1725-1946

Year	Region ⁸⁵	Distance / direction from XN ⁸⁶	Elevation	Inhabitants
1725	Xining	0	7,464 ft/ 2,250m	Han, Hui,
1725	Ledu	130 li E	1,900? m	Han, Hui, Tibetan
1761	Datong	110 li N		Han, Hui
1913	Guide	180 li S	2,200 m	Han, Hui, Tibetan
1913	Huangyuan	90 li W		Han, Hui
1913	Xunhua	270 li SE	1,800 m	Han, Hui, Salar, Tibetan
1929	Gonghe	280 li SW	2,835 m	Han, Hui, Tibetan
1929	Menyuan	200 li N	2,800 m	Han, Hui
1929	Tongren	440 li SE	2,480 m	Han, Hui, Tibetan
1929	Yushu	1900 li SW	3,681 m	Tibetan
1930	Dulan	1,020 li W	3,202 m	
1930	Huzhu	90 li NE	2,945 m	
1930	Minhe	170 li E	1,780 m	
1931	Hualong	180 li SE		Han, Hui, Salar, Tibetan
1933	Nangqian	1900+ li SW		Tibetan
1935	Tongde	180+ li S		Tibetan
1938	Chengduo	1000+ li SW		Tibetan
1943	Haiyan	110+ li NW	3,080 m	Han, Hui, Tibetan, Mongol
1943	Xinghai	600+ li SW		Han, Tibetan
1946	Huangzhong	70? li S		Han, Hui

⁸⁵ Years and regions drawn from Qinghai shengzhi zhengfu zhi bianmu weiyuanhui, ed. *Qinghai shengzhi zhengshi zhi zhongbian sheng zhengfu chugao* [Qinghai provincial gazetteer government gazetteer, initial draft], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1996), 23.

⁸⁶ Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu (1933), "Qinghai Mengqi yi lanbiao [Table of Qinghai's Mongol Banners].

Chapter Two

Fighting for the Frontier: The 1932 Qinghai-Tibetan Borderland War in Yushu

Cai Zuozhen stood at the summit of a mountain overlooking the village of Duolongduo in the southwestern highlands Qinghai province, and gazed down at the valley far beneath him. As he watched the snaking billows of campfire smoke, he was reminded of the calmness of peasant cooking fires during a brief respite from laboring in the fields.¹ Cai's vivid recollection of such pastoral tranquility is more poignant in light of all he had to look past in order to find peace in the scene below—the reality of the small faction of Qinghai provincial troops huddled there, besieged by an overwhelming number of Tibetan soldiers encamped around them; the battle to rescue the encircled provincial forces only moments away; and the unfavorable odds of he and forty provincial troops standing against such superior enemy numbers.

It was April 3, 1932, just over a week after an army of Tibetans had crossed the banks of the Jinsha (T. Drichu) River, at the time considered to mark the boundary between Xikang and Qinghai provinces. However, since the mid-1910s, control of the region had been openly challenged by an expansive Tibet's occupation of northwestern Xikang province, reclaiming the city they knew as Qamdo (Ch. Changdu), of great strategic importance in connecting Lhasa with points east. In the spring of 1932, Tibetan forces again resurged into the northwestern frontiers of China, this time into Yushu (T. Yul shul) county in southern Qinghai province.

¹ Cai Zuozhen, "Qing Zang zhanyi zhong wo de jingli (My experiences in the Qinghai-Tibetan war)," Qinghai sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, ed. *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 2 (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu wenyuanhui, 1964), 44.

The daunting geography of the Tibetan plateau restricted physical access to Tibet from China. One of the few routes ran southwest from Qinghai's provincial capital of Xining, up through its southern borderland of Yushu.¹ At times called the "doorway to Qinghai," Yushu had been a vital military route for maintaining control of the amorphous frontier between northwestern China and Tibet since the early Qing dynasty (1644-1911).² Although the route to Tibet from Sichuan had grown in importance since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Yushu road to Tibet remained of the highest strategic importance to Xining's military authorities.³ It was here, in the southeastern reaches of Yushu, that Cai Zuozhen, a second-generation hereditary chieftain (Ch. baihu, battalion commander) of the Buqing tribe in Yushu, found himself lost in thought before a battle.⁴

In his oral history recounting his experiences in this borderland war, Cai Zuozhen spoke of agriculture and cooking fires. These seemingly mundane recollections can be seen to reflect the goals of the Qinghai provincial government, and arguably, the very territorial imperative of the modern nation-state. Like all states in the epoch of

¹ One could travel to Tibet through two overland routes in Qinghai, both of which split at roughly at the southeastern corner of Qinghai lake. The first route led southwest from Qinghai lake, through Golok (Ch. Guoluo), past Yushu's county seat Jiegu, to Nangchen (Ch. Nangqian), towards Qamdo (Ch. Changdu). It then met with the road that went west from Sichuan/Xikang and approached Lhasa from the east. The other route continued west from Qinghai lake through the Tsaidam Basin and Dulan county, and approached Lhasa from the northeast. This second route largely corresponds with the recently opened Xining-Lhasa leg of the Beijing-Lhasa railway. Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu fushe bianshi yuekan she, ed. *Yushu jinshi ji* [Record of recent events in Yushu], (Xining: Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu fushe bianshi yuekan she, 1933), part 1, 13. Hereafter, YSJSJ. Great Britain Foreign Office Historical Section, "Tibet," *Peace Handbooks, vol. 12: China, Japan, Siam, no. 70*, (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920; reprint Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1973), 45.

² YSJSJ 1, 24.

³ Wang (2011), position 800.

⁴ Cai Zuozhen, "Qingmo zhi jiefang qianxi youguan Yushu diqu junzheng qingkuang de huiyi" [Recollections regarding the Yushu region's military and political situation from the late Qing to just before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1, (Xining: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi Qinghai sheng weiyuan hui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, 1963), 23. Wu Jun, "Huiyi Qing Zang jiu fen he zhaofu Yushu Laxiu deng buluo de jingguo" [Remembering the process of the Qinghai-Tibetan conflict and offering amnesty to Laxiu and other tribes in Yushu], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 7, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1980), 3.

territoriality,⁵ the Qinghai provincial government sought to impose hard, administrative boundaries on a complex and borderless region, thus preventing the nomadic inhabitants from “largely going where they please” (ji suibian). They called this process “turning the wilds (ye) into borders (jiang),”⁶ an essential aspect of the territorial nation-state’s prerogative of “establishing official posts and defining regions” (guojia she guan fen qu).⁷ Cai Zuozhen’s comfort imagining farmers’ cooking fires thus acquires greater poignancy in the context of the provincial government’s advocacy of colonization by Han Chinese or Hui Muslims as “cultivation where there is no government” (wu zhengfu zhi fuzhi).⁸

This chapter examines the processes through which the Qinghai provincial government under the Ma family militarists utilized armed force to maintain control over Qinghai’s southern borderland, Yushu.⁹ American historians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron employ the term “borderland” to denote both a geographic region and a temporal stage in the transition from empire to nation-state. When a frontier, defined as “a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined,” comes under military and political pressure from two or more expanding powers, a borderland is born. A borderland, however, is not yet a bordered land, and

⁵ Charles Maier, “Forum Essay: Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *The American Historical Review* 105.3 (June 2000), cited in Leibold, 44.

⁶ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzhengting, ed., *Zui jin zhi Qinghai* [Most recent Qinghai], Xin yaxiya xuehui bianjiang congshu 12, (Nanjing: Xin yaxiya xuehui 1932), 34. Hereafter, ZJZQH. Wang (2011) finds that Sichuan provincial authorities had similar goals during their early 20th century expansion into that province’s Kham Tibetan borderlands. Position 352.

⁷ YSJSJ 1, 1.

⁸ ZJZQH, 238.

⁹ For a meticulous study of the extent, and limits, of the Nationalist government’s reach into the provinces during the Nanjing Decade, see Hung-mao Tien, *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China, 1927-1937*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972).

therefore offers the opportunity for the indigenous people to manipulate the encroaching military powers in order to maintain their influence.¹⁰

The Yushu borderland was contested ground specifically because multiple groups claimed Yushu's space as their own place—Beijing or Nanjing on the Chinese national level, Gansu / Qinghai or Sichuan / Xikang on the Chinese provincial level, Lhasa from the Tibetan perspective, and last but certainly not the least, the mixture of Tibetan tribal chieftains and monastic elites for whom this *place*, whatever its name, was the center.¹¹

Much of the history of Republican China was focused on the military, diplomatic, and propaganda struggle for territorial integrity and national consolidation. Thus, the new Republican government's decision to assume the debts of the former Qing dynasty can be seen not only as an effort to gain international acceptance as the legitimate Chinese state, but also to retain the geopolitical borders of the Qing imperium.¹² Recent scholarship has shown that the struggling Republic of China under the Beiyang government (1912-1927) chose to maintain the indirect administrative structures of the former Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).¹³ Even after the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek "reunited" the country and ruled from Nanjing (1928-1937), it remained unable to effectively back up its Tibet policies with military force. The power of Chinese public opinion regarding Chinese territory, however, demanded that the government reclaim regions "lost" since

¹⁰ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104.3 (June, 1999), 815-816.

¹¹ David Harvey's discussion of the difference between space and place influence this discussion. "The Currency of Space-Time," in *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 248-290. Prasenjit Duara has also used Harvey's space/place approach in *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

¹² Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing became China," Joseph W. Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, eds. *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

¹³ Gray Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists and the Making of Modern China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 132.

the end of the Qing. In the view of one recent scholar, the Nationalist state had to craft a “political imagination that was engineered to maintain its Nationalist façade and political legitimacy.”¹⁴ Faced with losing former imperial dependencies like Mongolia and Tibet, yet still unable to find an ideological justification for nationalizing minority groups in frontier regions, Chinese statesmen and intellectuals turned to a “common spatial imaginary” of what China should be—a nation-state occupying the territory of the former Qing empire.¹⁵

In the absence of effective Chinese political control of Tibet during the Republican period, implementation of national policy was often left to regional actors such as Fu Zuoyi in Suiyuan and Liu Wenhui in Xikang.¹⁶ Along the Qinghai/Amdo frontier, Sino-Muslim leaders like Ma Bufang projected military power from the provincial capital, Xining, throughout the region. Otherwise excellent recent treatments of Sino-Tibetan relations during the Republic have ignored Xining’s importance as a gateway, mediator, and enforcer of Republican China’s Tibet policy. This can be attributed to scholarly decisions to focus on interactions between centralizing administrations in Nanjing and Lhasa,¹⁷ or as a consequence of Sichuan/Kham regional concentration.¹⁸ This chapter, then, seeks a remedy by highlighting the ways in which Qinghai and its Sino-Muslim armies also shaped interactions between Han Chinese and Tibetans during the first half of the twentieth century. Uradyn E. Bulag has suggested that

¹⁴ Lin Hsiao-ting, *Tibet and Nationalist China’s Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-1949* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 12-13. Lin specifically describes Sino-Tibetan interactions during the Nationalist period as China and its *southwestern* borderlands. I argue, on the other hand, that such a conceptualization elides the essential role that China’s northwestern borderland, i.e. Sino-Muslim leaders in Xining, played in implementing Nanjing’s policy.

¹⁵ Leibold (2007), 45-46.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

¹⁷ Lin (2006).

¹⁸ Tuttle (2005). Leibold (2007), especially Chapter 2. Wang (2011).

the key to maintaining central government support of Sino-Muslim militarists in Xining was their ability to ensure Mongol and Tibetan loyalty China.¹⁹ While this chapter supports Bulag's analysis of Ma Bufang's role vis-à-vis the central government, it hopes to expand the discussion beyond the politics involved in ceremonial observances of the Kokonor cult.

If empires pinpoint centers while nation-states construct borders,²⁰ the Qinghai-Tibetan border war of 1932 in Yushu county can serve as a microcosm for the larger and better-known tale of how the burgeoning Chinese nation-state interacted with its borderlands. Too often this process is cast as the inevitable march of central forces to the periphery, and the nationalist historical narrative subsumes and obscures sub-national alternatives. In order to guard against such triumphant teleology, this chapter does not assume the inevitability that present-day China's territory nearly matches that of the Qing Empire at its greatest extent, nor does it accept that the reified Qing Imperium is what China has always been.²¹ While knowledge of these events as revealed in historical scholarship, nationalist narratives, and cultural myth makes at least some teleology unavoidable, it should not be overlooked that this historical moment was fraught with contingency and consequent uncertainty.

At least until the opening shots of this round of borderland warfare in 1932, Qinghai had barely been able to retain control of Yushu in the face of the daunting array

¹⁹ Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols at China's Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), especially the chapter entitled "Modernity at the Edge: Muslim 'Feudal' Rule and Minzu tuanjie through the Kokonur Cult." Uradyn E. Bulag, "Going Imperial: Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism and Nationalisms in China and Inner Asia," Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young, eds., (2006), 260-295.

²⁰ Private correspondence from Pamela Kyle Crossley to Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Sino-Muslims in Northwest China*, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997), xxvii, note 22.

²¹ Lipman (1997), xxii.

of obstacles confronting them. These challenges to effective governance were rooted in the character and circumstance of the land itself. Geographically, the region's vast distances and rough terrain hampered communication. Culturally, close religious and ethnic ties to Tibet weakened Qinghai provincial influence and authority, and the mobile nomadic populations made it difficult to even consistently locate subjects. Politically, the provincial government was limited by a perennial shortage of government funding, threatened by Tibetan territorial claims that were backed with British arms, and further entangled by the complex network of allegiances among local religious elites and the various powers competing for influence of this borderland.

Like any historical research project, however, telling the tales of the conquered, the subaltern, the illiterate, or, in a word, the sub-national, still requires sources that can reflect their experiences and outlooks. The lessons taught by the "New Western" scholars of American history and the growing literature on frontiers and borderlands in the East Asian field offer promising frameworks through which to address these goals.²² These scholars have centered their investigations on the locale of the frontier, periphery, or borderland and the inhabitants thereof. For example, James Millward's broader formulation of the Qing frontier recognizes the importance of New Western historians, and views the frontier as both a process involving state expansion and a place where this

²² Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Turnerians All: The Dream of a Helpful History in an Intelligible World," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995). Lipman (1997). James A. Millward, "The Qing Frontier," in Gail Hershatter, Emily Honig, Jonathan N. Lipman, and Randall Stross, eds., *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 116. James A. Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998). Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

expansion takes place.²³ Similarly, Brett Walker's study of the Ainu people in the northern reaches of Tokugawa Japan boldly asserts that "with the focus now on place rather than excessively on process, borderland history is no longer simply the tale of the conquerors."²⁴ Prasenjit Duara's study of competing visions of authenticity with respect to the Manchurian "frontier" also serves as an example of scholarly sensitivity to the multiple meanings a single region may hold according to different nationalist histories.²⁵

Thus, while this chapter hopes to portray the dizzying complexities of a contested frontier region wedged between expansive military powers, this does not seek to be a fully multi-vocal history. Rather, it concentrates on one important story as it pertains to the formation of the peripheral province of Qinghai, as it was trying to define its place within the shifting provincial and national borders of the nascent Republic of China. In order to do so, this chapter focuses on *Recent Events in Yushu*, an official publication by the Southern Qinghai Borderland Garrison, of which Ma Bufang was the commander. Published in June 1933, *Yushu jinshi ji* includes Qinghai's official view on their history trying to control Yushu from the end of the Qing dynasty, and collections of communications between Qinghai's provincial government, Ma Bufang's military garrison, Qinghai military officers on the ground in Yushu, the central government, Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui, the Dalai Lama, and Tibetan military commanders. Grey Tuttle, Lin Hsiao-ting, and James Leibold have all discussed this conflict in previous publications, but have only focused on Nanjing, the Mongol and Tibetan Affairs Commission, Lhasa, and Xikang's roles in this drama. This chapter hopes to contribute to

²³ James A. Millward (1997), 116. Millward cites ethno-historian Jack D. Forbes on "inter-group situation."

²⁴ Brett L. Walker, *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion 1590-1800*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 9.

²⁵ Prasenjit Duara (2003).

the growing body of scholarship on Republican China's theories, policies and strategies by bringing the view from Xining into the discussion.

Thus this tale of Yushu is a story about carving place out of space, on multiple levels of meaning. On the ground, the geography and climate became actors in and of themselves, shaping the way people lived, fought, and attempted to possess land. The land itself became territory in the eyes of the various power holders, and thus this was also a competition between (would-be) governments utilizing rhetorical and military power to control this borderland. It is war itself that creates and ends borderlands—expansive militaries fighting over a frontier forms a borderland, and conversely, military victory serves to establish hardened borders.²⁶ War was returning to this borderland, but one might well ask what exactly they were fighting over.

Space: Geography

Yushu is a high, mountainous region of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau. The Tanggula Mountains form Yushu's southwestern boundary with Tibet. Northwestern Yushu, a largely inhabitable region, includes the famous Kekexili nature reserve and the recently opened railway from Xining to Lhasa. The main branch of the Kunlun mountains, which largely bisects Qinghai province into northern and southern portions, represented Yushu's northern boundary. A branch of the Kunlun range, the Bayanhar mountains, mark Yushu's northeastern edge.²⁷ Three of Asia's mightiest rivers have their sources in Yushu. The farthest northeastern section of Yushu drains into the Yellow River's flow

²⁶ Adelman and Aron, 818.

²⁷ YSJSJ 2, 33.

towards Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu. Central and southeastern Yushu feed the Mekong and Yangzi headwaters, the Zhaqu and Tongtian rivers, respectively.²⁸ The Qinghai provincial government likewise framed its discussion of Yushu's geography according to the dominant topographical features in the region—mountain chains and river systems.²⁹ Provincial sources went to great lengths to detail the mountain passes that connected Yushu to important locales surrounding the region, such as Lhasa, Changdu (T. Qamdo) in Xikang, Sichuan, Xinjiang, and Xining, as well as the equally problematic passes within Yushu itself.³⁰

The geography of the area constituted a significant obstacle for any potential government, primarily in the limitations inherently posed to both communications and transportation. Statements about the difficulty of traveling the region abound in provincial government sources, generally as a justification for not having implemented a policy goal. According to the provincial government, “barbarian lands do not have *li*, only the distance horses and oxen can travel in a day,” which in 1932 was calculated to be 80-90 *li* and 50-60 *li*, respectively.³¹ The journey between the provincial capital and the Yushu county seat, the main thoroughfare for government control, totaled over 1,620 *li*, and crossed through expansive grasslands, rugged mountain roads, and precipitous cliffs. In 1932 the government still calculated this route according to major temples or

²⁸ Zhou Xiwu, *Yushu diaocha ji* [Record of investigating Yushu], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1920), v. 1, 25-33. Hereafter, YSDCJ. Qinghai sheng difangzhi bianmu weiyuanhui, eds. “Chang Jiang, Huanghe, Lancang jiangyuanqu lizhi tu” [Map of location of the sources of the Yangzi, Yellow, and Mekong rivers], *Qinghai shengzhi 7: Chang Jiang Huanghe Lancang jiangyuanzhi* [Qinghai provincial gazetteer 7: gazetteer of the sources of the Yangzi, Yellow, and Mekong rivers], (Zhengzhou: Huanghe shuili chubanshe, 2000), map insert. Andreas Gruschke, “Dokham (mdo khams)—The Eastern Part of the Tibetan Plateau,” excerpt from *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: Amdo, volume 1. The Qinghai Part of Amdo* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, n.d.), 1.

²⁹ YSJSJ 2, 33-43.

³⁰ YSJSJ 2, 43-45.

³¹ YSJSJ 2, 46.

horse and oxen stops.³² In fact, Qinghai's provincial government only completed the arduous and dangerous construction of the "highway" between Xining and Yushu over twelve years later, in October 1944.³³

The provincial Construction Department's account of building the Xining-Yushu highway included a detailed map of the road's route that details the rise in elevation from Xining (roughly 2,300 meters of above sea level) to Jiegu, the Yushu county seat (roughly 3,700 meters in elevation). But it was a much more difficult route that the starting and ending elevations indicate. Traveling southwest from Xining, one must pass the Riyue Mountains (roughly 3,800 meters) before reaching the southeast edge of Qinghai Lake (roughly 2,900 meters). Continuing in a southwesterly direction, the road ascends through the Ela Mountains (4,700 meters), before winding through the northwestern leg of the Amne Machin range. From the Amne Machin until the Bayanhar mountains, elevations vary from 3,800 meters to 4,500 meters above sea level. The Bayanhar mountains peak at just under 5,000 meters above sea level. After crossing this range, the road slowly grades down to the Yangzi's upper reaches, the Tongtian River, at over 3,600 meters above sea level.³⁴

Since Mongolia's adoption of Tibetan Buddhism hundreds of years before, these long routes between Xining and Lhasa had been an important link between Tibet and Mongolia, and Sino-Muslims had acted as brokers and translators between the

³² YSJSJ 2, 46.

³³ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 725-726.

³⁴ Qinghai sheng zhengfu jiansheting, ed. *Qinghai jianshe gaikuang* [Overall situation of Qinghai's construction], (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhengfu jiansheting, 1946), Map insert "Qing Zang gonglu" [Qinghai-Tibet road]. Qinghai sheng kexue zhishuting and Qinghai sheng cehuiju, eds., *Qinghai sheng dituce* [Maps of Qinghai province], (Xi'an: Xi'an ditu chubanshe, 2003), 1-2.

agricultural zones around Xining and the pastoral highlands.³⁵ Not only did Geluk Tibetan Buddhism travel along this key transportation route between Mongolian and Kham Tibetan regions, the thoroughfare also served as an important north-south trade route.³⁶ Mongols and Tibetans, including some from Yushu, made long journeys down the mountains to bring products for sale in northeastern Qinghai. One small town just east of Qinghai Lake and the Riyue Mountains, Dangge'er or present-day Huangyuan, greatly benefited from its location along these trade routes. Local gazetteers emphasized Huangyuan's profitable role as frontier trading entrepot, at times calling it "Little Beijing."³⁷ One study from 1920 estimated that Huangyuan's trade in pastoral products—such as horses, yaks, sheep, furs and skins, mushrooms, caterpillar fungus, and gold, among other items—amounted to nearly eight hundred thousand silver *liang* per year.³⁸

Once the beginnings of a mechanized weaving industry opened in Lanzhou in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Qinghai's pastoralists began raising an increasing number of sheep.³⁹ Although statistics on the number of livestock in Qinghai and the income resulting from the wool trade are sketchy, pastoral products became a key source of income for the province's pastoralists and authorities in Xining. One contemporary source claimed that Qinghai had the highest production of wool in all of China.⁴⁰ Other studies from the middle of the 1930s found that the Yushu region had the second highest

³⁵ Lipman (1997), 13-14.

³⁶ Tuttle (2005), Figure 2.1 Commercial Relationship Between Tibet and Its Neighbors, Figure 2.2 Tibetan Buddhist (Gelukpa) Influence on the Mongols.

³⁷ Yang Zhiping, comp. *Dan'ge'er ting zhi* [gazetteer of Dan'ge'er ting]. Li Qing, ed. Qinghai difang jiuzhi wu zhong (five kinds of old Qinghai gazetteers), (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 127, .

³⁸ Zhou Xiwu (1920), 22-23.

³⁹ Cui and Zhang (2008), 104.

⁴⁰ Tu Jie, "Qinghai de yangmao ye" [Qinghai's wool industry], *Xibei xiangdao* 20 (October 1936), 392-393.

volume of wool produced in the province at 4 million jin a year.⁴¹ Yushu was second only to Dulan county in the Qaidam basin of northwest Qinghai, but that region will be discussed in Chapter 3. The upper reaches of the Yellow and Yangzi (Tongtian / Jinsha) rivers likewise gave traders an easier mode of transporting wool from the highlands of Yushu. But the Yushu region was also a key “commercial pivot” in the tea and wool trade along the Jinsha River, the upper reaches of the Yangzi River that flowed between Yushu and Tibetan regions in Xikang province.⁴² Although Chinese sources from the period tend to refer to mobile pastoralism and the people of frontier regions as poor, backwards, and in need of the guiding hand of a modernizing state, there was wealth in these highlands. But in order to control the region, and thereby benefit from the wealth contained there, Qinghai’s provincial government had to not only contend with the region’s challenging geography and close ties down the Yangzi river to Xikang, but also with a tribes of Tibetan inhabitants—the “Twenty Five Peoples of Yushu.”

Place: Monastic Cores and Pastoral Peripheries of Northern Kham

Qinghai provincial government publications such as *Recent Events in Yushu* and *Most Recent Qinghai* offer insight into the government’s views of the land they claimed to control and the people they sought to govern. First and foremost, even into the early Republican period the rulers in Xining perceived Yushu as a “barbarian” (*fan*) region in which pastoral nomadism dominated over agricultural pursuits, a classification replete

⁴¹ Lu Guilin, “Qinghai yangmao chanqu ji chan’e yi lanbiao” [Chart on Qinghai’s wool-producing regions and their production amounts], *Shiji kaifa Xibei de chubu* (June 1935), 2.

⁴² Lin (2006), 59. Ma Wei, lecture, July 7, 2009.

with the cultural chauvinism implied in the “barbarian / civilized” logic of difference.⁴³

The Civil Affairs Bureau of the provincial government summarized the situation:

“Qinghai is certainly a boundless, uncultivated area with the five nationalities living together. Although the land is fertile, the people are still simple and unadorned...and customs are still distinct.”⁴⁴ Chinese sources can give the impression that Yushu was an endless steppe, inhabited by people wandering aimlessly. The reality was, of course, much more complicated.

One of the most influential means of visualizing China’s economic and geographic complexity is G. William Skinner’s macro-regional system. Unfortunately, Qinghai, Yushu, and Tibet extend beyond both the northwestern and Upper Yangzi macro-regions that Skinner identified within late imperial China. Jonathan Lipman has criticized this framework’s placement of Gansu as a “periphery of a periphery,” preferring to conceptualize the region as a mosaic of “multiple cores, multiple peripheries” delineated by ethnic and linguistic differences.⁴⁵ Combining these conceptualizations of center and periphery offers a useful lens through which to assess Yushu’s social, economic, and cultural landscape—monastic cores and pastoral peripheries. Yushu’s economic geography had monasteries occupying the richest land and concentrating

⁴³ One of the clearest statements of this “barbarian/civilized” duality comes in the “Xuanni Qinghai Meng Zang gezu jihua shu” [Plan for pacifying the Mongolian and Tibetan peoples of Qinghai], ZJZQH, 381-388.

⁴⁴ ZJZQH, 19. On the provincial level, these ethnic groups were Hui, Han, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Monguor. The “25 peoples of Yushu” uses the same term, *zu*. In order to clarify the provincial from county levels of belonging, I have chosen to refer to the *zu* in Yushu as “peoples” in contrast to the five “ethnicities / nationalities” that inhabited Qinghai as a whole. It is hoped that this translation will clarify the fact that the peoples of Yushu were considered different tribes of Tibetans.

⁴⁵ Lipman, 14, following Xiao Gongchuan’s famous metaphor. G. William Skinner, ed. *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), 214-215. Wang (2011), position 806 also rethinks Skinner’s scheme in relation to Kham in the early 20th century.

monetary, spiritual, and political power on the local scale and pastoral tribes migrating in the areas in between.

Roughly two hundred *li* along the only southeastern road from Yushu's county seat, Jiegu (T. Jyekundo / Gyegu), are the lands of the Surmang tribes (Ch. Su'ermang), known to the provincial government as Nangqian (T. Nangchen). Nestled in a valley and protected by a circular moat, the Gadan monastery enjoyed fertile land, thick forests, broad grasslands, and abundant fish and salt in near proximity.⁴⁶ Its beautiful scenery had apparently so touched the Fifth Dalai Lama as he returned from visiting the Shunzhi Emperor in 1650 that he had ordered the construction of the monastery.⁴⁷ Gadan monastery's location near mountains and water, as well as its proximity to the cluster of settlements nearby, were typical of the layouts of the nearly one hundred monasteries scattered throughout Yushu.⁴⁸ Monasteries were also the sites of many periodic markets for trade and gatherings throughout Yushu.⁴⁹ Tibetan Buddhist monasteries were much more than centers of religious devotion and study; they were also landowners with powers of taxation. For these reasons, Chinese Marxist historiography includes monastic elite within the aristocratic class.⁵⁰

Hereditary tribal leaders of the "Twenty-Five Peoples of Yushu" were the second network of political and economic authority in Yushu. Pastoral tribes who traversed the borderless regions called Yushu, Xikang, or Kham had confused outside observers. On a mission for the central government to solve the first round of Sichuan-Qinghai

⁴⁶ YSJSJ 1, photograph: "Zangfang shixing qinlue Yushu jiekou baohu zhi Ga'erdan si" [Gadan monastery, the protection of which was the Tibetan side's excuse for invading Yushu].

⁴⁷ Cai (1964), 41.

⁴⁸ ZJZQH, 323-332. YSJSJ 2, 50-56.

⁴⁹ Zhou Xiwu (1920), 29-30.

⁵⁰ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 758.

administrative conflicts in late 1912, Zhou Wuxue sought to disentangle the competing claims of Qinghai and Sichuan over the governance of the 25 peoples that inhabited Yushu (from Xining's perspective) or Longqing (from Sichuan's perspective). In an attempt to rectify historical ethnic labels for the nomads in the region, Zhou found that both Sichuan and Gansu⁵¹ had given two different names to the same ethnic groups. Thus the "25 peoples of Yushu" were identical to the "25 peoples of Longqing." History had handed down these specialized names (*zhuanming*) and old gazetteers had turned them into official names (*gongming*). Zhou concluded that the Sichuan and Gansu borders, Longqing and Yushu, respectively, "in reality were only one place, and there were not '25 peoples of Longqing' and a separate '25 peoples of Yushu.'"⁵² Thus the provincial government's experience in "naming" the ethnic groups of Yushu illuminates how "personal and collective identities, elusive and processural in all human societies, have proved particularly troublesome in frontier areas when modern states attempt to rigidify boundaries and classify people."⁵³

Despite the flurry of state-building activities since the founding of the Republic in 1912, including the establishment of new counties within the region, the tribal system continued through the early twentieth century. The Beijing government had invested Tibetan tribal leaders with political titles in 1916, continuing the Qing dynasty's system of indirect rule via local headmen. An estimation of households under each tribe determined their title, either company commander (Ch. *baihu*) or the battalion

⁵¹ YSJSJ 1, 10-14.

⁵² YSJSJ, 1, 4.

⁵³ Lipman (1997), xxiv-xxv.

commander (Ch. *qianhu*).⁵⁴ These tribal leaders were responsible for bi-annual taxes and periodic military conscription to authorities in Xining. Cai Zuozhen, the *baihu* of the Buqing tribe whose musings opened this chapter, was one such government-recognized tribal headman. Cai's family was originally from Huangyuan, in between Xining and the Riyue Mountains, but his father worked as a translator on Xining's tribute tax collection missions. Ma Qi had appointed him to his position in the Buqing tribe, a title passed on to his son.⁵⁵ Monasteries tended to occupy the most agriculturally productive lands and thus became centers for the mobile pastoral populations to gather and trade. In theory, tribes had clearly delineated grazing lands; the reality of tribal grazing rights, however, were much murkier in practice, especially as monasteries often occupied the best location within tribal grazing lands.

From at least the early 1920s, a conflict had festered between the Gadan monastery and the leaders of a local tribe over the control of neighboring fertile lands and the taxation of residents.⁵⁶ Through continuous years of strife, Greater Surmang (Ch. Da Su'ermang) *baihu* had relied on Xining's backing at the provincial level, while the leaders of the Gadan monastery turned to Tibet for support. Beginning in 1923, attempts by representatives of Ma Qi, Tibetans, Gadan monastery, and Greater Surmang tribe, a settlement was never reached.⁵⁷

Across the would-be border between Yushu and Xikang province, a similar monastic dispute had entangled Xikang and Tibet in military conflict. In 1928 violence

⁵⁴ Wang Xiuyu, position 1197. Please note that references to this source are refer to positions in the Amazon Kindle version.

⁵⁵ Cai Zuozhen (1963). Cui, Zhang, and Du, 758.

⁵⁶ Lipman (1997), 172.

⁵⁷ Cai, 41. Qinghai shengzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui ed. *Qinghai lishi jiyao* [Outline of Qinghai history], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 108.

had again broken out between the Flowery Sect Bairi monastery, backed by Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui, and Dajin lamasery, supported by Lhasa. On that occasion the complicated web of spiritual and political ties had pulled a Tibetan force east into Xikang province. Due to overwhelming Tibetan numbers and lack of preparation time on the part of Xikang's forces, the Dajin and its Tibetan backers prevailed, and they occupied all of the lands surrounding the monastery.⁵⁸

By December 1931, the situation in the Yushu / Kham borderland had grown extremely tense. The Tibetan military commander in Qamdo sent forces north up the Mekong River's upper reaches to the border with Qinghai province. He asserted Lhasa's ecclesiastical authority over Gadan Monastery, and demanded the unconditional withdrawal of all provincial forces from Yushu's southernmost regions.⁵⁹ In the early part of 1932, Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui struck back by sending troops to attack Dajin lamasery and other regions occupied by Tibetan forces in 1928. After two months of fighting in February and March of 1932, Tibetan forces could no longer hold their positions and fled to the northern shore of the Jinsha River.⁶⁰

Although Lin Hsiao-ting claims that the cause of the military conflict in Yushu during 1932 and 1933 was "of little significance,"⁶¹ in fact the competing ethnic, tribal, and religious loyalties in this region can illustrate just how difficult it was to effectively enforce the policies of Xining, Chengdu, Nanjing, or Lhasa. The ways in which the combatants in these monastic and tribal conflicts manipulated the political backing of

⁵⁸ Cai, 41-42.

⁵⁹ YSJSJ 1, 18. YSJSJ 2, 90.

⁶⁰ Cai, 42. The Jinsha River is the name for the Yangzi in Western Xikang/Sichuan. In Yushu, however, the same river is called the Tongtian River, and it flows just to the north of Yushu's county capital, Jiegu.

⁶¹ Lin (2006), 58.

Chengdu, Xining and Lhasa to further their own interests is characteristic of processes found in borderlands. In some ways, the complex geographies of political and religious power in this contested region hindered a unified Khampa resistance against the influence of military governments in Qinghai and Xikang. As Gray Tuttle demonstrates, Tibetans in the area were largely concerned with local matters, equally resisting Chinese and Tibetan nationalist reforms.⁶² Despite the obstacles to controlling, let alone governing, a “non-state space” such as this borderland,⁶³ there was no shortage of aspiring governments claiming Yushu as their territory.

Yushu: Contested Territory

The Tibetan commander’s demand that provincial troops leave the southern usual borderland in 1931 was another example of frequent conflicts over the control of this borderland since the early 20th century. Long interested in the lucrative Tibetan tea trade, British colonial interests had repeatedly attempted to negotiate an increasing level of control over Tibetan affairs. As the great game was winding to a close in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Anglo Russian rivalries over Tibet heated up.⁶⁴ Qing amban Zhang Yintang secured diplomatic successes during two rounds of negotiations with the British in 1904 and 1906, and tried to stretch diplomatically recognized suzerainty into sovereignty over Tibet. The Qing Dynasty tacked to a much more aggressive strategy with Zhao Erfeng’s military campaign into the Kham highlands and dissolution of tribal

⁶² Tuttle (2005), 52-56, 150.

⁶³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 187.

⁶⁴ Wendy Palace, “The Kozlov Expedition of 1907-10 and the Problem of Kokonor,” *Asian Affairs* 32.1 (2001), 20-29.

rule in favor of direct imperial administration.⁶⁵ Even before the fall of the Qing in 1911, the community of modern international nation-states was forcing a new form of territoriality into the Tibetan highlands, and Yushu was contested ground.

Before the ashes of the Qing Dynasty had settled, the young Republic of China faced a territorial crisis. Declaring their bonds to the Manchu emperor dissolved, Mongolian aristocracy and the Dalai Lama both declared themselves and their peoples independent from China.⁶⁶ The British stepped in to the borderland conflicts in Amdo and Kham, seeking to mediate a settlement at the Simla conference of 1913-1914. The British and Tibetan proposal would have divided the Sino-Tibetan borderlands into regions called Inner and Outer Tibet. This would be border followed the Western banks of the upper Yangzi River but crossed to the eastern banks just before Yushu's county seat, Jiegu (T. Gyegu / Jyekundo). The border of so-called Inner Tibet would have bisected Qinghai east of the source of the Yellow River. After continued fighting along the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in 1916 and 1917, the British again proposed the plan dividing Tibet in 1918 and 1919.⁶⁷ Both times Ma Qi strenuously opposed these proposals.⁶⁸

Territorial claims on Yushu could come from within the Republic of China as well. Since the Qing dynasty, the Xining Affairs Commissioner (*Xining banshi dachen*) and the Sichuan-Yunnan Border Affairs Commissioner (*Chuan-Dian bianwu dachen*)

⁶⁵ Tuttle, 43-51.

⁶⁶ Leibold, 40.

⁶⁷ For narratives of the conflicts from a Tibetan-British perspective, see Hugh E. Richardson, *Tibet and its History*, 2nd ed., (Boulder, CO and London: Shambala, 1984), 107-138; W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 246-273; Helmut Hoffmann, *Tibet: A Handbook*, (Bloomington, IN: Asian Research Institute, Research Center for the Language Sciences, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1975), 70-77; Alastair Lamb, *Tibet, China & India 1914-1950: A History of Imperial Diplomacy*, (Hertfordshire, GB: Roxford, 1989), 177-213.

⁶⁸ YSJSJ 1, 3

had both been responsible for overseeing parts of Kham.⁶⁹ Before the dust had settled from the collapse of the Qing government, the Gansu military governor (and native Sichuanese), Zhang Binghua, had lobbied the central government to place Yushu and its nomadic inhabitants under the administration of Sichuan. His arguments highlighted many of the difficulties that Qinghai faced governing this region. Travel time from Xining to Yushu, roughly twenty-five days over uninhabited grasslands that were impassable during winter and spring, prohibited effective government. Yushu's location between the Tibet and Sichuanese border, Zhang continued, made communication concerning Tibet easier to receive in Sichuan than in Xining.⁷⁰ Should Xining continue to govern Yushu from such a distance, Zhang felt that this would merely be a continuation of the Qing's "light yoke" policy towards Mongolia and Tibet, which he felt was responsible for the "loss" of those regions of former Qing imperial territory.⁷¹ Many of these same justifications were again used in 1928 when the Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui attempted to wrest Yushu from Xining's control. Liu especially emphasized the important economic and transportation connections between Yushu and Xikang.⁷² Qinghai's government recognized these connections as well, calling Yushu and the Xikang / Sichuan frontier "mutually dependent," yet justifying Qinghai's own claims on the region.⁷³

Since this borderland conflict in Yushu occurred in the wake of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and full-scale attack of Shanghai in early 1932, border

⁶⁹ YSJSJ 1, 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ YSJSJ 1, 2.

⁷² YSJSJ 1, 17.

⁷³ YSJSJ 1, 13.

issues were obviously an urgent topic for the national government and media. On the national and provincial levels, border defense occupied a key role in discussions of who should control Yushu. Communications from Ma Lin and Ma Bufang to the central government, Dalai Lama, Tibetan military officials, and Yushu's chieftains stressed the importance of maintaining provincial and therefore national territory.

A County in Name Only

Several months after Yushu became a county on August 6, 1929,⁷⁴ Ma Qi advocated an eight-point plan for calming border affairs in Yushu. This plan included reconstruction of the civilian government, promotion of Tibetan Buddhism, opening of “wasteland” for agriculture, troop training, establishment of factories and mills, transportation improvements, and securing the defense of national borders.⁷⁵ The administrative organ through which these ambitious policies would have to be implemented was Yushu's county government. The first magistrate in Yushu was Zhang Dongfan.⁷⁶ Chong Weiyue, a 48 year-old Gansu native, was the Yushu county magistrate from January to September of 1932.⁷⁷ A total of 30 other people staffed the government office, including one private secretary, one department head, ten writers, four general clerks, one granary manager, eight grain-measurers, and four active service personnel. Conspicuously absent from Yushu, however, were government police.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ ZJZQH, 18-19.

⁷⁵ YSJSJ 1, 16-17.

⁷⁶ ZJZQH, 42.

⁷⁷ ZJZQH, 50.

⁷⁸ ZJZQH, 52.

In 1929, the Civil Affairs Bureau recommended adding seven new counties, some of which would have carved chunks of territory out of Yushu. This plan never materialized, however, due to government “difficulties,” apparently of a financial nature. While this plan remained on the drawing board, in 1930 the government embarked on a provincial-level training program for self-government regions within Qinghai. Proclaiming self-government (*zizhi*) to be the foundation for civil government (*minzhi*), by late 1930 over 50 graduates had been churned out of the self-government training program, none of whom, however, came from or were sent to Yushu, Tongren, or Dulan counties. Noting that the territory had not yet been fully established, and that “the people were of Mongolian or Tibetan ethnicity and their movements were irregular (*wu chang*),” self-government for these regions remained a policy goal. Since financing for the self-government initiatives was so low, it might not have mattered anyway.⁷⁹

Lack of funding represented the largest obstacle to government initiatives in Qinghai as a whole and Yushu in particular. A provincial Civil Affairs Bureau report in 1932 stressed the importance of funding, calling expenditures “the lifeblood of an organization” (*jiguan zhi mingmo*) and the prerequisite for implementing policies. When Qinghai became a province in 1929, the fiscal difficulties had become extreme.⁸⁰ Qinghai government sources claimed that financial difficulties sprang from the region’s poverty,⁸¹ but this pre-existing situation had been exacerbated by government extractions for military purposes. For instance, Duan Qirui appointed Feng Yuxiang as military governor

⁷⁹ ZJZQH, 205-208.

⁸⁰ ZJZQH, 11.

⁸¹ Throughout the twenty years from the fall of the Qing to the moment studied in this paper, Yushu and Dulan (Qinghai’s largely Mongolian frontier region from Qinghai Lake west to Xinjiang) both relied on the importation of essential foodstuff from the agricultural zones around Xining and Huangyuan counties. ZJZQH, 34.

of the northwest in 1925. At that time, Gansu Muslims agreed to tolerate Feng and his National People's Army (*Guominjun*) as long as it attacked only Shaanxi or non-Muslims in eastern Gansu. Feng, however, needed to bleed Gansu dry of revenue and manpower for his campaigns against Zhang Zuolin.⁸² This meant that urgent demands for military funding trumped civil government priorities, thus most of the provincial and county public security funds found their way into Feng's coffers. Yet it was not only the outsider Feng Yuxiang who bled the government dry—Ma Bufang also “borrowed” half of the guns and ammunition set aside for provincial police forces for his own military needs before 1932.⁸³

If expenditures are in fact the lifeblood of government services, Qinghai was suffering from extremely low blood pressure. The Civil Affairs Bureau characterized funding as perennially falling short of government needs. Official salaries across the spectrum of government bureaus were barely adequate, and did not increase enough to meet rising living standards (*shenghuo chengdu*) and the broadening scope of government activities.⁸⁴ The provincial government's dire financial straits brought about by low tax revenue, exacerbated by frequent hemorrhaging of civil government funds advanced for military expenditures, precluded the implementation of many government functions in Yushu. Public security and policing in Yushu, a fundamental goal of government, suffered in particular. Out of 121 police officers (*jing guan*) and 540 constables province-wide in 1932, Yushu had only one and zero, respectively. Overall numbers of police officials for individual counties peaked at 74 in the capital Xining,

⁸² Lipman (1997), 173.

⁸³ ZJZQH, 182, 194. The Civil Affairs Bureau report does not specify a date for Ma Bufang's requisition of police munitions.

⁸⁴ ZJZQH, 11, 53.

while “special circumstances” in Yushu, Dulan, and Tongren counties left them with neither police districts nor constables. Should problems arise, moreover, the one officer stationed in Yushu had no weapons with which to enforce the law!⁸⁵ Public security was not the only area to suffer the pinch of insufficient funds. Social welfare projects, such as hospitals, disaster relief administration, education, and agricultural colonization, all remained out of the provincial and county government’s reach.⁸⁶ Thus in 1932, the local officials representing the Qinghai provincial government in Yushu had only tenuous authority in this southern borderland.

When it came to the pastoral tribes of Yushu, Qinghai’s provincial power holders were still unaware of many key statistics that form the basis of modern governance—the state simplifications that make the population and land it controls legible.⁸⁷ The Qinghai Provincial Civil Affairs Bureau noted in 1932 “the important conditions of the land area of each county, population, and fiscal matters had not been given much attention.”⁸⁸ Much like Scott’s characterization of a premodern state, Qinghai’s government in 1932 was “partially blind... [knowing] precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity.”⁸⁹ Indeed, much of the detailed statistics about Yushu and its inhabitants contained in the Qinghai Southern Borderland Garrison’s Recent Events in Yushu were copies of Zhou Xiwu’s investigation from 1919. Tables of Yushu’s climate, mountain passes, rivers, monasteries and monks, tribes and grazing grounds including in the definitive provincial government record of this

⁸⁵ ZJZQH, 178-179, 188, 193, 196. Aside from Xining, Yushu, Dulan, and Tongren, the numbers of police by county broke down as follows—62, 57, 46, 38, 32 (x 2), 26, 24, 26, 14. See chart pp. 178-179.

⁸⁶ ZJZQH, 211-214, 226-227, 234-235, 238.

⁸⁷ Scott, 3.

⁸⁸ ZJZQH, 20.

⁸⁹ Scott, 2-3.

borderland war were full replications of Zhou Xiwu's investigation results from over a decade before.⁹⁰ Exact land area, total population numbers, numbers on religious affiliation all remained incomplete until the late 1940s.⁹¹

Qinghai's provincial government was painfully aware of how little it knew about its nomadic subjects in Yushu, and how little it actually controlled them. In a discussion on the *tusi* system of state-sponsored local headmen continued from the Qing era, the Civil Affairs Bureau report noted that in the absence of "established border lines...governance largely fell under the opinions of individuals." Even after Yushu was reformed into a county in August of 1929, the government complained that "inclinations of the followers of local chieftains and nobles (*qianbaihu wanggong*) are unalterable...they do not heed orders." Much of the problem resided in the very mobility of pastoral people, and the government recognized that daily migrations hampered the implementation of government orders since "the chieftain...had to actually get to the same place."⁹² With daily migrations that regularly surpassed 300 li,⁹³ finding those one sought to govern was difficult indeed!

While such state simplifications as population, location, and ethnic identity are admittedly incomplete slices of the society they depict, Scott likens them to "abridged maps," but maps that "allied with state power, would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade."⁹⁴ Yet this must be coupled with state *power*, and the provincial government was aware of their lack of just that. In August 1931, the provincial

⁹⁰ Zhou Xiwu (1920), vol. 1, 12-14, 18-21, 21-23; vol. 2, 3-10, 28-29. YSJSJ 2, 34-40, 48-57.

⁹¹ ZJZQH, 181, 255, 258, 304.

⁹² ZJZQH, 19-20.

⁹³ ZJZQH, 382.

⁹⁴ Scott, 3.

government petitioned Nanjing to dissolve the system of indirect rule via local headmen. This was Qinghai's version of direct administration (*gaitu guiliu*) that Zhao Erfeng had implemented in western Sichuan in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁹⁵ Although Xining was only able to enforce this order north of the Yellow River, and Yushu therefore remained unaffected.⁹⁶ Despite continuous efforts at increasing government penetration into both Mongolian and Tibetan nomadic regions since the establishment of Qinghai province in January 1929, including the creation of Chengduo county in 1933, as late as 1941 it was "difficult to clearly delineate the powers of local headmen and local government."⁹⁷

Since Qinghai under the Ma family was attempting to project Muslim military power from the agricultural regions around Xining into a land dominated by Tibetan ethnic, cultural, and religious influence, the lack of government penetration into Yushu did matter. According to the Civil Affairs Bureau's plans for pacifying Qinghai's Mongolian and Tibetan populations, the majority of the province was inhabited by nomads, who "had absolutely no concept of the central government, and were completely ignorant of the national situation." This report intended for the central government even sarcastically remarked that most still thought China was governed by an emperor-like dictator (*zhuanzhi*) in Beijing. With a rhetorical flourish, the report pointed out the most basic precondition to pacifying the recalcitrant Mongolians and Tibetans. "If you wish to

⁹⁵ Xiuyu Wang (2011).

⁹⁶ *Xingzhengyuan hezhun chexiao Qinghai sheng tusi gezhi cheng guofu zhao'an zhuancheng* [Memorials to the national government concerning the administration's approval of canceling Qinghai's chieftain titles], Qinghai provincial library's written reproduction of No. 2 Historical Archive Document (August 1931).

⁹⁷ Meng Zang weiyuanhui diaocha shi, "Qinghai Yushu Nangqian Chengduo sanxian diaocha baogao" [Investigative report on Qinghai's Yushu, Nangqian, and Chengduo counties], December 1941, held at Nanjing Library, 17; cited in Liu Jin, *Guomindang zhengquan yu Gan Ning Qing de zhengzhi he shehui* [Nationalist government power and Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai's government and society], PhD diss., (Zhongshan University, 2003), 173.

change this 2,500,000 square *li* of deserted wilderness (*kuang ye*) into a province, to make the province's names match reality, you absolutely must first teach the Tibetans and Mongolians that there is a central government."⁹⁸ When discussing Yushu and Qinghai's western border region, largely populated by nomadic Mongols, the Civil Affairs Bureau recognized that "although they are counties in name, in reality they are beyond the reach of the law."⁹⁹

Remembering that power is a relationship rather than an object to be held, when studying the history of a locality or region, the question "*who* is the state?" must be answered before assuming the implementation of central policy.¹⁰⁰ In 1932 Qinghai's Civil Affairs Bureau noted that "the territory of the nation, the contentment of the area, and the people's livelihood have all entered a dangerous path." This certainly rang true for the beleaguered provincial forces surrounded in Jiegu, and the military emergency hindered the government's ambitious plans for Yushu. For if Yushu "still cannot be secured, then how can we discuss development" (*shang buneng bao, he yan kaifa*)?¹⁰¹ Questions of security and military defense would quickly become paramount, exposing Xining's tenuous control over the Yushu borderland and the ineffective nature of Nationalist Chinese ethnic ideology.

Borderland War

Throughout February 1932, the Tibetans gathered between five and six thousand troops on the Jinsha River, generally taken to be the boundary between Yushu and

⁹⁸ ZJZQH, 382.

⁹⁹ ZJZQH, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Lipman (1997), xxix.

¹⁰¹ ZJZQH, Preface, 1.

Xikang, scouting Yushu's troop strength and disrupting communications.¹⁰² Over 300 li south of the county seat and almost directly north of Tibetan-occupied Changdu, in the vicinity of the mountain top where Cai Zuozhen had brooded and the Gadan monastery, were two battalions of Qinghai provincial troops, only totaling seventy men combined.¹⁰³ The Su'ermang region was situated on the fringes of Qinghai's power in southern Yushu—perhaps the anteroom to Qinghai's southern doorway.

As a response to the mounting tension with the Tibetan army in Changdu, in March 1932 Qinghai provincial government established the Qinghai Southern Border Region Garrison with Ma Bufang in charge. Two brigades were set up in Yushu; Ma Xun was commander of the first brigade and Ma Biao commander of the second.¹⁰⁴ Despite the strategic importance of this borderland, when the Tibetans invaded in the early months of 1932, only Ma Biao's regiment was stationed in Yushu while First Brigade Commander Ma Xun remained in the provincial capital. Thus, like many of the military and civil policy proposals aimed at securing Qinghai's control over their southern borderland, at this early stage in the war, the Qinghai Southern Border Region Garrison existed only on paper.

At that time Ma Biao had one camp of cavalry, which, together with the forces of the government headquarters totaled only four hundred men. He dispatched his secretary Wang Jiamei and various local headmen to Tibet to negotiate a peaceful settlement. It was apparently decided that the Gadan monastery affair would be settled in the next spring. Whether this was a strategy designed to slow the pace of military advances and

¹⁰² YSJSJ 1, 18. Quanguo zhengxie, Qinghai sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, eds. *Qinghai san Ma* [Three Ma's of Qinghai], (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1989), 109.

¹⁰³ YSJSJ 1, 18. *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

¹⁰⁴ YSJSJ 1, 17.

thus buy more time for the Qinghai provincial government, as suggested by one secondary study,¹⁰⁵ Ma Biao quickly telegraphed Ma Bufang to request hasty reinforcements, but they would not arrive until mid-June.¹⁰⁶

On March 24, 1932 the Tibetans began to attack Lesser Surmang, thus forcing their way into southern Qinghai. After eight hours of fighting, both sides had suffered casualties.¹⁰⁷ On the same night in the county seat Jiegu, Ma Biao convened a conference attended by the chieftains of local clans, residents, and merchants. At this meeting, Ma Biao reportedly asserted that “our strength is sufficient to protect the lives and property of Yushu’s residents. Not only will we resist Tibetan incursions, but in the future we will tie our war horses at the gate of the Tibetan government compound!”

Backing up his bold claim about driving into Tibet, however, would prove more difficult than Ma Biao’s bravado indicated. On the March 26, 1932, the Greater Surmang contingent of Ma Biao’s Qinghai troops met over 500 Tibetans on the battlefield southeast of Jiegu. Cai Zuozhen recalled that the Tibetans simply overwhelmed the undermanned provincial forces by at least five to one. The company consequently retreated to a camp near Duolongduo, which was quickly surrounded by Tibetan troops. At nearly the same time, a detachment of provincial forces at Lesser Surmang, only thirty strong, also found itself surrounded by over one hundred Tibetans.¹⁰⁸ Even if Ma Biao had the troop strength to drive the Tibetan army out of Yushu, his orders from Chiang Kai-shek down to Ma Lin and Ma Bufang were to hold the territory and seek a peaceful solution.

¹⁰⁵ *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

¹⁰⁶ YSJSJ 1, 25. *Qinghai san Ma*, 108.

¹⁰⁷ *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Cai (1964), 42-43.

Throughout the early part of April 1932 the Tibetan military forced their way into southern Yushu, occupying the most southern point in this region, with important mountain passes leading southwest into Tibet, south to Changdu, and east into Xikang. As provincial forces withdrew in the face of an enemy frequently five to ten times their number, Tibetans methodically ate up ground on their way north to encircle the county seat, Jiegu. At the same time, they also sent a contingent of roughly 300 troops from Xikang across the Tongtian river to attack Labu and Xiewu, monasteries situated on the two vital thoroughfares to the north of Jiegu.¹⁰⁹ The Tibetans were in a strong military position, and in one fell swoop had occupied nearly all of the areas surrounding Jiegu's southern side and had severed the county seat's communications with Xining.

Jiegu, the site of Yushu's county government and nominal headquarters of the Southern Qinghai Garrison, was the key to holding Xining's position in its southern borderland. On April 15, a provincial government report ominously stressed the military importance of Jiegu—"Yushu's life or death depends on whether Jiegu can be held."¹¹⁰ Situated as it was in a strategic pass (*yanhou*) along the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau, provincial government sources repeatedly described Yushu as the doorway to southern Qinghai (*Qinghai zhi menhu* or *Hainan menhu*).¹¹¹ In a rhetorical twist so characteristic of the double entendres that enrich the Chinese language, the description "strategic pass" also denotes the throat. Outnumbered roughly ten to one by Tibetan troops,¹¹² and with communications between the county seat and provincial capital severed, the military situation looked dire for Xining and the Qinghai provincial forces. The Tibetans' were

¹⁰⁹ *Qinghai san Ma*, 109. Cai (1964), 43.

¹¹⁰ YSJSJ 1, 21-22.

¹¹¹ YSJSJ 1, 21-22.

¹¹² YSJSJ 1, 19.

tightening their stranglehold on southern Qinghai's throat. At this point in the war, it certainly appeared that the Tibetans had shut the door and locked Xining out.

Pacification and Propaganda

While the Southern Qinghai Border Region Garrison forces under Ma Biao were digging in for a drawn-out defense of the Yushu county seat, the provincial government in Xining initiated a flurry of activity. On April 19, 1932 Ma Lin and Ma Bufang telegraphed the Military Affairs Commission in Nanjing with a four-point recommendation for improving Qinghai's southern border defense. The propositions included moving the Southern Qinghai Garrison twenty *li* west of Jiegu, and stationing a regiment between Jiegu and Xining at Daheba to protect the lines of communication between Jiegu and Xining. Ma Lin and Ma Bufang also requested that 2000 rifles, 20,000 rounds of ammunition, temporary military funds of 40,000 yuan, and five wireless telegraphs from the central government.¹¹³

On the last day in April, Ma Bufang requested that provincial chairman Ma Lin send the Southern Qinghai Border Region Garrison's first brigade commander, Ma Xun, to the southern front as Yushu Pacification Commissioner. He also once again sought a peaceful settlement to the military conflict.¹¹⁴ Four days later, Ma Bufang and Chairman Ma Lin sent a telegram Xi'an announcing of the appointment of Ma Xun as Yushu Pacification Commissioner (Yushu xuanwei shi) and relaying the current military situation in Yushu.¹¹⁵ It was not until May 24, that the central government's response

¹¹³ YSJSJ 1, 21. *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

¹¹⁴ YSJSJ 1, 21-22. *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

¹¹⁵ YSJSJ 1, 24.

reached Xining via Xi'an. In this communiqué, Chiang Kai-shek approved the suggestions on the new garrison in between Xining and Jiegu and the relocation of the Yushu garrison. Qinghai would also receive most of its requests for military aid, although at much lower levels than had been requested.¹¹⁶ Although the one wireless telegraph set given by the Nationalist government fell far short of Qinghai's request for five, in the context of the nagging communication difficulties caused by poor transportation, it would be an important asset. And an asset that Ma Bufang and his military commanders would repeatedly reference in the record of their communications with, and orders to, Tibetan leaders in Yushu.

On May 26, 1932, Ma Xun left Xining for Yushu with the orders that, regardless of whether peace can be maintained, the communications route between provincial capital and Jiegu must be protected at all costs. At departure, Pacification Commissioner Ma had a regiment of roughly one hundred troops, provincial government secretaries with Mongolian and Tibetan language skills, one surveyor, and a special party affairs representative. Ma Bufang himself traveled with the expeditionary force as far as Daheba, the site of the proposed garrison between Xining and Jiegu.¹¹⁷ The translators, surveyor, and party affairs representative in Ma Xun's contingent recall the Civil Affairs Bureau's plan for a high official in the central government to personally visit Qinghai and awe the Tibetan "barbarians" into loyalty to the nation-state. This proposal called for doctors, dentists, and botanists to accompany the group and dazzle the "backward, superstitious" locals with medical treatment, heavily armed contingent of guards, photographers and

¹¹⁶ YSJSJ 1, 24.

¹¹⁷ *Qinghai san Ma*, 109.

artists to capture images of the region for national consumption, and propagandists armed with portable cinema units.¹¹⁸

For over two months Ma Biao had struggled to hold Jiegu's defenses. Finally, on June 18 Ma Xun and roughly one hundred troops arrived in Jiegu after 22 days of travel.¹¹⁹ Three separate entreaties for peace based on mutual inclusion in the multi-ethnic Chinese nation all failed. Indeed, 3,000 Tibetan troops led by a skilled general pushed forward the invasion of Yushu.¹²⁰ After Ma Xun arrived, Qinghai's troop strength gradually increased, further bolstered by a second and third wave of reinforcements, which arrived in Jiegu on August 20 and September 20, respectively.¹²¹

Despite the intense efforts of Cai Zuozhen and other small contingents of Qinghai troops, the Tibetans still enjoyed an overwhelming numerical advantage. Qinghai troops, however, routinely inflicted far more casualties on the Tibetans than they themselves suffered. This pattern played out in the battle for the Changu monastery, five *li* south of the county seat in the deep night of June 27, where Qinghai forces under Ma Biao outfought a Tibetan force twice its size despite the enemy enjoying the high ground, and again on July 14 when provincial forces drove the Tibetans away from the Tongtian River just north of Jiegu.¹²² This suggests that, despite the numerical advantages Tibetan forces often enjoyed, Qinghai's troops were better trained. For instance, while battles raged around the vicinity of the county seat, the locus of provincial power in Yushu, the

¹¹⁸ ZJZQH, 381-388. The proposed movie projectors are especially interesting in light of Chang Tai-hung's discussion of traveling projection teams and the spread of nationalist sentiment in China's interior. *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

¹¹⁹ YSJSJ 1, 25. *Qinghai san Ma*, 109. Cai (1964), 46.

¹²⁰ YSJSJ 1, 25. Cai (1964), 46.

¹²¹ YSJSJ 1, 26-27.

¹²² YSJSJ 1, 26. Cai (1964), 46. *Qinghai san Ma*, 109-110.

besieged city's rumor mill had been running around the clock about how horrific the Tibetan artillery was. Rumors aside, the Tibetans had fired over forty cannon rounds into Jiegu, but none had exploded. When the residents noticed that the rounds had not hurt anyone, the rumors subsided, morale strengthened, and the situation calmed somewhat.¹²³ Finally at this point in the Yushu border conflict, Qinghai's forces appeared to live up to the fearsome reputation reported by observers in the late 1930s and 1940s.¹²⁴

On July 23, 1932, Ma Bufang dispatched regiment commander La Pingfu to Yushu. Although the combined forces of Ma Xun and Ma Biao had already met the Tibetans in battle three times, they still had not yet faced full enemy troop strength. Thus while successful in minor engagements around the county seat, they could not expose their rear by attacking too far from Jiegu.¹²⁵ Just under a month later, Ma Bufang again dispatched reinforcements to the southern borderland. Ma Lu, the leader of this detachment would also play an important role as the war wound down during the fall of 1932. He recorded an investigation of Yushu's inhabitants, land, and prospects for colonization in order to remedy the Civil Affairs Bureau's debilitating ignorance of such an important avenue for trade and conquest between northwestern China and Tibet.¹²⁶

¹²³ Cai (1964), 46.

¹²⁴ Robert B. Ekvall, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 18 argued that Qinghai's military strength far surpassed that of Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui. This also meshes with Leonard Clark's observations in 1948 from *The Marching Wind*, (New York: Funk & Wangalls, 1954), 31, and A. Doak Barnett's statement that Xikang's control over its Tibetan population west of the Jinsha River was only on maps while Qinghai under Ma Bufang had tight control over its inhabitants. A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve of Communist Takeover*, (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 233-234. Although Ekvall's attributing this to determination springing from their faith in Islam is somewhat sketchy, Liu Jin accepts this proposition and presents primary evidence to the religious indoctrination in Ma Bufang's army. See Liu Jin, 168. Merrill Hunsberger's Ph.D. dissertation also emphasizes the role of religious indoctrination in Ma Bufang's army during the 1930s and 1940s. He also details the number of Muslim religious leaders serving in the Qinghai army. Hunsberger, 88-90.

¹²⁵ YSJSJ 1, 26.

¹²⁶ YSJSJ 1, 26.

Ma Biao's March of Revenge

On August 20, 1932 La Pingfu and his reinforcements arrived in Jiegu. This led to the battle to free Jiegu from encirclement. After a hard march of over twenty days, La's troops were exhausted; therefore they remained in defensive positions within Jiegu while Ma Xun and Ma Biao's troops set out south with 800 local militiamen, meeting the Tibetans in the middle of the night. Qinghai troops used the naked blades of the "Great Sword" group (*dadao dui*) to slice through the Tibetans in bloody hand-to-hand combat. Lacking the training of the Qinghai troops, the Tibetans fled past the first chain of mountains south of Jiegu. Around four in the morning, the Tibetan troops reinforced their ranks from the rear, thus regaining a temporary advantage on the battlefield. Qinghai troops, however, enjoyed the high ground and used the lay of the land to their own advantage. Their defenses held firm until nearly six in the morning, when they suddenly mounted a fierce attack, scattering the Tibetans into a chaotic retreat. Tibetan losses were heavy and provincial forces also sacrificed many troops. After over four months, however, Jiegu's encirclement was finally broken.¹²⁷ Thereafter Qinghai troops begin to move south and reclaim territory lost to the Tibetans. After three days of rest for La Pingfu's recently-arrived reinforcements, provincial troops went out south with Ma Xun in command of the first route, Ma Biao the second, and La Pingfu trailing the rear.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ YSJSJ 1, 27.

¹²⁸ YSJSJ 1, 27. *Qinghai san Ma*, 110. Cai Zuozhen's personal account of the war betrays some discrepancies in the chronology, placing La Pingfu's arrival in Jiegu to have been mid June. Although, as an oral history, it is likely that Cai's recollection is less than clear, he does feel that the situation in Yushu did grow more stable after his arrival. Cai (1964), 46-7.

As reinforcements arrived in Jiegu, Ma Bufang issued regulations for military engagements and behavior while retaking lost territory in Yushu. According to these orders, this military campaign was solely for the purpose of retaking lost territory and absolutely was not a punitive mission against local Tibetans. Ma Bufang expressed hope the Tibetan armies would bring withdrawal from Yushu quickly and peacefully. He called on local Tibetans to cooperate with and protect provincial forces in their activities. Ma Bufang also included the conditions for a return to law and order in this borderland. Military commanders were to gather with local religious and political elites in order to form public safety committees and deal with the inevitable problem of refugees. These directives also firmly situated this military campaign within the realm of national border defense and stressed the central government orders. Promises were made to compensate injured soldiers and honor the fallen. These orders also mandated medical care for wounded Tibetan soldiers, promising funding for the return journey to Tibet for all prisoners of war and entered Tibetan soldiers.¹²⁹

Ma Bufang also issued a series of communiqués to the inhabitants of Yushu. He asked for the assistance of local leaders and militia in expelling the Tibetan military; promised rewards for those who helped; expressed sympathy for the suffering of the people during the war, but fully placed blame on the Tibetans for their military aggression; promised swift justice against any provincial soldier reported for violations of military discipline or abuse of local people. And he disavowed any personal honors for commanding this campaign, calling victory in this military campaign “not the honor of an

¹²⁹ “Wei huifu shidi gao wo jun yingxing zunshou shi'er tiao quanwen” [Full text of twelve rules our army should follow in order to retake lost land], YSJSJ 2, 113.

individual, but a victory for all people in the country.”¹³⁰ This was to be a glorious national mission, with an assiduously disciplined military being assisted by local Tibetans. Cai Zuozen’s memories of the campaign, however, were starkly different.

While taking a circuitous route so as to avoid an unforeseen military confrontation on their way to recover the territory occupied by the Tibetans to Jiegu’s south, Ma Biao’s troops frequently came upon Tibetan soldiers in different stages of flight or repose. Tense standoffs were common. Cai did remember, however, Ma’s troops killing over ten Tibetans in the process of surrendering as well as taking the possessions of over twenty households in one village. Within the next several days, Cai had heard reports of Ma Biao’s troops executing more than ten starving Tibetan troops, and he personally witnessed Ma’s troops firing upon a helpless woman who refused to let go of her dead husband’s corpse. “Completely without humanity,” he recalled. Even after receiving an entreaty to peace from the Dalai Lama, sweetened with gifts that made Ma Biao so happy he was beside himself (*xi bu zi jin*), Ma ordered a contingent of soldiers to commandeer seventy horses from the local nomads. Further along their drive to Surmang, Ma Biao’s troops came across two heavily armed merchants with eight draft animals packed with merchandise brought from Changdu. This time, Ma simply killed the merchants, leaving the spoils on the road.¹³¹

These instances illustrate an aspect of the relationship between the provincial forces and local ethnic groups that, not surprisingly, do not appear in the official publications like *Recent Events in Yushu* or *Most Recent Qinghai*. The official

¹³⁰ YSJSJ 2, 129, 134-135.

¹³¹ Cai (1964), 47-48.

commandeering of local property undoubtedly alienated the locals, but the primary sources consulted for this chapter as of yet remain silent on local reaction. If Cai's account is to be fully believed, the Tibetan soldiers also perpetrated acts of heinous violence on Yushu's inhabitants. In a large battle south of Jiegu that soon followed, Cai accused them of burning nine villages, emptying two monasteries of their possessions, and raping women and even nuns. These acts moved Cai to curse "this so-called spirit army" for not stopping at any evil deeds (*zhen shi wu 'e bu zuo de*).¹³²

These episodes serve as poignant reminders that while local religious elites centered in the monasteries of Yushu and its surrounding regions had been able to manipulate the encroaching Tibetan, Qinghai, and Xikang powers in order to maintain something of their influence, the average inhabitants of this borderland remained vulnerable to arbitrary extraction of resources by those same power-holders. Whether one views these actions as necessary evils of wartime mobilization or outright theft, the results were the same for newly horseless nomads in an environment strapped for resources. Collections of folk songs from Qinghai speak to a bitter life of oppression by the Xining overlord, described as having three pairs of eyes that focused on conscripting soldiers, commandeering horses, and taking money, thus feeding himself on "human soup" while the commoners were forced to subsist on wheat husks and chafe. They therefore sang that "the sun doesn't rise in the Ma family's Qinghai."¹³³

¹³² Cai (1964), 46. Most likely torn between his Buddhist faith and position within the provincial forces defending Yushu, Cai's perspective on this topic is quite interesting.

¹³³ "Ma Bufang zhang le san shuang yan, yao bing, yao ma, yao jinqian," "baixingmen chi de fupi kang," "Ma jia de Qinghai wu taiyang." Ji Ye, ed. *Qinghai mingxue xuan* [Selection of Qinghai folk songs], (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1954), 2-3.

Ma Biao's wrath was not limited to the nomadic subjects of the Qinghai provincial government. When the expedition force on its way to Yushu's southern periphery passed by Gadan monastery, he wanted revenge. Saying that "because the recent violation of Qinghai's borders was instigated by this monastery, they must be punished," he commanded his troops to destroy all images of deities, votive tools, and religious books. His anger was so intense that, as they left the violated monastery, he commanded Cai Zuozhen to burn it to the ground. Although Cai's performance in the war was highly commendable from a military perspective, with daring rescues of both soldiers and civilians, this was too much for him. A devout Buddhist, Cai could not burn the temple, and simply lied to Ma Biao that it was in flames. Fortunately the monastery's inhabitants had already fled to Changdu, the seat of the Tibetan military in northwestern Xikang.¹³⁴ The fact that they had fled with the "invaders" speaks volumes about their view of the provincial government that claimed them as subjects.

As the Qinghai provincial troops continued their southern march of revenge in late 1932, they continued to pursue the fleeing Tibetans and punish the locals for cooperating with the invaders. As punishment for local headmen in Nangqian allegedly cooperating with the Tibetans, Ma Biao commandeered 10,000 *jin*¹³⁵ of tsampa, 20,000 *jin* of highland barley, over three thousand *jin* of yak butter, two hundred head of cattle, and over forty sheep. The headmen in particular were forced to give Ma Xun, Ma Biao, and La Pingfu pelts, pilose antlers, horses, and money. Cai reckoned that all together the

¹³⁴ Cai (1964), 48-49.

¹³⁵ One *jin* is currently valued at 500 grams, but at the time, measurement conversions were less clear. Zhongguo shehui kexue yanjiuyuan yuyan yanjiusuo cidian bianzheshi, ed. *Xiandai hanyu cidian* [The contemporary Chinese dictionary, Chinese-English edition], (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoke yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2002), 1002.

goods totaled over two thousand silver dollars. A defensive contingent was left behind in Nangqian to guard the border, and the main body of troops began the return trip to Jiegu. Along the way, Ma Biao took another thousand silver dollars worth of pelts and horses from a monastery within the lands of the Laxiu nomads.¹³⁶

As Cai took account of the aftermath of what he might have called “Ma Biao’s march of revenge,” he was not proud. Aside from having captured over one hundred Tibetan soldiers and their dependents, the punitive mission had never engaged with the full weight of the retreating Tibetan army. Instead, they had only “plundered and killed numerous innocent merchants and nomads, and destroyed many ancient monasteries.”¹³⁷

Cai Zuozhen’s possibly self-serving demonization of Ma Biao aside, such government behavior was not uncommon in these regions. The increasing military might of Qinghai provincial forces in Yushu in late 1932 and early 1933 would not only exact “revenge” from the monastic and nomadic inhabitants, but also serve as the tool for reasserting Qinghai’s military control of its southern borderland. Although provincial forces ultimately regained and strengthened their control over Yushu, peace did not necessarily follow the end of this round of borderland hostilities. Between 1921 and 1942, the Qinghai Ma rulers reportedly invaded Guoluo (T. Golok)—a region just north of Yushu along the border with Sichuan occupied by especially recalcitrant nomads—to perpetrate similar acts of violent oppression on eight separate occasions.¹³⁸ The Yushu region was certainly not immune to military extraction of resources either. The following

¹³⁶ Cai (1964), 48-49.

¹³⁷ Cai (1964), 49.

¹³⁸ Liu Jin, 172-173. Barnett’s account argues that Ma Bufang rose to power in a bloody campaign and maintained his position through treating cooperative Tibetans well while “suppressing opposition elements harshly,” 234. It is possible that Barnett is referring to this borderland war, but he does not specify the conflict.

table illustrates the frequency of Qinghai's military expeditions against the province's Tibetans under Ma Bufang.

Endgame: Dawn of a Bordered Future

For roughly a week and a half at the end of August through early September, Qinghai provincial forces battled the Tibetans for the Surmang region at the southeastern fringe of Yushu. Earth-shaking artillery battles erupted on August 24 and 27, but when a portion of the 2,000-strong Tibetan army reinforced the battle lines, Qinghai provincial forces surrounded them and massacred over two hundred enemy soldiers. Little Surmang returned to Xining's control as the Tibetans fled to recongregate in Greater Surmang to the west. On September 2, 1932, La Pingfu's three hundred men occupied the rear route of the Tibetan army around Big Surmang. Despite the ferocious defense led by two of Tibet's best generals, the string of successive defeats apparently had sapped their effectiveness, and they relinquished Greater Surmang.¹³⁹

The third wave of reinforcements from Xining, Ma Lu's brigade, arrived in Jiegu on September 20, 1932, further solidifying Qinghai's military position. Cai's account has Ma Lu meeting with Ma Xun, Ma Biao, and La Pingfu just south of Jiegu at Batang, next valley south from the county seat, Jiegu. In a meeting with the local headmen in the area, the provincial commanders decided to set out at once for the Jinsha River, which tentatively marked the border between Yushu and Xikang, and attack the Tibetan forces stationed on the western shore at Xidengke. Following an agreement with the Xikang

¹³⁹ *Qinghai san Ma*, 110.

military forces Qinghai troops moved to attack Xikang, where 1000 Tibetans had been facing off with that province's troops across the Jinsha River.¹⁴⁰

Qingke monastery faced Dengke across the river, and was a major connecting point on the route to and from Changdu in the south. This monastery was surrounded on all four sides by mountains, and during the Tibetan occupation of Xikang had remained an important troop encampment, perhaps second only to Changdu, the focus of Tibetan power in the region. The monastery's defenses were therefore very solid, with three lines of over 5,000 troops. On October 15, 1932, artillery fire began to rain down on the monastery, testing the stout Tibetan defenses. Just as Qinghai forces split their approaches, attacking and moving to encircle the Tibetans defenses, Xikang troops began to bombard the monastery from across the Jinsha River. The Tibetans could not withstand the joint attack of Qinghai and Xikang's provincial forces, and consequently relinquished their position. After this striking act of cooperation between the forces of two provincial powers previously at loggerheads over territorial administration, Qinghai and Xikang armies connected across the river.¹⁴¹

Qinghai's counterattack in Yushu was in fact coordinated with Xikang's military leader, Liu Wenhui. Ma Lin had communicated with Liu on multiple occasions,¹⁴² but there were over sixty communications between Ma Bufang and Liu Wenhui included in *Recent Events in Yushu*. Some of these were communications between Ma Bufang and his subordinates coordinating the military actions in Yushu, but were sent through Liu

¹⁴⁰ *Qinghai san Ma*, 110.

¹⁴¹ *Qinghai san Ma*, 111.

¹⁴² YSJSJ 2, 69.

Wenhui's telegraph machines.¹⁴³ Ma Bufang specifically ordered his troops to follow orders from officers in the Xikang army, and his relevant commands to Qinghai's troops praised the close cooperation of their provincial neighbor's military.¹⁴⁴

Some secondary scholarship has argued that Ma Bufang and Liu Wenhui had long planned a joint military campaign against Tibetan forces in Kham.¹⁴⁵ Gray Tuttle argues that the Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui hoped to use the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 as an opening to “resolve the Tibetan issue by force.”¹⁴⁶ The stridently anti-Ma Bufang Chinese account, *Qinghai San Ma* argues that Ma Bufang sent a telegram to Chiang Kai-shek and Xikang militarist Liu Wenhui suggesting the two provincial armies jointly attack the fleeing Tibetans and retake Changdu. Chiang, however, ordered a halt to the hostilities and initiated negotiations with the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama, reportedly noticing the string of defeats, loss of all land occupied east of the Jinsha River, and the strain that years of continuous warfare had put on the people, and agreed to peace negotiations that stretched until June 15, 1933.¹⁴⁷

The Yushu Borderland Garrison's official account of the war does not include any specific references to Ma Bufang or Qinghai suggesting a preexisting plan for military operations against the Tibetans. Had there been a plan for a military solution to the Tibet problems, it is unlikely that such documents would have been included in *Recent Events in Yushu*. Chapter Five will expand upon Qinghai's response to the new national strategy

¹⁴³ YSJSJ 2, 104-121.

¹⁴⁴ “Zhi Yushu Ma zhihui ji ge lv tuan ying zhang heng” [Communication to Commander Ma and all brigade, group, and battalion commanders], YSJSJ 2, 114-115.

¹⁴⁵ The Biographical Dictionary of Republican China describes this military campaign as “cooperation” between Ma and Liu Wenhui. “Ma Pu-fang,” Howard L. Boorman and Richard C. Howard, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China Vol. II: Dalai-Ma* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1968), 474-475.

¹⁴⁶ Tuttle (2005), 172.

¹⁴⁷ *Qinghai san Ma*, 111-112.

centered on the cultivation of political relationships with Buddhist religious leaders, especially as reflected in frontier education endeavors.

Regional Interests, National Borderlands, and the Essential Problem of Peripheries

The Qinghai-Tibetan Peace Treaty essentially reinstated the administrative, military, and territorial situations to the pre-war status quo. Yet this historical moment which had been so fraught with uncertainty as to whether Qinghai could maintain control of its strategically-vital southern borderland ended up solidifying Ma Bufang's military control over Qinghai, Yushu, and projected Xining's power into northwestern Xikang province.¹⁴⁸ Despite the war's anti-climax, for this complex region, those who inhabited it, and those who sought to control it, it represented the "dawn of a bordered future."¹⁴⁹ This murky dawn was not yet complete—the geographic obstacles as well as ethnic and religious complexities certainly still remained to frustrate Qinghai's government policies. Nevertheless, the Tibetan military never again posed so serious a threat to Qinghai's domination of Yushu. The strategic passes remained under Qinghai's control, and soon after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the People's Liberation Army would prove Qinghai's leaders' estimations of this borderland's importance correct when one of their routes to Tibet passed through Yushu.

The victory of Qinghai provincial forces in the conflict over Yushu in 1932 to 1933 demonstrated the ultimate effectiveness of Ma Bufang's military command, catapulting his and his "Sino-Muslim" Army's reputations. The Japanese occupation of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 112-113.

¹⁴⁹ Adelman and Aron, 818.

Manchuria in 1931 and resulting national crisis highlighted the importance of defending national territory. And in this instance, Qinghai's military was up to the task of enforcing Nanjing's claim over the Yushu/Kham contested borderland. Commander Ma Biao's reputation also began to rise, and he would gain national attention in his heroic campaigns against the Japanese in northern China beginning in late 1937. Qinghai's victory in the relatively small border conflict would be memorialized in the Sino-Muslim education system later in the decade as one instance in which this distant and poor frontier province made concrete contributions to the threatened Chinese nation-state. The Qinghai-Tibetan border war in Yushu during the early 1930s also forcefully demonstrates that a full understanding of Sino-Tibetan relations in the Republican period must recognize the role that China's northwestern frontier played. Simply put, Sino-Tibetan relations in the early twentieth century were not limited to the southwestern frontier. Yushu, Xining, and Qinghai were all important sites of Sino-Tibetan interactions during the Republican era. And Sino-Muslims militarists were some of the key actors in the drama that occurred.

Chapter Three

Repelling “Reclamation” in the “Wastelands” of Qinghai, 1933-1934

Qinghai’s provincial government and the Southern Borderland Garrison responded to the Tibetan invasion of Yushu with strategies long used by frontier officials. These included military campaigns and a “pacification commissioner,” although pacification had been updated with propaganda of national unity. The third strategy Qinghai authorities drew on was an investigation of agriculture along the route from Xining to Yushu. Ma Lu, leader of the third round of reinforcements dispatched from Xining on October 10, 1932, recorded a meticulous account of his trip to Yushu. His report focused on the number and locations of households engaged in agriculture, noted the origins of agricultural colonists in the region, and pointed out fallow land that could be brought under the plow. This survey was a first step in a project of frontier economic development and state-building—“land reclamation,” or perhaps more accurately, agricultural colonization. He suggested ways in which to increase agricultural productivity among colonists, like better tools, as well as methods to improve transportation and communications, such as having colonists repair roads or serve as messengers.¹ As the Yushu borderland war was drawing to a close, Qinghai’s leaders looked for ways to deepen government control and develop the region’s economy.

War would return to northwestern China in far greater force in early 1934. Over one hundred thousand soldiers marched and fought their way through the heartland of

¹ “Ma Lu Yushu lvxingji,” YSJSJ 2, 144-159.

Chinese Islam. Armies under the Sino-Muslim militarists dominating Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai provinces joined together to repel the advance of an army of sixty thousand under Sun Dianying (1889-1947), the “pock-marked” bandit, drug dealer, tomb raider, general of the Forty-First National Army, anti-Japanese fighter, Western Qinghai Agricultural Colonization Commissioner, and soon-to-be disgraced warlord.

Sun had been appointed by Chiang Kai-shek to station his army in western Qinghai and “open up wasteland” through agriculture. “Wasteland” (*huang*) referred to all forms of uncultivated land, but this word also has cultural judgment built into it, marking the region and its people as unproductive and backwards.¹ In this historical and geographic context, “wasteland” meant uncultivated grasslands, inhabited by Mongol and Tibetan nomads, whose mobile pastoral lifestyle meant few crops were grown. “Reclaiming” land for agriculture, even beyond the edge of agricultural China, has a long and checkered history in imperial China.²

The “Battle of the Three Ma’s Repelling Sun” appears to have been, first and foremost, a conflict over who would control Qinghai and the greater northwest—the Han-dominated central government under Chiang Kai-shek, or Sino-Muslim militarists controlling Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. But the conflict over Sun Dianying’s agricultural colonization of western Qinghai is much more than another instance of “warlords” resisting the centralizing policies of the Nationalist government during the Nanjing Decade. Even as Sino-Muslim militarists mounted a multi-faceted public relations campaign, clearly communicated their fierce opposition to this general and his

¹ Micah S. Muscolino, “Refugees, Land Reclamation, and Militarized Landscapes in Wartime China, 1937-45,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 69.2 (May 2010), 454.

² Perdue (2005), 310-313.

encroaching army, prepared for and then waged war, they nevertheless expressed unquestioned support for the fundamental policies of developing the northwest. These included the spread of agriculture, increased trade in pastoral products, “improvement” of pastoral populations, and loyalty to the Nationalist state and Chinese nation. Ma Hongkui and Ma Lin also resisted the government’s orders appointing Sun and promised a civil war that would be fought to the death. But the double-edged sword of empowerment and potential discipline that constituted inclusion in the Nationalist state under Chiang Kai-shek fell on Sun Dianying’s neck.

Much of the process of the battle is known in Chinese historiography—chronologies, provincial gazetteers, textbooks, monographs, and articles discuss this event. Despite the fact that even the *New York Times* covered the build-up, military engagement, and aftermath at the time, English-language scholarship has largely ignored this conflict. The only chapter-length treatment of the Sun-Ma conflict comes from Merrill Ruth Hunsberger’s 1978 doctoral dissertation.³ Although Hunsberger’s work benefits from extensive interviews with Ma Bufang’s son and subordinates in Taiwan, his analysis is limited to the problem of “warlord” politics and national political integration. It is high time to revisit this understudied event.

Fortunately, recent works on frontier state-building, environmental history, and land reclamation continue to deepen scholarly understanding of many issues present in the Sun-Ma conflict in the early 1930s. Cui Yonghong and Zhang Deyin’s recent environmental history of the upper reaches of the Yellow River serves as this chapter’s

³ Merrill Ruth Hunsberger, *Ma Bufang in Qinghai, 1931-1949*, Ph.D. dissertation, (Temple University, 1978), Chapter 3, “The Sun Tien-ying Affair.”

baseline on the changing ecologies of northwestern China.⁴

Justin Tighe's monograph on frontier state-building in the short-lived Suiyuan province finds that agricultural colonization of the Mongol steppes was the central developmental and state-building activity there. In so doing, he identifies dual goals of agricultural colonization in the *Kaifa Xibei* (Develop the Northwest) policy movement of the 1930s—frontier defense and economic development.⁵ This chapter argues that Sun Dianying's mission to create a military agricultural colony in western Qinghai represented a conflict between these two goals. Northwestern leaders, especially Ma Lin and Ma Bufang, took advantage of a slippage between the two goals of agricultural colonization. In a surprisingly conservationist tone, Qinghai's leaders correctly argued that military colonization would not only fail but would harm the region's ecology and disrupt the pastoral economy of the Tibetan highlands.

Micah S. Muscolino's article on wartime refugees, land reclamation, and the resulting environmental degradation in one mountainous region of Shaanxi province⁶ offers fruitful avenues for comparison with similar efforts in Qinghai during the 1930s and 1940s. His discussion of historical land reclamation, the *Kaifa Xibei* research and policy movement, and sensitivity to ecological damage reflects many of the issues his chapter will discuss. Despite the temporal and spatial differences between Muscolino's wartime land reclamation in Shaanxi and Sun's failed attempt to agriculturally colonize western Qinghai in the early 1930s, these case studies nevertheless had striking

⁴ Cui Yonghong and Zhang Shengyan, *Mingdai yilai Huanghe shangyou diqu shengtai huanjing yu shehui bianqian shi yanjiu* [Historical research on the natural environment and social changes along the upper reaches of the Yellow River since the Ming Dynasty], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2008).

⁵ Justin Tighe, *Constructing Suiyuan: The Politics of Northwestern Territory and Development in Early Twentieth-Century China*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁶ Micah S. Muscolino (2010), 453-478.

similarities. Both were motivated by overpopulation, the problem of refugees, and the discourse of development in the “Develop the Northwest” movement.

Chapter Two discussed how Ma Bufang and his Sino-Muslim troops asserted role as enforcers of China’s territorial integrity in battle with Tibetans in Qinghai’s southwestern borderland. This chapter, on the other hand, turns to the Qaidam Basin in western Qinghai, and how the Ma militarists of Xining opposed a central government order in the name of protecting the region’s Mongols and Tibetans.

The Battle Against Sun Dianying

Near the end of May 1933, the “Christian General” cum Nationalist military leader, Feng Yuxiang, convened a conference in Zhangjiakou to establish the Allied Army for the Resistance of Japan, of which he named himself overall commander. Facing pressure from the southwestward movement of Japanese forces from Manchuria, Feng and his comrades at arms prepared themselves to ignore Chiang Kai-shek’s avowed national policy of internal pacification of Communists before resisting the external aggression of Japanese imperialism, and fight back. One military commander who participated in the conference and engaged in a costly battle with the Japanese in Chahar province was the notorious, tomb-looting, “pock-marked” General Sun Dianying. By spilling the blood of his soldiers resisting the Japanese beyond the Great Wall, Sun garnered a fair amount of national sympathy that partially improved his and his army’s dastardly reputation. After Feng’s grand plans were thwarted, he announced a six-point proposal for improving China’s calamitous situation on its borders, one article of which

advocated moving Sun and his forces to western Qinghai to engage in wasteland reclamation through military colonization.

As Sun's army was forced out of Chahar, was unwelcome in Yan Xishan's Shanxi, and Chiang Kai-shek feared an alliance between Feng Yuxiang and Sun, the Central Government appointed Sun to the newly-formed post of Western Qinghai Wasteland Reclamation Commissioner on June 27, 1933. This office both promised to get Sun and his army out of the northern heartland and away from potentially threatening allies and meshed with the national policy of strengthening the nation through development of the northwestern regions.

In late July, Sun's forces consisted possibly 70,000 troops in Chahar, and 10,000 in Shanxi's Jincheng, and were stationed a daunting two months journey from their destination in Qinghai. Government fiscal problems, the realities of supplying so vast an army over great distances in the inhospitable land of northwestern China, and general foot-dragging saw Sun Dianying remain in position until the end of July, when they finally departed westward towards Baotou, stopping for extended consultation with Yan Xishan.

Even before Sun's appointment was officially announced to the leaders of the region he would be colonizing, however, word leaked out, and a flurry of telegrams from Ma Hongkui, Ma Lin, and various "people's organizations" in the northwest flooded all levels of the Central Government crying out in vociferous opposition to Sun's plans. These communications bounced between Chiang Kai-shek, Wang Jingwei, various organs of the central bureaucracy, Ma Hongkui in Ningxia, Zhu Shaoliang in Gansu, and Ma Lin and Ma Bufang in Qinghai, among other regional leaders. They reported on the

dire straits of the inhabitants of the northwest, the barrenness of the land there, popular conventions of various social groups in Ningxia and Qinghai, and public demonstrations that numbered in the thousands. On September 21, 1933, the central government's point man in the northwest, Zhu Shaoliang, joined with his neighbors and argued to the Central Government that Sun should not come west. Moreover, he used his position of authority to order that Ningxia and Gansu refrain from offering any assistance to Sun's army as it moved through on the way to Qinghai.

By the end of September, Sun's forces were once again on the move towards Ningxia, and the tension was ratcheted up daily. Ma Hongkui repeatedly telegraphed Sun himself, asking that he pause so that the Central Government could solve the conflict. It took the October 26 orders of the Beiping branch of Military Affairs Commission, He Yingqin, to get Sun to recall his armies from their positions facing off with Ningxia's forces across the border. But Sun refused to remain in western Suiyuan for its cruel winter, arguing that his soldiers could not survive until spring. Facing unified resistance from northwestern leaders, the central government ordered Sun to halt his troop advances for the winter and await further orders. Through the end of 1933 and beginning of 1934, Sun and the northwestern leaders took great pains to convince national leaders that they were following orders, while the other side violated the government's will.

From the middle of January, Sun Dianying's forces fought against Ningxia's military, as Gansu and Qinghai armies established lines of defense to the west. By late January 1934, Sun's continued attack on Ningxia against the orders of the central government exposed him to punishment for disloyalty. Yet the outcome of the event was

uncertain, at least until January 29, 1934, when the Central Government abolished Sun's position in Qinghai and even his generalship in the national army. He was now a "rebellious general," and the hammer of state discipline quickly fell on him from all sides. By March, the combined brunt of aerial attacks from Nationalist Commander Hu Zongnan, Yan Xishan's movement from Sun's rear, and the militaries of the northwestern "Sino-Muslim armies" broke his lines and he withdrew to the East in full retreat. In April, Sun was out of military life and politics, his army dissolved into other regional forces, and his chances at a positive historical reputation dashed.⁷

Wheelin' and Dealin'—Sun Dianying and His Times

Sun Dianying entered the world in 1889, born to a poor family in Yongcheng, Henan. As a young man, Sun and trouble were never far apart. He burned his schoolhouse down in at the tender age of 8, after which he unsurprisingly ended his studies. Back at home, Sun caught smallpox, and although he recovered his health, the characteristic scars gave him a new name—"Pock-Marked Sun." Everywhere he went, from Henan to Shanxi, Anhui to Shaanxi, Sun ran with the local hoodlums. He worked

⁷ The narrative presented above is drawn from the archival collection of communications between the involved parties published in Zhongguo di er lishi dang'an guan, ed. "Sun Dianying bu Qinghai tunken dang'an shiliao xuan [Selection of archival historical materials on Sun Dianying agriculturally colonizing Qinghai] *Minguo dang'an*, (April 1994), Zhongguo di er lishi dang'an guan, ed. "Sun Dianying bu Qinghai tunken dang'an shilian xuan, xu" [Selection of archival historical materials on Sun Dianying agriculturally colonizing Qinghai, continued], *Minguo dang'an*, (January 1995), contemporary newspapers (most notably the Xi'an paper, *Xijing ribao* [Western capital daily]), and journals. Merrill Ruth Hunsberger's (1978) chapter on the Sun Dianying incident confirms the narrative, although he uses a different set of periodicals, including *Dongfang zazhi*, *Qinghai minguo ribao*, and the *North China Herald*.

his way up through criminal and military networks, and his friends followed him soon thereafter.⁸

Sun chose a career that offered unlimited potential earning—drugs. His criminal connections allowed him to build an opium and heroin empire that some contemporary observers described as fairly monopolistic. Stretching from Anhui to Henan and as far north as Rehe, the flying eagle emblazoned on his “Dianying”⁹ brand heroin seems appropriate.¹⁰ In the early 1930s, as well, Sun’s drug business continued in Shanxi.¹¹

Drugs and guns played integral roles in Sun’s military career. He smuggled his product using the cover of his military patron, and after growing rich by 1916, drug money allowed him to purchase his first 15 rifles. Increasing military protection only enlarged his drug business. As soldiers enlarged his ranks and drug money filled his coffers, Sun’s potential for success and destruction rose as well. Warlords bought him off, and when cities would not, they were put to the torch. From 1926-1928, Sun looted Baotou, Anhui, three times. Despite a horrible reputation, as Sun’s power rose so did his rank. The Shandong-Zhili (Zhi-Lu) clique incorporated Sun. This was a match made in hell, at least for the people in the area. The head of the Bozhou merchants’ association went so far as to put special currency on the market for the Zhi-Lu army, hoping to head off future banditry.¹²

⁸ Zhang Hexuan, Su Xuncheng, Oral history recorded by Zhang Heren, “Wo suo zhidao de Sun Dianying” [The Sun Dianying I know], *Henan wenshi ziliao xuanji* 3, 111.

⁹ Both Zhang Yinting’s and Zhang and Su recollection calls them “Dianying” brand, but the characters differ.

¹⁰ Zhang Yinting, “Sun Dianying sancu huo Bo qin liji,” *Anhui wenshi ziliao* (7 July 1987), 50. Zhang and Su, 111. Liu Zhuangfei, “Wo suo zhidao de Sun Dianying” [The Sun Dianying that I know], *Shijiazhuang wenshi ziliao* 5, (December, 1986), 196.

¹¹ Li Zhonghu, “Sun Dianying gongda Ningxia jianwen” [What was seen and heard when Sun Dianying attacked Ningxia], *Nei menggu wenshi ziliao* 23, (December 1986), 91.

¹² Zhang Yinting, 52-55.

Sun appears to have been an extremely politically savvy man, one who deftly maneuvered himself through the warlord battles. Although he was not always on the victorious side, he nevertheless survived. He joined with Zhili-Shandong army,¹³ first against Feng Yuxiang, and later with him; with Feng against Chiang Kai-shek, and later with Chiang in the 41st National Army. Nation-wide infamy sprung from his most notorious act—looting the tombs of the Qianlong emperor and Empress Dowager Cixi in 1928. Despite the damage to his already unsavory reputation, it appears that Sun bought his way out of punishment with gifts to Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Song Meiling.¹⁴

Like many regional militarists of the time, Sun Dianying was quick to use nationalist rhetoric to justify his actions.¹⁵ When preparing for resisting the Japanese in May 1933, he fanned the flames of Chinese nationalism among his troops.¹⁶ Sun consciously sought to revive his and his army's reputation through resisting Japan, yet he was unwilling to expend all of his military power for the sake of nationalism. Should resistance be unsuccessful, however, Sun planned for an escape so that “we do not sacrifice all in that place.”¹⁷

Sun's participation in the anti-Japanese battles in Chahar went far to resuscitate his tarnished name.¹⁸ One periodical noted that these actions washed his former evil

¹³ Zhang Yinting, 52-55. Zhang and Su, 113.

¹⁴ Zhang and Su, 113-115. Liu Zhuangfei, 198-9.

¹⁵ James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: the Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949*, (New York: Free Press, 1975), 105-106.

¹⁶ Xiao Yang, *Shuang ma jiangjun: Sun Dianying* [Shuangma general: Sun Dianying], (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chuban gongsi, 1995), 48-49.

¹⁷ Guo Gaosheng and Yuan Haiyou, *Sun Dianying lishi jiemi quanji lu* [Unraveling the historical mystery of Sun Dianying], (Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 2005), 117.

¹⁸ Xiao Yang, 51.

deeds clean,¹⁹ but a participant in the war in Ningxia qualified this assessment by stating that resisting Japan was the only good thing he did in his entire life,²⁰ and secondary scholarship in Chinese doubts his nationalistic motivation.²¹

During the spring and summer of 1933, Sun Dianying was stuck in a tight spot. As he had moved between the patronage of Feng Yuxiang and Chiang Kai-shek, it is unlikely that either trusted him. Anti-Japanese resistance offered him a chance for popular support and positive press coverage, but ran afoul of Chiang's policy resisting Japan only after fully suppressing Communist threats. When Feng established his Anti-Japanese Army in the spring of 1933, Sun remained pessimistic about the potential success of this endeavor.²² Perhaps even more importantly, Sun and his army had no territory to call their own. Some oral histories consider the motivation for territory as central to Sun Dianying's political decisions at this time.²³

The dirty under belly of savvy is, of course, manipulation. And Sun was a master. He consciously sought to repair his reputation by joining himself to the heroic cause of resistance to foreign aggression yet would not be its martyr. Similarly, when presented with the opportunity to colonize the northwestern frontier under the banner of the Nationalist state, Sun saw a chance for territory, security, and power—all under

¹⁹ “Sun Dianying you Cha xikai zhi jingguo” [Process of Sun Dianying going west from Chahar], *Kaifa Xibei*, 1.2 (February 1934), 102.

²⁰ Zhao Jiucheng and Hu Qingwen, “Wo suo zhidao de Sun Dianying” [The Sun Dianying that I know], *Anyang wenshi ziliao* 15 (Oct, 1986), 107.

²¹ Shi Yun, “Liumang junfa Sun Dianying” [Rogue warlord Sun Dianying], *Zhongzhou tongzhan*, (April 1994), 36.

²² Li Zhonghu, 92.

²³ Zhao Chengsui, “Sun Dianying toukao Yan Xishan ji qi jingong Ningxia de shibai” [Sun Dianying's defeat siding with Yan Xishan and attacking Ningxia], *Shanxi wenshi ziliao* 9, 5-6. Li Zhonghu, 91. Liu Zhuangfei, 200. Zhang and Su, 118.

legitimate auspices. Contemporary memoirs²⁴ and historical scholarship²⁵ alike stress his schemes to become the “King of the Greater Northwest,” and they carry more than a grain of truth.

Just as Sun had been skeptical of Feng’s plan to resist Japan, he was even more wary of Chiang’s intentions for sending him to the northwest.²⁶ And well he should have been; that Chiang also schemed is without doubt. Preventing all-out war with Japan and nipping a possible re-alliance between Feng Yuxiang and Sun were likely motivations for moving the pockmarked general and his armies away from the northern heartland.²⁷ Likewise, solidifying northwestern border defenses with an army capable of extending influence into the western part of a restive Mongolia, a strife-torn Xinjiang eyed by the Soviets, and an ever-problematic Tibet exacerbated by English influence were factors as well.²⁸ Or Chiang’s wariness of growing Sino-Muslim power in Qinghai, fresh off a victory over Tibetan armies to the southwest could have drawn his attention. Several references to secret communications between Chiang and the northwestern powers tell of designs to eliminate Sun Dianying once and for all, but no other evidence has been found

²⁴ Wang Yongsheng, “Sun Dianying Tangyang bei fu” [Opposition to Sun Dianying in Tangyang], *Hanyang wenshi ziliao*, (December, 1988), 70. Zhao Chengsui, 6-7.

²⁵ Yang Xiaoping, *Ma Bufang jiazuo de xingshuai* [The rise and fall of Ma Bufang’s lineage], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 110. Qinghai shengzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui, (1980), 358-359.

²⁶ Yao Jun, “Ma Hongkui, Ma Bufang Ningxia jueji Sun Dianying de jilu” [Brief account of Ma Hongkui and Ma Bufang repelling Sun Dianying in Ningxia], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao* 1 (June, 1983), 51. Guo Gaosheng and Yuan Haiyou, *Sun Dianying chuanqi* [Legend of Sun Dianying], (Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 2004), 123-125.

²⁷ Zhang and Su, 119. Liu Zhuangfei, 200.

²⁸ Hunsberger, 41-43, 48-50. Hunsberger’s analysis is the most persuasive of the secondary sources, in my opinion, since it most closely reflects the recollections of Ma Bufang’s advisor in the 9th Division, 2nd Brigade. Wang Jianping, “Xibei si Ma zai Ningxia heji Sun Dianying de huiyi” [Recollection of the Four northwestern Ma’s jointly attacking Sun Dianying in Ningxia], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao* 3 (Xining: October, 1964), 70-71.

to substantiate such recollections and undocumented references.²⁹ Nevertheless, the context of border crises, competing interests among the military power bases loosely bound to the Nationalist state and Chiang make a combination of the above factors a likely cause for Chiang to appoint Sun as the Western Qinghai Land Reclamation Commissioner. Regardless of the outcome, chances were that Chiang Kai-shek and the central government stood to benefit from wearing down or breaking the might of either military group.³⁰

The most persuasive explanation of Chiang's decisions concerning Sun Dianying come from Shen Dulong and Guo Yinchun's 1998 article revisiting the Sun Dianying incident. They argue that the political and military situation in northern China motivated Chiang's appointment of Sun as western Qinghai reclamation commissioner, but once the extent of northwestern opposition was apparent, Chiang seized the opportunity to take out Sun Dianying and his military.³¹ Such political machinations, however, are confined to memoirs, oral histories, and scholarly interpretations.

Sun Dianying the individual was in many ways a product of his times, drawing upon the strategies, however unsavory and destructive, that many ambitious military men in the Republic also utilized. Likewise, his generalship of the 41st National Army was also a product of the rampant militarization of Chinese society since the last decade of the

²⁹ Bai Xianghua and Zhang Hongming, "Zhu Shaoliang zai Xibei" [Zhu Shaoliang in the northwest], *Gansu wenshi ziliao xuanji* 3 revised ed. (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1987), 5. Shen Keni, "Sun Ma Ningxia zhi zhan shimo" [The Sun-Ma Ningxia war, start to finish], *Ningxia wenshi ziliao* (March, 1984), 88-89. Wang Jianping (1964), 71. Shen Keni's piece is drawn from contemporary reportage and memoirs, and is thus less persuasive. Wang, on the other hand, worked in Ma Bufang's army and therefore has quite a bit more credibility. Yet, I am still hesitant to argue for the secret communication without documentary evidence that is not a memoir.

³⁰ Guo and Yuan, 136-145. Qinghai shengzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui (1980), 358-359

³¹ Shen Dulong and Guo Yingchun, "Sun Dianying tunken Qinghai wenti zai renshi" [Rethinking the problem of Sun Dianying agriculturally colonizing Qinghai], *Guyuan shizhuan xuebao* 67 (1998), 18-22.

Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and post-Northern Expedition politics, as necessity forced Chiang Kai-shek to incorporate independent military power into the “unified”³² state. Contemporary government and press sources, however, justify Sun’s appointment in the language of national crisis, border defense, agriculture, and development.

The Plan—“Develop the Northwest” through Military Agricultural Colonization

Development, progress, unification, modernization—these words run through historical documents in the Republican era. They remind us that Republican China was not merely warlord intrigue, internecine violence, political cliques, and desperate fight for national survival. Although progress was often derailed, unification frustrated, and hopes dashed by corruption and suffering, Chinese from the full spectrum of society were struggling to define their modernity. And many of those efforts were aimed at developing the frontiers of China into integrated, productive, secure regions of the national whole.

First provisional president of the Republic of China and “father of the nation,” Sun Yat-sen had long advocated a policy for drastically reterritorializing China. Sun Yat-sen advocated one hundred thousand miles of railway tracks, over a million miles of highways, and a massive telephone and telegraph network. Sun Yat-sen hoped that this massive transportation and communication infrastructure would allow for a greater integration of the Chinese geo-body. Through a large-scale “cultivation and colonization” project Sun hoped to bring thousands of Chinese peasants and decommissioned soldiers to the frontiers. His plan thus illustrates the intimate connection between agriculture,

³² See Hung-mao Tien, *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China, 1927-1937*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972). Eastman (1974). Sheridan (1975).

political control, and economic development during a period of national reterritorialization.³³ The Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek continued Sun Yat-sen's policies by turning Mongolian and Tibetan frontier regions into Chinese provinces. Likewise, "the slogan 'develop the northwest' (*kaifa xibei*) gained official Kuomintang recognition as an item of national development policy."³⁴

Sun's appointment as Western Qinghai Agricultural Colonization Commissioner reflected the discourse of travel accounts, scholarship, and frustrated policies that made up the *Kaifa Xibei* movement in the 1930s.³⁵ *Kaifa Xibei* scholarship presented an introduction to the geography, ecology, history, politics, economy, culture, education, religion, ethnic groups, and natural resources of the northwest including Qinghai. Scholars from coastal, urban China frequently made investigative trips to the northwest, and published their research and impressions of the peoples and lifestyles in this previously poorly understood region. Periodical publications such as *Kaifa Xibei*, *Xin Xibei*, *Dixue zazhi*, *Xin Yaxiya* also contributed to and reflected the growing interest in the northwest. Education, irrigation, trade, technology, pastoral nomads, border defense, geography, and natural resources—all came under the view of scholars, travelers, and the central government.³⁶ The Nationalist government sought to capitalize on the production of knowledge about this region³⁷ spurred on by the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in

³³ Leibold, 33-34.

³⁴ Tighe, 95.

³⁵ Zhao Zhen, "Jindai xibei kaifa de lilun gouxiang he shixian fancha pinggu" [Difference between modern develop the northwest ideal and implementation], *Xibei shifan daxue xuebao: shehui kexue ban*, 40.1 (2003), 22-27.

³⁶ For a brief introduction to the major scholars, books, and periodicals of Qinghai and the northwest, see Qinghai sheng difang zhi bianmu weiyuanhui, ed. *Qinghai shengzhi 73: shehui kexue zhi* [Qinghai provincial gazetteer 73: social science gazetteer], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1999), 98.

³⁷ On the increased materials relating to Qinghai, see Zhou Zhenhe, "Qinghai qianyan" [Qinghai preface], *Yugong* [Evolution of Chinese geography], 1.10 (16 July 1934), 32.

1931, and they convened conferences on “Opening Up the Northwest.”³⁸ Grand plans abounded in this literature, but the implementation of those plans rarely met expectations.³⁹ Reflecting on western experiences of expansion and colonization, one scholar to hoped to turn northwestern China into a new Chicago.⁴⁰

After Sun’s defeat at the hands of Japanese forces in Chahar, Feng Yuxiang suggested that Sun agriculturally colonize western Qinghai, and the pockmarked general himself quickly began angling for such an appointment. In a telegram on 8 June, 1933, he stressed his nationalist resistance to the Japanese, his loyalty to orders from Nationalist Party superiors, and his concern for the common people who all too often suffered at the hands of soldiers. Noting that the “the battle has ended and many soldiers have gathered together like clouds,” Sun expressed concern for the repercussions for commoners in the face of a large group of idle soldiers. In so doing, Sun rehashed the common trope of “good steel should not become nails; good men should not become soldiers.” In Sun’s argument, rather than disbanding his soldiers to “wreak havoc on society,” they should be kept in the army to serve the nation. And the best way, he advocated was to “fill up the frontier through agro-military colonization (*tunken shibian wei shangce*).” Not only would this allow “several tens of thousands of my soldiers to be forever self-sufficient and productive” since the “northwest border region is vast and its capacity is huge,” but it would be an “essential policy for state-building (*mouguo zhi yaotu*).”⁴¹

³⁸ “Kaifa xibei xiehui di yi ji nianhui baogaoshu” [Report on the first annual conference of the develop the northwest association], *Zhongguo xibu kaifa wenxian* 13, (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1999).

³⁹ Zhao Zhen (2003), 22-27.

⁴⁰ Li Jixin, *Kenzhi xue* [Study of land reclamation], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1933), 37.

⁴¹ Sun Dianying to Lu Yuting (8 June 1933) MGDA, 27. Sun Dianying to Lin Sen (17 June 1933) MGDA, 27.

Sun Dianying's "concern" that discharged soldiers would prey upon citizens echoed Sun Yat-sen's "presidential will," widely publicized as the dying leader's wishes for a developmental policy. President Sun advocated exploiting the country's natural resources (*kenfa ziran fuyuan*) and changing soldiers into workers (*hua bing wei gong*).⁴² To solve both over-militarization and coastal overpopulation, colonization of the underpopulated northwest seemed to be the answer that academics and officials sought.⁴³ Zhou Zhenhe, prolific writer on the northwest and its development potential, echoed Sun's assessment of Chinese soldiers in July 1934. Despite being the largest standing army in the world, Zhou felt that it could not resist external threats, but only cause civil war! Thus, China suffered from the problem of the "three too-many's": soldiers, bandits, and peasants driven into a mobile life. He called for "correct agro-military colonization."⁴⁴ Other writers like Yang Shenglin, agreed with this view. He argued for a three-pronged strategy to solve a three-fold problem—military, civilian, and criminal colonization. And like Sun's proposition on June 8, 1933, soldiers could be made useful by increasing border defenses and engaging in agricultural production.⁴⁵

In the eyes of researchers and policy makers, the problems of border defense, overpopulation, and over-militarization affected all of China, and therefore were the national government's prerogative and responsibility. Similarly, the presumptive solution—agricultural colonization—was also a matter of national interest. T.V. Soong (Song Ziwen) used similar if more dramatic terms. "The construction of the northwest is

⁴² Shen and Guo (1998), 19.

⁴³ Jiang Chaoqun, "Guomin zhengfu sanshi niandai xibei kaifa zhong de kenchi ye" [land reclamation during the nationalist government's 1930's northwestern development], *Qinghai shehui kexue* 1(2003), 42.

⁴⁴ Zhou Zhenhe (1934), 30-31.

⁴⁵ Yang Shenglin, "Kaifa xibei yu kenchi wenti" [Developing the northwest and the problem of land reclamation], *Kaifa xibei* 1.3 (March, 1934), 17, 29, 32.

not a regional issue, but a problem of the entire nation-state...it is the life-line of the Republic of China.”⁴⁶ The “Develop the Northwest” movement was a policy of state building along the frontiers, and Sun as well as the researchers in the 1930s recognized it as such. Li Jixin explicitly directed his knowledge and advice to the government leaders (*zhi guo zhe*).⁴⁷ Another scholar explicitly addressed “those who manage the northwest” in one study of agricultural reclamation.⁴⁸ Zhou Zhenhe seemed to implicitly argue that the point of *Kaifa Xibei* was management (*jingying*), and this was intimately connected to the extension of county governments into “wasteland.”⁴⁹

All involved parties agreed on the necessity of developing the northwest and strengthening border defense. Sun Dianying expressed his “unworthy but unwavering commitment to border defense;”⁵⁰ likewise, Ma Lin and Ma Bufang of Qinghai certainly spoke of the importance of border defense in the northwest. Their armies had just defeated a Tibetan army that occupied Xikang province and Qinghai’s Tibetan borderland to the south, Yushu. Just as Sun had fought against the Japanese, soldiers in Qinghai’s largely Sino-Muslim army had bled to defend the borders of the province. In fact, considering the border crisis the Republic of China was facing in the early 1930s, Ma Lin himself wrote that “the safety or danger of the northwest [was] an extremely

⁴⁶ Song Ziwen quoted in Shi Baizhai, “Kaifa Xibei yu sheji wenti” [Develop the northwest and the problem of design], *Kaifa Xibei* 1.5 (May, 1934), 94.

⁴⁷ Li Jixin (1933), 37.

⁴⁸ An Han, “Kenzhi xibei jihua” [plan to agriculturally colonize the northwest], *Kaifa xibei* 1.1 (January 1934), 60.

⁴⁹ Zhou Zhenhe (1934), 30.

⁵⁰ Sun Dianying quoted in Secret Telegram from He Yingqin to Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek (26 June 1933) MGDA, 28.

important matter.”⁵¹ The vocabulary of developing the northwest infused language of justification, and as we shall see, of resistance.

Sun’s language in the communications in June and July 1933 was imbued with the urgent concerns of the Nationalist state and the solutions offered by the *Kaifa Xibei* movement. In fact, the argument in his telegram illustrates three essential components of the “Develop the Northwest” movement: increasing national production through military labor, in this instance, farming; the perception that the northwestern frontier was unused or empty, and therefore ripe for exploitation; with the ultimate goal of frontier defense, state-building, and centralized control. Like the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) before it, authorities in Xining had been engaged in the extending its control westward via agricultural colonization in Mongolian and Tibetan pastureland.

“Reclaiming” Kokonur for Xining

Military agricultural colonies have a long and checkered history in imperial Chinese statecraft. From as early as the former Han Dynasty (206 BCE-9 CE), dynastic officials argued for the benefits of agricultural military colonies along the northern frontier. As Peter Perdue notes, one motivation for the famous debates on Salt and Iron monopolies from the second century BCE was financial support for military colonies in the northwest. By the late imperial era, agricultural colonies were intended to increase production to feed the garrisoned soldiers, ward off social unrest in China proper by relieving population pressure, and ensuring permanent control of the northwestern frontier. The Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661-1722) ordered the establishment of military

⁵¹ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, et al. (25 June 1933) MGDA, 27-28.

agricultural colonies after defeating the Khalkha Mongols in 1692 and again in 1715. Under the Yongzhong Emperor (r. 1722-1735), the Qing official in Xining, Nian Gengyao, built military agricultural colonies in the Kokonuur (present day Qinghai) region. Agricultural colonization of Qinghai under Kangxi and Yongzheng lacked sufficient financial support to achieve agricultural productivity, instead focusing more on military activities.⁵²

From the mid-eighteenth century, locals began farming much of the available land in the lowland river valleys of northeastern Qinghai, which loosely represent the western edge of northern-Chinese dry agriculture. According to local gazetteers researched by historians in Qinghai, the region administered by Xining had over two million mu of land under cultivation during the Daoguang Emperor's reign (1820-1850). The Qing government committed itself to increasing the amount of land being farmed under the jurisdiction of Xining in 1908.⁵³ With a heavy investment of silver, the Xining Reclamation Affairs office was tasked with "reclaiming wasteland" in the region. This organization divided available land into nine price grades based on anticipated agricultural output and resulting tax income. Sixty percent of agricultural revenue went to the imperial office in Xining while the remaining forty percent filled the coffers of local elites. Like many of the Qing dynasty's last minute reforms in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, this Land Reclamation Office ultimately followed the fate of

⁵² Perdue (2005), 324, 329, 342-343.

⁵³ For the history of agricultural colonization in Qinghai from the late Qing through the end of the Republic, see Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 653-656 and Cui and Zhang (2008), 172-177. Many Republican-era primary sources also recount this history. An Han, "Qinghai kenwu gaikuan, xu" [Qinghai reclamation affairs, continued], *Xibei wenti* (1932, 4, or 6), 11-13. Cong Tiansheng, "Xibei zhishi jianghua: Xibei de kenwu, xia" *Xibei xiangdao* 13 (1936), 20-21. Yuan Keyi, "Xibei kenzhi de kenengxing," *Xibei nongbao* 6.2 (1947), 210-211. Qinghai sheng jianshe ting (1946), Ch. 6 Agriculture, 1-2.

the dynasty that built it. Many private agricultural colonists, both Han and Sino-Muslim, still bought land for agriculture in the early years of the Republic according to the nine-grade price levels established by the late Qing Land Reclamation office in Xining.⁵⁴

Provincial authorities in Lanzhou, as well as Xining's government, both tried to rejuvenate agricultural colonization in Qinghai in 1918 and 1919. The Xining Agricultural Colonization Office in Lanzhou never got off the ground, nor did Xining's exhortation for agricultural colonization of Dulan and the Qaidam Basin. Ma Qi's Ninghai Reclamation Affairs Office, established in 1923, opened ten branches around the region, but likewise failed to produce any real results. When Feng Yuxiang's National People's Army took control of northwestern China in the late 1920s, local officials appointed by Feng built a fairly effective agricultural colonization network. From 1927 to 1929, nearly thirty thousand *mu* of "wasteland" came under publicly directed cultivation. Private agricultural colonizers added nearly nine thousand *mu* of agriculturally productive land. In total, these land reclamation efforts brought in over twenty-one thousand silver *yuan* in revenue.⁵⁵

Agricultural colonization efforts in the late 1920s benefited from a devastating drought to the east in Gansu and filled Feng Yuxiang's coffers to fund his uprising against Chiang Kai-shek.⁵⁶ Feng's officials took advantage of this misfortune to raise land prices in the face of rising demand as refugees fled to the greener pastures of Qinghai. The nine-grade land divisions established in 1908 saw price increases of 0.6-1.2 *yuan* per *mu* of land. This, in fact, was a staggering price increase, with many of prices

⁵⁴ Cui and Zhang (2008), 173.

⁵⁵ Cong Tiansheng (1936), 20. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 654. Cui and Zhang (2008), 174-176.

⁵⁶ Yuan Keyi (1947), 211 acknowledges the drought in Gansu, but states that it stopped all agricultural colonization efforts.

doubling. Over twenty thousand mu of land was “reclaimed” in 1929 alone, bringing in an additional fifteen thousand yuan in payments.⁵⁷ This was the most successful agricultural colonization effort up to that time, but it must be remembered that Feng Yuxiang’s military government, and not the Ma family, benefited from these efforts. Ma Lin and Ma Bufang would likely remember how an outsider profited from selling Qinghai’s land, thus setting the stage for their resistance to Sun Dianying’s appointment in 1933.

Agricultural colonization in the region that would become Qinghai took two forms. The first was the intensification of agriculture in the lowland river valleys around Xining.⁵⁸ This intensification included better irrigation leading to higher productivity, but it also refers to spreading agriculture into land plots not previously under cultivation, generally spreading into higher elevations but still in the agricultural region of Qinghai. In some sense, this is appropriately called “land reclamation,” since it entailed bringing land that was unused but suitable for agriculture under the plow. The second form of agricultural colonization, including Sun Dianying’s failed attempt, sought to spread agriculture into areas that were generally suited for pastoral economic activities.

The central government appointed Sun Dianying as Agricultural Colonization Commissioner, ordering him to station his army in the Qaidam basin in the far west of the province. The Qaidam basin is a large region hemmed in by mountains on all sides, but with an elevation similar to the lowland river valleys in northeastern Qinghai. The basin’s average annual temperature was also similar to that of the Huangshui and Yellow river

⁵⁷ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 654.

⁵⁸ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 653.

valleys. The region was crossed by a network of rivers, the largest being the Qaidam river, which flowed from the Dulan county seat west into the center of the basin. Dulan county was the western terminus of the major thoroughfare which ran from the capital, Xining, past Qinghai lake on the north—a total of 740 *li* from Xining.⁵⁹ Elevation, climate, and water resources made it, on paper at least, an attractive region for potential agricultural exploitation.

In the numerous articles and policy statements published under the “Develop the Northwest” movement, advocates of agricultural colonization frequently cited Qaidam as the number one target for “reclaiming” land for the plow in Qinghai. According to one report on Qinghai’s fallow land, Dulan county, encompassing the Qaidam Basin, had the highest amount of land that awaited agricultural exploitation—five million *mu*. The administrative region with the next largest amount of land ready for cultivation was Gonghe county, with two million *mu*.⁶⁰

Land reclamation activities have historically been closely connected to the presence of effective irrigation.⁶¹ There was very little irrigation construction in Dulan before Qinghai became its own province in 1929. By 1934, however, a researcher found eight irrigation projects in Dulan and the Qaidam Basin. These eight canals spanned roughly 100 *li* in total, and provided water to over 90 *dun* of fields.⁶² Despite the lack of irrigation infrastructure in Dulan and the Qaidam basin, noted scholar of agricultural land

⁵⁹ Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu, ed. “Qinghai Mengqi linbiao,” *Yushu jinshi ji* (Xining: Qinghai nanbu bianqu jinbei lingbu fushe Bianshi yuekan bianjishi, 1933).

⁶⁰ An Han, “Qinghai kenwu gaikuang, xu” [Qinghai reclamation affairs, continued], *Xibei wenti* [Northwestern problems], 9 (1934), 13.

⁶¹ Cui and Zhang (2008), 172-179.

⁶² Zhang Huzhou, “Qinghai yi chengji jihua zhi shuili jianshe” [Qinghai’s already completed water conservancy construction], *Kaifa xibei* 1.6 (June 1934), 26-27.

reclamation, An Han, argued that the river systems in the basin would nevertheless allow for agriculture.⁶³ But numerous obstacles to this policy goal remained, including the land itself, lack of government infrastructure, and the Mongol pastoralists that lived in the region.

In many ways, Dulan county and the Qaidam basin were far past the fringe of agriculture and effective government control in Qinghai. Dulan's county government had only opened in 1930, and no would-be officials for the county had attended the recently established six-month training program for officials, nor were any government police stationed there. Qinghai's Civil Affairs Bureau explained the lack of government penetration into the region by noting that the inhabitants were Mongolian and Tibetan pastoralists, whose movements were "irregular." According to contemporary provincial records, the pastoral population of the region was largely estranged from or unaware of the central government.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, authorities in Xining had been attempting to entice colonists to move to Qaidam during the first two decades of the Republic.

Although agricultural colonization of Dulan county and the Qaidam basin had proceeded very slowly in the 1920s, the provincial government continued its efforts. The Qinghai Civil Affairs Department sent an investigation team to Dulan in the summer of 1929. The team leader and future head of the Dulan county government, Liang Binglin, spent his time gathering tribal leaders to lecture them on the benefits of agriculture and the unity of the five nationalities of China. He also noted the five or six households "from the interior" attempting to make a living from agriculture just south of Dulan's county

⁶³ An Han, "Qinghai nongtian shuili diaocha gaikuang" [Situation of investigating Qinghai's agricultural irrigation], *Xibei wenti* 3-5 (1934), 24.

⁶⁴ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 165, 205, 288, 440.

seat. Mongol Banner land use restrictions, the colonists' lack of legal land rights, and financial difficulties hampered their efforts at agricultural colonization. Once Liang assumed the reigns of Dulan county government in the spring of 1932, the county government itself took the lead in spreading the word about agriculture. Ten *li* around the county seat were designated as public space for cultivation and all county officials and their families were required to grow crops there.⁶⁵ Liang's strategy of opening public land to demonstrate the efficacy of agriculture was similar to plans by elite academics studying land reclamation. An Han and Li Zifa's plans for experimental agricultural fields in the northwest recommended an extended period of testing soil and experimenting with different crops even before land reclamation took place.⁶⁶

By 1932, Liang Binglin reported sixty new households of colonists were in homes and setting up their fields around the county seat at that time. Another region in Qaidam, Chachaxiangke, had around thirty houses. Three households of colonists from northern Chinese heartland had recently moved in. From one household of Han colonists in 1929, the Helahetu region now had over forty households of colonists from Xunhua and Hualong counties. Liang also reported that the Chahan naisu region had eight hundred square *li* of fertile land awaiting cultivation. Although a small group of Mongols were farming there, they occupied roughly one percent of the open land. The Xiangride region had twenty households of colonists from the central plains of China as well as five or six

⁶⁵ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 288-289.

⁶⁶ An Han and Li Zifa, eds. *Chouban Gan Ning Qing sansheng nongye shiyanchang niyi ji jihua* [Opinions and plans for preparing agricultural experimental fields in the three provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai], (December 1934).

Tibetan households. Although only a small number of colonists engaged in agriculture in the basin, nomads from Golok often came to Xiangride to buy grain.⁶⁷

Most agricultural colonization efforts in Dulan faced the challenge of a different set of land-use rights in the territories of Qinghai's Mongol Banners. The more serious and in-depth scholarship on agricultural colonization in the *Kaifa Xibei* literature certainly acknowledged the difficulty of gaining the rights to land for farming. These scholars generally advocated government-run colonization that dealt with this thorny issue before hand.⁶⁸ Liang Binglin expressed frustration with some Mongol leaders around Dulan for their personal restrictions on land use. The Kekewang, who controlled the fertile land around the Saishenke River, prohibited agricultural colonization in favor of continuing to farm through seed scattering. Liang Binglin also had to negotiate face to face with the Xiangride wang to convince him to open the region for merchants, but was unable to secure rights for agricultural colonists.⁶⁹

Mirroring the research, policy proposals, and government-sponsored institutions of the central government during the *Kaifa Xibei* movement, Qinghai crafted its own *Outline for Colonization in Qinghai (Qinghai yizhi dagang)* in 1932.⁷⁰ The planners in the provincial Civil Affairs Department sought the financial backing of the central government for agricultural colonization of pastoral lands and the pacification of its nomadic inhabitants. Needs included gifts for Mongolian and Tibetan leaders, technological equipment like mobile cameras, and fees for the general office, official

⁶⁷ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 289-291.

⁶⁸ An Han, "Xibei kenzi jihua" [Plan for northwestern land reclamation], *Kaifa xibei* 1.1 (January 1934), 60. Liu Kerang, "Kaiken biandi wenti" [Problem of land reclamation in frontier land], *Xibei lunheng* 5.11-12 (December 1936), 16-17. Yuan Keyi (1947), 213.

⁶⁹ Qinghai sheng minzhengting (1932), 290-291.

⁷⁰ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 288, 446-448.

salaries, and transportation. The suggested retail price for the initial two years of this endeavor amounted to 4,892,000 silver dollars.⁷¹

Thus the rulers of Qinghai in 1933 supported the goals of opening up the northwest, sought financial support from the central government for its own plans, and actively engaged in agricultural colonization within their own province. Yet as soon as news of Sun Dianying's appointment as the Western Qinghai Agro-Military Colonization Commissioner made its way to the northwest, it was met with heated resistance. The telegram record shows northwestern leaders opposing Sun's appointment while loudly proclaiming their support for opening up the northwest. In short, he was not the right man, and this was not the right way.

Regional Arguments against a National Plan

As we have seen, Sun first suggested moving his army to the northwest on June 8, and by the 17th he had telegraphed his acceptance of the post to colonize Qinghai. *Shen bao* reported on Sun's acceptance of the post in Qinghai on June 20, quoting a telegram from the nineteenth.⁷² Sun Dianying knew of his appointment by June 17, a large portion of the press-reading public were made aware on the 20th, but the authorities whose territory was the target of colonization had to hear it through rumors and the media.⁷³ Qinghai's representative in Nanjing immediately made their opposition known. Aside from expressing his province's opposition to Sun's appointment on the grounds of overburdening commoners with the responsibility of feeding another army, he noted that such

⁷¹ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 442, 445-446.

⁷² "Sun Dianying biaooshi yuan bu Qing" [Sun Dianying expresses willingness to go to Qinghai], *Shenbao* (20 June 1933), 3.

⁷³ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, et al. (25 June, 30 June, 2 July 1933) MGDA, 27-29.

hearsay had yet to be officially communicated to the Qinghai authorities.⁷⁴ The official notification would not arrive until 29 June.⁷⁵ Ma Lin addressed this issue on the 30th in a highly indignant tone. “Year after year we devote ourselves to border defense, girding and supporting the center, yet never daring to proclaim our contribution.” Despite this formerly silent support, “you have never told us one bit of truth about this.”⁷⁶ This was not off to a good start.

A day after receiving the telegram from the Qinghai’s government, Wang Jingwei responded in defense of the Central Government’s decision-making process. To Ma Lin on July 3, Wang responded that the central government had “discussed the matter of the agricultural colonization commissioner at length several times.” Only after weighing the matter “especially carefully” was Sun appointed, and with clearly delineated powers of office. Thus the central government, contrary to Ma Lin’s accusatory telegram, was actually “increasing its guarantees for Qinghai’s welfare.”⁷⁷

Six days later, the Executive Yuan elaborated on this argument in a telegram to provincial authorities in Qinghai. “It will be benefit Qinghai’s border defense, facilitate receiving assistance from all sides, exploit natural resources, and begin development ... Moreover, it will defend the national borders, and lead our compatriots in the border regions to increase production.”⁷⁸ Again on July 13, Wang Jingwei attempted to assuage northwesterners’ misgivings about Sun’s military funding, assuring the opposition that “Sun’s troops rely on monthly support from the central government, and therefore will

⁷⁴ “Qinghai daibiao qingyuan: wu tiao kejun ru Qing,” *Shenbao* (21 June 1933), 3.

⁷⁵ Executive Yuan to Qinghai provincial government (29 June 1933) MGDA, 28.

⁷⁶ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, et al. (30 June 1933) MGDA, 28.

⁷⁷ Wang Jingwei to Ma Lin (3 July 1933) MGDA, 29.

⁷⁸ Executive Yuan to Qinghai Provincial Government (9 July 1933) MGDA, 30.

not strain the region.” He also argued that Sun’s troops were “completely disciplined, and will not trouble the people.”⁷⁹ Thus, the Central Government’s justifications of this unpopular policy read like a laundry list of the major goals of the initiative to open up the Northwest.

Northwestern leaders like Ma Lin and Ma Bufang strenuously opposed Sun Dianying’s plan to garrison his soldiers in western Qinghai, but their opposition could only be persuasive if it was voiced in national terms. Edward McCord has shown how militarists were forced to turn to anti-warlord rhetoric to justify their own political interests. McCord argues that a well-known exchange of “circular wires” in the early spring of 1919 established the need for “warlords” to be opposed to warlord involvement in politics.⁸⁰ Along with Ma Hongkui in Ningxia, Qinghai’s Ma-family rulers also used telegrams addressed to all levels of the national government and released to the press to argue against Sun Dianying’s plans for colonizing western Qinghai. They opposed the central government’s orders as provincial governors, representatives of northwestern citizens, and caretakers of Mongol and Tibetan mobile pastoralists. Not only does this show the influence of anti-warlord sentiment in China at the time, but it also pointed to the importance of provinces as sites of political legitimacy.⁸¹

Voices of opposition from northwestern leaders made liberal use of public opinion and the “people’s wishes.” As Henrietta Harrison has shown, the republican political system situated sovereignty in the Chinese citizenry, resulting in a new form of political discourse that sought to justify political power as coming from the will of the

⁷⁹ Wang Jingwei to Zhu Shaoliang, et al. (10 July 1933) MGDA, 31.

⁸⁰ Edward A. McCord, “Warlords against Warlordism: The Politics of Anti-Militarism in Early Twentieth Century China,” *Modern Asian Studies* 30.4 (1996), 795-797.

⁸¹ John Fitzgerald (1999), 97, 123.

people. Looking at Republican Chinese political ceremonies like National Day, Harrison notes that the rubric of participation by “all sections of society” (*gejie*) referred only to “members of certain modern, government-sponsored institutions and associations.”⁸² The Ma militarists used this political rhetoric to demonstrate that “all sections” of northwestern society opposed Sun’s plan to station his army in western Qinghai.

According to the record of communications between northwestern leaders and the central government, “the people” of Ningxia and Qinghai provinces remained opposed to Sun Dianying’s appointment. Huge popular demonstrations erupted in Xining on July 5, forcing businesses, schools, and industry to close.⁸³ Ma Lin and Zhu Shaoliang reported that Qinghai’s Han, Muslim, Mongolians, and Tibetans had all voiced strenuous opposition to Sun’s plans, and inflammatory posters had appeared.⁸⁴ Ningxia social organizations would join in protest in mid-October.⁸⁵ On November 4, the phenomenon of popular organizations communicating their strong opposition to Sun’s appointment transcended provincial borders, this time uniting voices from the Education, Industry, Agriculture, Chambers of Commerce, schools, student unions, Journalism Worker’s Association, and Actors Association. Also included were the Islam Progressive Council and the Mongolian and Tibetan Cultural Progressive Council.⁸⁶ Protest against Sun’s

⁸² Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118.

⁸³ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, Head of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Committee, and He Yingqin (5 July 1933) MGDA, 29-30.

⁸⁴ Ma Lin to Wang Jingwei (7 July 1933) MGDA, 30. Zhu Shaoliang, et al., to Wang Jingwei (10 July 1933) MGDA, 30.

⁸⁵ Ningxia Provincial Education Committee, et al., to Nationalist Party Central Committee, et al. (16 October 1933) MGDA, 38.

⁸⁶ Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai Education Committees, et al., to Executive Yuan (4 November 1933) MGDA, 40.

appointment by these social organizations took advantage of the voices of “the people” to tap into a discourse of regionalism against a centralizing state.

Opposition to Sun’s appointment by these “popular organizations” was extremely critical of the man appointed to spearhead the drive to open up western Qinghai for agriculture. Sun’s infamous reputation was known far and wide, as was that of his army. “Who in the entire country does not see them as a rag-tag, bandit army that absolutely lacks discipline?” If everyone knew this, the petition against Sun’s appointment asked, “how can he implement the central government’s great policy of opening the northwest?”⁸⁷ When push came to shove, it appears that fighting against the Japanese in Chahar, generalship in the National Army, and a powerful appointment to carry out a high-priority central policy had not washed Sun’s reputation clean.

Not only was Sun Dianying unfit to serve in this capacity, they accused him of manipulating an important national priority for his own aims. In their argument, he was using the “fake, borrowed title of Agricultural Colonization Commissioner” to seize Qinghai’s territory and establish himself as the sole power in northwestern China. If this was not his plan, why would he have purchased weapons and ammunition in such large quantities, the Anti-Sun Petition Convention rhetorically asked? Furthermore, these communications accused Sun of incorporating bandit groups and manipulating the central government into funding his endeavor.⁸⁸ His delaying tactics while angling for funding and preparing his army for war in late July and August raised skeptical eyebrows in the

⁸⁷ Qinghai Anti-Sun Petition Convention to Executive Yuan (September 1933) MGDA, 34.

⁸⁸ Qinghai anti-Sun Petition Convention to Executive Yuan (September 1933) MGDA, 34.

media of the time.⁸⁹ He Yingqin, head of the Beiping Military Affair Committee and frequent intermediary for Sun, apparently felt the need to conduct an interview with the press on August 27 and defend the general's integrity and loyalty to the party-state.⁹⁰

Taking a strong northwestern regional stance, popular conventions criticized the entire "Develop the Northwest" initiative as excessively driven by the concerns of the central government. According to the Qinghai People's Anti-Sun Petition Convention in September 1933, the calls to open up the northwest appeared "muddled and unrecognizable for the people of Qinghai," and thus promoted doubts and resistance among the populace. From a local perspective, national citizens could only read about development plans "like apprentices unfamiliar with reality," and therefore mistook Qinghai to be a fertile, irrigated region capable of accommodating "the whole country's extra bandit armies."⁹¹

Nationalist party offices in Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai also put a financial spin on this regionalist argument against Sun Dianying. Financial support was a crucial issue in this process, made all the more critical by Sun's penchant for taking what he needed by force from the populace. In simple terms, the northwestern Party offices telegram to the Nationalist Party Central Committee summed up the logic of this argument. "Since the Central Government cannot give Sun Dianying enough funds to make full preparations, therefore they order him to open wasteland. This, of course, is not something that Sun's

⁸⁹ "Sun Dianying bianwu" [Sun Dianying frontier affairs], *Xijing ribao* (27 August 1933) 2. "Sun Dianying zhao suobu guanzhang bubing heng xunhua" [letter of speech Sun Dianying gave to all officers and soldiers], *Xijing ribao* (31 August 1933), 2.

⁹⁰ "He Yingqin tan Sun bu ru Qing wenti" [He Yingqin discussing the problem of Sun's forces entering Qinghai], *Xijing Ribao* (29 August 1933), 2.

⁹¹ Qinghai People's anti-Sun Petition Committee to Executive Yuan (September 1933) MGDA, 33-34.

men can do without eating.”⁹² As the *New York Times* reported, “the situation is embarrassing politically and financially. Suiyuan is eager to have the Forty-first Army removed and the central government is eager for it to arrive in Kokonuur in order to remove the burden of support from Nanjing.”⁹³ This, however, directly countered Wang Jingwei’s promise to Ma Lin that Sun’s army would not be a burden on the region due to full financial support from Nanjing.⁹⁴ In fact, military agricultural colonies had rarely been self-supporting in Chinese dynastic history. We have already seen how the Han Dynasty had debated over salt and iron monopolies to pay for military agricultural colonies. Peter C. Perdue’s work on the Qing’s incorporation of Xinjiang and the northwestern frontier also demonstrates that these colonies remained more “military” than agricultural.⁹⁵ Likewise, James Millward’s work suggests that supporting Xinjiang’s military colonies was a devastating drain on the dynasty’s silver reserves.⁹⁶ It seems, then, that history was on the side of northwestern opposition to Sun Dianyong.

In October, the Ningxia Provincial Education Committee and other social organizations echoed this localist critique. Disparaging the Central Government’s concern with border defense as nostalgic or romantic, Ningxia social circles said that the government’s grand plan was imperiling the people of the northwest. Contrary to the goal of integrating this region into the national whole inherent in the *Kaifa Xibei* movement, this communication urged that the central government “must not view Ningxia province

⁹² Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai Provincial Party Affairs Offices to the Nationalist Party Central Committee (29 September 1933), MGDA, 34-35.

⁹³ “New Civil Conflict is Feared in China: Ninghsia Provincial Officials Block Regular Army on its Way to Garrison Post,” *New York Times* (24 October 1933), 11.

⁹⁴ Wang Jingwei to Zhu Shaoliang, et al. (13 July 1933) MGDA, 31.

⁹⁵ Perdue (2005), 325. Perdue also cites Arthur Waldron’s evaluation of military agricultural colonies.

“Military farming simply did not work.” Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83.

⁹⁶ Millward (1998).

to be outside of China.” Would Sun Dianying be preparing for war and “talking so loudly out of the barrel of a gun” if he were stationed in the interior (*neidi*) and not the frontier?⁹⁷ Although Sun’s past history suggests that he in fact would have, these telegrams ask a more fundamental question. Was this to be development or conquest?

According to the communications from Ningxia and Qinghai popular conventions, the need for development was urgent, but another army was not the answer. What was needed included specialized experts, science and technology, heavy machinery, and enormous amounts of capital. Pastoral nomads needed “improvement” from a paternalistic state, not a predatory military. As the Qinghai popular convention against Sun argued in September, “what needs immediate work in the present is improving the nomadic problem. It is definitely not the problem of dispatching troops to reclaim land.”⁹⁸ In Ma Lin’s words of July 5, “Qinghai’s military affairs are completely in order, and it is said this is a safe place.” He cited provincial forces’ defeat of Tibetan armies in 1932 as proof an army sufficiently powerful to defend the borders.⁹⁹ The fact that Tibetan forces were able to occupy Yushu county for months on end could just as easily justify the need for more troops. Similarly, the provincial government’s influence in the pastoral regions around Dulan county and in the Chaidamu Basin was superficial to say the least.

In its rhetoric of resistance, Qinghai’s government did not explicitly argue that they should be the only group to “open up” western Qinghai. They did, however, stress

⁹⁷ Ningxia Provincial Education Committee, et al., to Nationalist Party Central Committee, et al. (16 October 1933) MGDA, 38.

⁹⁸ Qinghai Anti-Sun Petition Convention to Executive Yuan (September 1933) MGDA, 34.

⁹⁹ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, Head of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Committee, and He Yingqin (5 July 1933) MGDA, 29-30.

that the more soldiers were unnecessary. Development must go on, but not by Sun Dianying and his army of would-be agricultural colonizers. Considering the voluminous publications under *Kaifa Xibei* rubric that sought to open the minds of political leaders to the developmental potential of the northwest, and the detailed strategies for doing so, where were Sun Dianying's plans for opening up the northwest? In the Executive Yuan's order appointing Sun as reclamation commissioner regulated that his garrison should have offices for general affairs, land reclamation, veterinary medicine, and military affairs.¹⁰⁰ The research for this chapter, however, has uncovered neither a strategy nor policy statement on Sun's part. In the rhetoric of northwestern opposition to Sun Dianying, agriculture must spread into the grasslands, but not by Sun and not to the exclusion of regional power and local expertise. Qinghai's government and its agents were there on the ground, and were literally the ones trying to open pastoral land for agriculture, to teach Qinghai's Mongols and Tibetans about their nationality, and more importantly, about the government that sought to rule, improve, and speak for them.

"Conservationism" as Northwestern Resistance

Land is almost as much of an actor in this event as the people who negotiated and fought over it. As a basis for tax revenue, the protection and seizure of this prime commodity fueled destructive wars between militarists.¹⁰¹ The loss of land as national territory in the border crisis of the early 1930s spurred nationalist resistance. Threats to this key ingredient of nationhood stimulated plans for a more complete exploitation of

¹⁰⁰ Cui and Zhang (2008), 175.

¹⁰¹ Lipman (1997), 172.

natural resources and integration of land into the national territory in the Develop the Northwest initiative. Agricultural colonization aimed at fundamentally changing the relationships between land and inhabitants whose livelihood revolved around their flocks and pasture. Gendered female in some of the *Kaifa Xibei* literature,¹⁰² land was to be surveyed, defended, and developed. Land as territory, security, and wealth were part of Sun Dianyong's goal in going to Qinghai. Conversely, land and its lack of productivity were key parts of the language of opposition to his appointment in Qinghai.

We have seen that Qinghai's government sought to spread the twin prongs of agriculture and government control into nomadic pasturelands of western Qinghai. This process gave them an intimate knowledge of the terrain. This knowledge was in turn used as a weapon of rhetorical resistance to Sun's appointment. Northwestern leaders like Ma Lin, Ma Hongkui, and Zhu Shaoliang argued that the land and its agricultural output could not support Sun's army, and this would be the cause of great suffering and violent conflict.

In early July, Ma Lin argued that the land targeted for agriculture by Sun's army was unsuited for agriculture and would never be able to support his arm. "Western Qinghai was filled with marshes and salt flats, frozen all four seasons, and has not even a single inch of arable land. The only usable land is pasture for Mongols and Tibetan nomads."¹⁰³ Although Qinghai's own investigations as well as *Kaifa Xibei* literature on Dulan and the Qaidam Basin prove that Ma Lin was exaggerating the barrenness of the

¹⁰² Yang Shenglin, 17.

¹⁰³ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, Head of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Committee, and He Yingqin (5 July 1933) MGDA, 29-30.

region,¹⁰⁴ his claim that only usable land is pasture for Mongolian and Tibetan nomads was supported by at least one researcher in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰⁵ Qinghai's popular convention against Sun Dianying took a more measured tone than Ma Lin on July 5, but nevertheless argued that only twenty percent of Qinghai's land was suited to agriculture and that it was already fully cultivated.¹⁰⁶

As in the case of Yushu, discussed in the previous chapter, provincial authorities in Qinghai were only beginning the process of surveying the province. Dulan county and the Qaidam basin were also regions that were poorly researched by the early 1930s. A British man mapped the basin and the Qilian Mountains to the north in 1906. An international survey team from Germany and Australia surveyed Qinghai Lake and the Qaidam Basin twenty years later. Chinese experts, however, only began a comprehensive survey of Qinghai's geography in 1937, when military necessity required the Nationalists to professionally survey Qinghai and other western provinces. Surveying activities increased under Ma Bufang in the 1940s. Experts supported by the provincial government surveyed all irrigation projects in the province between 1943 and 1949. The provincial government's highway construction projects to Yushu and Xinjiang led to detailed mapping and surveys of southwestern and northwestern Qinghai in 1943 and 1946, respectively. Ma Bufang also ordered surveys for potential mineral wealth in the province. Teams searched for gold in the Huangshui and Datong River valleys in 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 288-291.

¹⁰⁵ Yuan Keyi (1947), 214-215.

¹⁰⁶ Qinghai Anti-Sun Petition Convention to the Executive Yuan (September 1933) MGDA, 34.

Ma Bufang invited over twenty experts from Lanzhou to search for natural resources throughout Qinghai in 1947.¹⁰⁷

Although Xining's officials and land experts had barely begun the process of scientific surveys of Qinghai's territory, they nevertheless argued that they had a better understanding of the province's geography, ecology, and productivity. The agricultural colonization of Dulan and the Qaidam basin was only just beginning—colonists numbered in the hundreds of households, at best. To say that stationing over fifty thousand troops on the steppe would “burden” the region's environment is most certainly an understatement.

Northwestern leaders' opposition to Sun Dianying's planned agricultural colonization of Dulan and the Qaidam basin took a surprisingly conservationist tone. The Qaidam basin was unsuited to agriculture and therefore could not feed that many new inhabitants, they argued. Moreover, the agricultural regions of Qinghai could not support the burden of an extra fifty thousand soldiers. Both of these lines of argument have been confirmed by recent work on the environmental history of northwestern China. In particular, Cui and Zhang demonstrate a striking degradation of the region's ecology during the late Qing and Republican periods. Population growth was a major factor in loss of native forests, erosion, and the desertification of Qinghai's grasslands. But the primary cause of the destruction of grasslands was land reclamation.¹⁰⁸ Micah S. Muscolino's work on land reclamation activities in wartime (1937-1945) Shaanxi

¹⁰⁷ Qinghai sheng difangzhi bianmu weiyuanhui, eds. *Qinghai shengzhi 6: cehuizhi* [Qinghai provincial gazetteer 6: land survey gazetteer], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 4, 95.

¹⁰⁸ Cui and Zhang (2008), 115.

powerfully demonstrates the severe damage to Huanglong Mountain's natural environment that resulted from excessive agriculture.¹⁰⁹

The agriculturally productive river valleys in northeastern Qinghai would likely not be able to support Sun's armies either. According to Zhu Shaoliang, Ma Lin, Ma Hongkui, and Deng Baoshan, the three northwestern provinces were "frontier wastelands, have suffered continuous years of disasters, lack sufficient food, and have many famine victims. Even though it rained copiously this year, it also caused floods, and then the harvest did not produce enough." Furthermore, Ningxia and Qinghai had suffered a horrible string of natural disasters.¹¹⁰ Hail had devastated over 175 villages in Qinghai between 1929 and 1931; floods in 29 villages in the same period; drought in 48 villages, and weasel infestations in 46 villages.¹¹¹ The drought that scorched Gansu province in 1929 was the worst in over two hundred years, enveloping over thirty million residents in Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai.¹¹² The situation was so dire and the land stretched so close to the subsistence point that Zhu Shaoliang argued it should be considered a disaster area.¹¹³

Agricultural colonization was a popular strategy for developing northwestern China during the Republican period, but it was by no means the only strategy offered. A different vein of policy proposals advocated taking advantage of the region's natural assets by making animal husbandry and the wool trade the primary vehicle for

¹⁰⁹ Muscolino (2011), 469 notes the "unimaginable" extent of deforestation as a result of land reclamation activities. Obviously, the Qaidam basin would not have suffered from deforestation, but the ecology of Qinghai's grasslands and steppe would have felt the brunt of military colonizers.

¹¹⁰ Zhu Shaoliang, Ma Lin, Ma Hongkui, and Deng Baoshan to Lin Sen, et al. (21 September 1933) MGDA, 33. Ma Hongkui to Executive Yuan (10 October 1933) MGDA, 35. Ningxia Provincial Education Committee, et al., to Nationalist Party Central Committee, et al. (16 October 1933) MGDA, 38.

¹¹¹ Qinghai sheng zhengfu minzheng ting (1932), 285-287.

¹¹² Cui and Zhang (2008), 212.

¹¹³ Zhu Shaoliang to Wang Jingwei (14 October 1933) MGDA, 37.

developing the northwest.¹¹⁴ One article argued for improving the dairy industry for its economic and nutritional value.¹¹⁵ This kind of development plans based on the pastoral trade in Qinghai sought to take advantage of the region's natural resources, instead of forcing agriculture upon ill-suited grasslands. Justin Tighe's work on agricultural colonization in Suiyuan province also finds that "pastoralism came to be accepted by many as one of the special characteristics of the northwestern development path."¹¹⁶

The grasslands, mountains, valleys, and deserts of western Qinghai might have been agricultural "wastelands." Dulan and the Qaidam basin, however, were highly productive as grazing lands for mobile pastoralists. Along with southwestern highlands of Golok and Yushu, Dulan and the Qaidam basin was central to the frontier trade of salt, livestock, skins, and furs. To borrow Karen Wiggen's turn of phrase, Qinghai's "circuitry of production and exchange"¹¹⁷ connected the mobile pastoralists grazing their flocks on the grasslands of Qinghai with several frontier markets for wool, then down the Yellow or Yangzi rivers to urban Chinese and overseas markets. The reckless expansion of agriculture into one of the sources of Qinghai's pastoral wealth would damage the economic circuitry, rather than develop the region. Although Qinghai's leadership took a conservationist tone to resist Sun's appointment, Ma Bufang was keen to develop and exploit the natural resources in Qinghai's pastoral regions. He was correct that

¹¹⁴ Meng Min, "Kaifa xibei yu muxu" [Develop the northwest and pastoralism], *Kaifa xibei* 1.3 (March 1934), 41-50.

¹¹⁵ Zhang Yuanbin, "Fazhan Qinghai ru shiye zhi guanjian" [A look at developing Qinghai's dairy industry], *Kaifa xibei* 1.4 (April 1934), 67-70.

¹¹⁶ Tighe, 137, 148.

¹¹⁷ Karen Wiggen, *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 16.

overzealous agricultural colonization would harm the region's ecological balance, but his argument was also self-serving.

Qinghai's wool trade took off in the late nineteenth century, and Dulan county, encompassing the Qaidam basin, was the region of Qinghai that produced the largest amount of wool. Although exact statistics are lacking, multiple studies of the wool industry in mid-1930s placed Dulan at the top of the wool production heap. Dulan had the highest production of wool at five million *jin* a year; Yushu and Guide counties followed a close second with four million *jin* each.¹¹⁸ From 1924 until 1933, at most one quarter of the wool produced in the province was sold outside of Qinghai.¹¹⁹ This suggests that there was money to be made collecting, distributing, and exporting Qinghai's pastoral products to urban centers along the Chinese coast.

The global economic depression that struck in the late 1920s severely affected the wool industry in Qinghai, as international buyers stopped their annual purchase of Qinghai's wool. As wool prices plummeted (one researcher found on average a decrease of 50%), local government taxes on the wool trade increased, some times as high as three times the value of the wool itself.¹²⁰ One study of Qinghai's wool industry in 1936 found twelve different taxes and fees assessed on wool sent from Huangyuan county, just west of Xining, to Tianjin. Of those twelve fees, eight were assessed before the product was

¹¹⁸ Lu Guilin (1935), 2. Dan Qinglin (1936), 11.

¹¹⁹ 16% was sold outside of the province and 8% was used for "manufacturing" (weaving?) within Qinghai. Lu Guilin (1935), 3.

¹²⁰ Lu Guilin (1935), 1.

shipped out of Xining!¹²¹ Although these taxes and fees were high, one standard use for wool revenue at the county level was paying for education fees.¹²²

The Ma family's desire to control and exploit the pastoral trade in Qinghai was nothing new. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing government had moved to centralize the frontier salt trade that connected Qaidam and Xining. They took control of the Qinghai Mongol Salt trade, and changed the name to Qinghai Official Salt trade.¹²³ But stationing Sun Dianying's army in Dulan certainly threatened Ma Bufang's active plans to dominate the wool industry in Qinghai with a network of companies loyal to him.

In the late 1920s, Ma Lin opened the Xiehe Company (*Xiehe shangzhan*) with an eye to profiting from the wool trade. Once Ma Bufang came to Xining in 1929, however, he wrested control of the company from his uncle. In tandem with the newly established Dexinghai Company, Xiehe then became part of Ma Bufang's near monopoly over Qinghai's market in pastoral products. From its headquarters in Xining, Xiehe grew to include branch offices in all of Qinghai's counties as well as Tianjin, Shanghai, Baotou, and Lanzhou.¹²⁴ Monopolizing the skin and fur trade was not the only means of exploiting Qinghai's natural and pastoral resources. From 1915 through 1949, the Ma family of Qinghai built a network of government-run grazing fields and horse farms for provincial and national armies. Ma Qi took over the former Qing's imperial horse farm

¹²¹ Tu Jie (1936), 395-396.

¹²² See Chapters Four and Five.

¹²³ Yang Zhiping (1910), 165.

¹²⁴ Qinghai sheng gongshanglian, ed. "Ma Bufang guanliao ziben de qiye jigou" [Enterprise structure of Ma Bufang's official capitalism], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1963), 63-65.

near Xining in 1915. Another military horse farm under Ma Qi's command opened in Menyuan in 1921.¹²⁵

Ma Bufang certainly wanted to control Qinghai's territory and exploit its resources. But he and his uncle strenuously resisted Sun Dianying's agricultural colonization of Dulan and the Qaidam Basin. Instead, he played to the ecological strengths of this frontier between agriculture and pastoralism. In many ways, Ma Bufang was seeking to continue his family's role as frontier military officials, responsible for managing, and at times "pacifying" the pastoral minorities who lived in the highlands of western and southwestern Qinghai.

Northwestern Resistance: Managing the Mongols

Agricultural colonization was one of many policies geared towards fully integrating frontier provinces into the Chinese national whole. Plans for the development of frontier regions—what one might call a policy of armies, fences, and roads—most often impacted the lives of Tibetan and Mongolian pastoral nomads. On the provincial level, the Qinghai government sought to "turn wilds into borders" and exert government control over mobile or semi-nomadic Tibetan and Mongolian populations, often through punitive expeditions that slaughtered locals and "extracted" their resources. Thus conflict over Sun Dianying's appointment in Qinghai has undertones of friction between nomadic and sedentary ways of life, and ethnic relations between Han, Hui, Tibetan, and Mongolian peoples. All of the northwestern leaders expressed deep concerns over potential conflict between locals in Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai when the size of Sun's

¹²⁵ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 663-666. Cui and Zhang (2008), 106-107.

forces overburdened the agricultural basis of the region, a lesson all too clear in Suiyuan's recent history of colonist-local conflict.¹²⁶ When Ma Lin warned the central government about Mongols perceiving that their way of life was endangered, he was likely exaggerating to make his viewpoint more persuasive. But he was not stretching the truth. Qinghai's Mongol banners had been losing population, territory and power for centuries.

Since Mongol tribes settled in Qinghai during the late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and especially under the Yongzheng emperor in the early eighteenth century, they had deeply influenced the region.¹²⁷ Examples of the influence of Mongols in Qinghai's history can be seen in place names. Qinghai Lake's Mongolian name, Kokonur, remains widely known. Huangyuan county's original name, Dang'e'er, also came from the Mongol language.¹²⁸

Qinghai's Mongol population largely grew out of the Qing Banners used to defeat the Dzungar Mongols in the early eighteenth century. Historical sources of the Qing dynasty through the Republic contained detailed information on Qinghai's twenty-nine banners, leadership genealogies, and imperially sanctioned grazing lands. Mongol banners were essential to the defeat of the Dzungars and the resulting incorporation of Qinghai into the Qing Empire. Since the conquest, the banner system structured the

¹²⁶ Yang Shenglin (1934), 35.

¹²⁷ Kang Furong (no date, Qing), 41-42. Ma Hetian, "Qinghai Meng Zang minzu zhi yiwang yu xianzai" [Past and present of Qinghai's Mongol and Tibetan ethnic groups], *Kaifa xibei* 4.1 (April 1934), 13-25, 37.

¹²⁸ Yang Zhiping (1910), QHDFJZWZ, 140, note 1.

families and livelihoods of the Mongols in Qinghai, as well as serving as the political power structure with which Qing officials in Xining interacted.¹²⁹

Since the mid-eighteenth century, however, Mongol power in the Kokonuur / Qinghai lake region began to decline. This began with the Qing's brutal conquest of the Khoshot Mongols, in what was likely a series of massacres intended to decimate regional opposition to the new dynasty. Despite the relative peace and stability that followed the Qing conquest, Kokonor's Mongol Banner populations never fully recovered.¹³⁰ But a close corollary to that was growing Tibetan strength, as they steadily moved north and west into Mongol pasturelands, often times violently taking livestock from Mongol Banners.¹³¹ By the early nineteenth century, nearly every Mongol banner in the region was under annual attack from Tibetan groups as most Tibetan tribes moved into Mongol lands. After more than a century of conflict along the Kokonuur frontier, Tibetan tribes gained official recognition of their right to reside in former Mongol pastures north of the Yellow River.¹³² One article from 1933 clearly delineates Mongol banners' original pastures from the current, and generally smaller, grazing lands under each banner.¹³³ Thus, Qinghai's Mongol tribes had been losing pastureland to Tibetans for over two centuries.

¹²⁹ For the basic information on banners, tribes, pastureland, tribal affiliation, see Kang Furong, 2-3. Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu fushe bianshi yuekan (1933), Chart Insert: "Qinghai Mengqi yi lanbiao" [Chart of Qinghai's Mongol banners]. For a much more detailed, contemporary studies, see Liao Xiaosu, "Qinghai zhi minzu zhuangkuang" [Situation of Qinghai's ethnic groups], *Xin yaxiya* 6.2-3 (August-September 1933). Qiu Xianglu, "Qinghai ge minzu yiru de suyuan ji qi fenbu zhi xianzhuang" [Origins of all of Qinghai's ethnic groups moving into the province and the current distribution], *Xin yaxiya* 5.3 (March 1933).

¹³⁰ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 362-367.

¹³¹ Lu Cheng, "Qinghai shidi kao" [Investigating Qinghai's historical geography], *Kaifa xibei* 1.1 (January 1934), 51. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 368-376.

¹³² Bulag (2002), 39.

¹³³ Liao Xiaosu (1933).

When the news of Sun's appointment in Qinghai was heard, Ma Lin warned "if Sun's army came in the morning, by evening the Mongolians would attack regardless of the danger."¹³⁴ And in this instance, mutual interest motivated Ma Lin to speak of Mongol resistance to agricultural colonization. Mongol leaders confirmed such dire predictions, predicting a fight to the death that would affect the stability of the entire northwest,¹³⁵ echoed by the Transportation Bureau warnings of racial (*zhongzu*) violence.¹³⁶ The *New York Times* noted that "religious and racial discord which followed similar colonization attempts in other frontier areas... as the recent history of the neighboring province of Sinkiang has shown what serious consequences may ensue when racial and religious prejudices are fanned."¹³⁷

Mongol opposition to agricultural colonization was not limited to Qinghai under the Ma family. Under the Kangxi and Yongzheng Emperors, military agricultural colonies closely followed Qing conquest of Mongol confederations.¹³⁸ By the 1930s, then, there would have been over two centuries of memory associated imperial conquest with agricultural colonies. Conflict between Han settlers and locals in Inner Mongolia is a well-known story. Owen Lattimore observed as much during his field research along the northern Chinese frontier during the 1930s. Such land reclamation activities resulted in local resistance throughout Inner Mongolia (Chahar, Suiyuan), Ningxia, and Qinghai.¹³⁹ Authorities in the new province of Suiyuan faced similar challenges to their efforts at

¹³⁴ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, Head of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Committee, and He Yingqin (5 July 1933) MGDA, 29-30.

¹³⁵ Executive Yuan Secretariat to Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Committee (19 July 1933) MGDA, 32.

¹³⁶ Transportation Bureau to Executive Yuan (28 July 1933) MGDA, 32-33.

¹³⁷ A.T. Steele, "Gens. Ma Combine to Oppose Gen. Sun," *New York Times* (7 January 1934), E8.

¹³⁸ Perdue (2005), 324.

¹³⁹ Owen Lattimore, "On the Wickedness of Being Nomads," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 1.2, (Shanghai: September, 1935), in *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers 1928-1958*, (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1962), 415-416.

agricultural colonization of Mongol banner pasturelands. At the level of practical implementation, banner land rights and usage patterns proved to be obstacles to colonists' purchase of land for farming. Colonization, both legal and illegal, was also the source of conflict with Mongols whose land was being taken. At a deeper, perhaps more systemic level, these conflicts represented the resulting friction between pre-existing Mongol visions of their land and the territorializing policies of the Chinese nation-state, its provinces, and its officials.¹⁴⁰

Ma Lin noted that Qinghai's Mongolians and Tibetan repeatedly voiced their opposition "because in their minds they felt their nomadic way of life was endangered and oppressed."¹⁴¹ Indeed, government reformers and academic researchers both stressed the need to "improve" nomadic peoples of Qinghai and the northwest. Many articles connected to the "Develop the Northwest" movement of the 1930s and 1940s suggested different strategies for reforming mobile pastoralists lifestyles. This kind of program certainly contained a cultural value judgment, favoring Chinese-style settled agriculture over "backward" mobile pastoralism. Some did include measures intended to "settle" mobile pastoralists by restricting grazing lands.¹⁴² Owen Lattimore's extensive personal experience in Mongolian regions of Chahar, Suiyuan, and Ningxia and scholarship led him to recognize the colonization policies aimed at "curing" Mongols of the "wickedness of being nomads."¹⁴³ This characterization, if somewhat extreme, reflects the statements of nearly all parties involved in this event. Respected scholar of the northwest, Zhou Zhenhe acknowledged that "frontier" peoples viewed the bundle of "development"

¹⁴⁰ See Tighe's chapter on "Suiyuan and the Challenge of Mongol Space."

¹⁴¹ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, et al. (25 June 1933) MGDA, 27-28.

¹⁴² Yang Shenglin, "Kaifa xibei yu kenzhi wenti," *Kaifa xibei* 1.3 (March 1934), 27.

¹⁴³ Owen Lattimore, "On the Wickedness of Being Nomads," (1935, 1962), 415-426.

policies of the *Kaifa xibei* movement as threats to their livelihoods and forced ethnic assimilation.¹⁴⁴ Ma Lin also communicated disillusionment with the central government's rhetoric among Mongols and Tibetans. "They are disappointed that your beautiful words—that their lives are secure and the central government is good to them—do not match reality."¹⁴⁵

Northwestern leaders argued that the land could not support the extra burden of Sun's army, and warned of possible ethnic conflict over scarce resources. Likewise a scarcity of resources and shelter in the frozen plains north of the Yellow River in Suiyuan province might have forced Sun Dianying himself to continue his western advance into Ningxia. Yet in the end, the northwestern leaders remained as loyal, if disobedient, members of the Chinese state, whereas Sun became a rebellious general and suffered the consequences.

The Politics of Resistance: Loyal Disobedience and Rebellious Implementation

Through the late autumn months of 1933, communications bounced between all levels of regional and national governments, reporting troop movements, popular protests, and political opposition from northwestern leaders. Sun Dianying and northwestern leaders all proclaimed their obedience to the central government, all the while asserting the ways in which the "other side" was violating orders. Sun's armies were stuck in the inhospitable plains of Ningxia and Suiyuan, worried about the oncoming winter, and reminding any and all listeners that he, in fact, was attempting to

¹⁴⁴ Zhou Zhenhe, "Meng Zang zhengzhi ying ruhe jianshe" [How one should construct Mongol and Tibetan politics], *Kaifa xibei* 1.6 (June, 1934).

¹⁴⁵ Ma Lin to Lin Sen, et al. (25 June 1933), MGDA, 28.

complete the task assigned to him. Northwestern leaders, on the other hand, continued their arguments against Sun's garrisoning western Qinghai. They also added accusation after accusation of how Sun was defying government orders. Although military hostilities had not yet erupted, the political battle over who was loyal and who was rebellious was in full swing.

Ma Lin and Ma Hongkui were extremely careful to present themselves as loyal servants of the Chinese nation-state, and ended up remaining so. But it was a tight rope to walk, balancing alarmist predictions of popular uprisings or spontaneous civil war against appearing too weak to rule their territory. But they presented a unified front against Sun's encroachment, with many telegrams jointly signed by Ma Hongkui, Ma Lin, and Zhu Shaoliang since September 21, 1933. On October 11, Ma Hongkui described his difficult position. Sun was clearly a central appointee leading a national army, thus resisting him was resisting central orders. Torn between his responsibilities to the welfare of Ningxia and his obedience to the central government, Ma Hongkui dramatically resigned with his entire provincial government.¹⁴⁶

Although Ma Lin praised the Ma Hongkui's motivation to resign, he also sought to differentiate between the people of Ningxia, whose suffering at the hands of Sun's armies would be temporary, from those in his own province. "As for Sun reclaiming wasteland in western Qinghai, Tibetan and Mongolian people's suffering will be a hundred times that of the people of Ningxia." In Ma Lin's argument, if Sun's army did in fact come west, then the native villages (presumably Hui and Han) would be unsafe, but the threat to the livelihoods of Qinghai's mobile pastoralists was much worse. Following

¹⁴⁶ Ma Hongkui to Lin Sen, et al. (11 October 1933) MGDA, 35-36.

Ma Hongkui's lead, Ma Lin stated that "I and my subordinates cannot shoulder this responsibility [of allowing Sun to come]. All we can do to thank national citizens is resign." His cosigners included Qinghai provincial committee members Ma Bufang and the Panchen Lama, among others.¹⁴⁷ This was an opposition so solid that Chiang would have to think twice.

Thus, Ma Lin and Ma Bufang used their recently earned roles as protectors of northwestern security and recognized rulers of Qinghai to resist Sun's appointment. They spoke as caretakers of the land and mediators between the central government and the Mongols of Qinghai province. Perhaps more important, however, was what they did not say. Although contemporary observers and historians alike naturally refer to this conflict in terms that are regional (northwestern), ethno-religious (Hui), and familial ("Ma family"), the available historical records of Qinghai's voices of opposition notably refrained from describing this conflict as one between Han Chinese and Sino-Muslims.

The New York Times coverage in early December illustrates how the ethnic and religious composition of northwestern opposition remained a threatening prospect. Despite being one of the largest religious groups in China, according their reporter in Beijing, Muslims had played a "relatively unimportant role in Chinese affairs" due to their "lack of unity" and clever exploitation by "their non-Mohammedan Chinese overlords." But when "group prestige is threatened" as in the case of Sun's coming westward, Chinese Muslims "have proven themselves capable of forgetting their differences." In the face of 50,000 troops in Sun's "alien force," Ma Hongkui and Ma

¹⁴⁷ Ma Lin, et al. to Wang Jingwei (19 October 1933) MGDA, 38.

Lin mended old differences.¹⁴⁸ According to the report, Ma Hongkui's resignation threat made the Central government induce Sun to halt, "realizing that civil war was inevitable if General Sun attempted to carry out his purpose." As a result, Sun was ordered to encamp for the winter around the "bleak, frozen plains around Paotow, at the terminus of the Peiping-Suiyuan Railway."¹⁴⁹

Another example comes from the *Kaifa xibei* journal in February 1934. While reporting the state of hostilities between Sun and the northwestern armies, the author imagined the possible outcomes if either side won. Should Sun lose, then his army would like turn to banditry and prey upon locals in Gansu, Ningxia, and Suiyuan provinces. Should Sun defeat the northwestern armies, the author feared that ethnic violence between Han Chinese and Sino-Muslims would once again rear its ugly head.¹⁵⁰

During the last half-century before hostilities erupted over Sun Dianying, conflict between Han Chinese and Sino-Muslims in the northwest had been frequent and devastating. The destructive northwestern Muslim rebellion from 1865-1873 scarred the region.¹⁵¹ Violence between Chinese and Muslims featured prominently in local historical accounts from the late Qing through the Republican period. Conflict again erupted in 1895 and again as recently as the late 1920s, when Ma Bufang's younger cousin, Ma Zhongying, raised the banner of Muslim resistance to Feng Yuxiang's occupation of the northwest. This inter-ethnic strife terrorized Hezhou (contemporary Linxia, Gansu), northeastern Qinghai, the Gansu corridor, and continued to fester in

¹⁴⁸ Hunsberger also notes the cooperation between Ma Hongkui and Ma Bufang, but calls it typical of the activities of "pure warlords." Hunsberger, 51-52.

¹⁴⁹ A.T. Steele (7 January 1934), E8.

¹⁵⁰ "Yi yue lai zhi xibei" [The northwest over the last month], *Kaifa xibei* 1.2 (February 1934), 104.

¹⁵¹ Kim (2004).

Xinjiang at the time of Sun's appointment. Although some Chinese accounts argue that Ma Lin initially supported Ma Zhongying as a proxy against Feng Yuxiang, Ma Bufang led the military operations that forced Zhongying's soldiers out of Qinghai.¹⁵² The time would have been ripe to rally Sino-Muslims against yet another Chinese-led army attempting to bring the northwest to heel. Instead, Ma Lin and Ma Bufang professed loyalty to the central government while resolutely opposing central orders. And they did so in the name of protecting Qinghai's frontier environment and the Mongols that lived there.

In this treacherous game of political disobedience, Zhu Shaoliang's (1891-1963) role appears to have been crucial. A long-time supporter of Chiang Kai-shek, Zhu's loyalty to the Generalissimo gave Chiang a trustworthy point man in the northwest.¹⁵³ Zhu's early support of the northwestern perspective gave Ma Lin and Ma Hongkui the justification that they so sorely needed if they hoped to avoid being labeled rebellious.¹⁵⁴ In October, he had ordered Ma Hongkui of Ningxia to withhold any supply or transportation support from Sun's passing armies. In early November, Zhu Shaoliang announced that he was sending reinforcements to Ningxia's eastern border to shore up defense against Sun Dianying's 50,000 strong army.¹⁵⁵

The fact that Zhu was not a Muslim also allowed northwestern leaders to reasonably claim that this was not about Sino-Muslims fighting the central government.

¹⁵² Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 490-496.

¹⁵³ Wang Jin, *Gan Ning Qing minguo renwu zhuan* [Biographies of people in Republican-era Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai], (Lanzhou: Lanzhou daxue chubanshe), 88-126.

¹⁵⁴ Ma Hongkui to Executive Yuan (10 October 1933) MGDA, 35.

¹⁵⁵ Although the published archival record of communications about the Sun Dianying incident does not include Zhu's actual order, telegrams from Ma Hongkui and Sun Dianying confirm Zhu's order. Sun Dianying to Wang Jingwei (9 October 1933) MGDA, 35. Ma Hongkui to Executive Yuan (10 October 1933), MGDA, 35.

In late January 1934, Zhu would explicitly deny any ethnic motivation behind northwestern opposition in a telegram reproduced in *Xijing ribao*. “Hui are part of the nation-race (*guozu*), and have been patriotically following the central government.”¹⁵⁶ Instead, it was the party-supported, officially recognized governors of the northwestern provinces of Ningxia, Gansu, and Qinghai that opposed this policy.

Sun and his army faced a difficult situation during the fall and winter of 1933-1934. In November, the *New York Times* reported about Sun Dianying’s unwillingness to remain in the vicinity of Baotou through the winter.¹⁵⁷ On December 12, Sun reported to Bai Xiongqie that he was encountering severe difficulties feeding his troops in his current position. The authorities at Jincheng could not allow him to remain there for long. Sun professed his loyalty to the Central Government but also the necessity of moving to greener pastures, so to speak.¹⁵⁸

Appearing to grow increasingly desperate, Sun also floated the idea of his troops taking Xinjiang as their site for agricultural military colonization, reportedly saying that this had been his goal all along. Sun’s statements then seem to move into open threats against the Central Government, claiming that the impending war would be an annoyance to the security of the northwest. Then, turning the imperialism justification for opening up the northwest on its head, Sun noted that Xinjiang was in a precarious position, with Soviets in the north and Chinese Communist forces in the Sichuan area. In Bai’s words, if they two forces joined together through Gansu, the outcome would be unthinkable.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ “Yang Shao dian Sun tingjin: jinghou zhongyang chuli,” *Xijing ribao* (26 January 1934), 6.

¹⁵⁷ “Ningsia Situation Tenser,” *New York Times* (6 November 1933), 13.

¹⁵⁸ Yang Yongtai to Wang Jingwei (31 December 1933) MGDA, 41.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

According to Sun's Beijing representative, he was following the Central government's orders, but due to the harsh winter in Wulin, his soldiers and officers were living in tents and suffering greatly. "Heavy snows will make the numbers of injured and dead soldiers unthinkable." Yan Xishan had apparently offered permission for Sun and his soldiers to temporarily stay in Woye in Inner Mongolia. Friendly armies did not know the straits in which Sun found himself, and were obstructing his duties in many areas.¹⁶⁰

Sun continued to present himself as the loyal general attempting to follow orders in the face of a disobedient yet determined foe. "Since returning from resisting the Japanese, I have followed the orders for military cultivation. I hoped to reach Qinghai at an early date." Although his troop vanguard had already reached the outskirts of the Ningxia provincial seat, they were meeting with stiff resistance. Earnestly trying to avoid conflict, Sun ordered his troops to hold positions, but his "responsibility was not yet completed."¹⁶¹ Sun again attempted to blame Ma Hongkui for the battles in the northwest, making his strongest nationalist argument, saying that "there is no kind of feudal thought and warlord ambition worse than preventing a national army from crossing through national territory to defend a neighboring province!"¹⁶²

Sun attempted to use his title against the northwestern opponents, and painted them as disloyal for obstructing his passage to Qinghai. But his actions since taking up the post left plenty of room to doubt his motivation. His purchase of large amounts of ammunition understandably triggered alarm bells among northwestern leaders, as had

¹⁶⁰ Sun Dianying's representative in Beijing quoted in He Yingqin to Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei (3 January 1934) MGDA, 42.

¹⁶¹ Sun Dianying to Wang Jingwei (15 January 1934) MGDA, 43.

¹⁶² Telegram from Sun Dianying to Executive Yuan (23 January 1934) MGDA2, 8.

incorporating a large “bandit” force into his army.¹⁶³ And through the first month of 1934, Sun put those weapons and troops to use attacking Ningxia. From January 11, Sun’s forces attacked Dengkou in Ningxia. Upon taking the city, his army reportedly closed down government and party offices, arrested officials, and freed criminals. These were not the actions of a government official taking his post, or so northwestern leaders argued.¹⁶⁴ Sun’s forces suffered a major defeat on the field of battle between January 16 and 17.¹⁶⁵ On January 21, Sun’s forces withdrew to the north. An uneasy cease-fire ensued as a flurry of telegraphs circulated between Ningxia, Gansu, Qinghai, Nanchang, Nanjing, Beijing, and Baotou.¹⁶⁶

While Sun’s words and actions grew increasingly reckless, Ma Bufang became a key military informant for the central government. In a telegram from December 8, he presented Wang Jingwei with the latest intelligence on Sun’s forces, including his own evaluation of the effectiveness of Sun’s fighting forces.¹⁶⁷ Ma Bufang would again offer military intelligence to the central government in reports through January.¹⁶⁸

On January 19th, Ma Bufang, Ma Hongkui, and Ma Hongbin once again presented their case. They argued that their duty to defend and protect their provinces and people forced them to fight, describing their actions as “making full preparations to fight for the sake of peace.” And they demanded vengeance for Sun Dianying’s transgressions. “For

¹⁶³ Ma Bufang to Wang Jingwei (8 December 1933) MGDA, 41.

¹⁶⁴ Zhu Shaoliang, Ma Hongkui, Ma Lin, Deng Baoshan, Ma Hongbin, Ma Bufang, Lu Dacheng, and Ma Buqing to Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek (13 January 1934) MGDA 43.

¹⁶⁵ Telegram from Sun’s subordinates, Xi Enbo et al. to Party Center, Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, and He Yingqin (20 January 1934) MGDA2, 8. “Zai ming Sun bu tingjin,” *Xijing ribao* (24 January 1934), 2.

¹⁶⁶ “Yang Shao dian Sun tingjin: jinghou zhongyang chuli,” *Xijing ribao* (26 January 1934), 6.

¹⁶⁷ Memorial from Ma Bufang to Wang Jingwei (8 December 1933) MGDA, 41.

¹⁶⁸ Ma Bufang to Wang Jingwei (17 January 1934) MGDA2, 7.

the nation's prestige, punish him! For the people of the northwest, punish him!"¹⁶⁹

The following day, six of Sun Dianying's former subordinates telegraphed their surrender to the major figures in the national government in which they "confirmed" nearly all of the accusations leveled against Sun by the northwestern leaders. While one must certainly read such confessions with a skeptical eye, it nevertheless represents a major nail in Sun's coffin. The surrendered officers recounted Sun's schemes on the northwest, echoing Ma Hongbin, Ma Hongkui, and Ma Bufang's accusations against Sun in their telegram on January 19. According to their confession, Sun jumped at the opportunity caused by the chaos of the Fujian Rebellion, the Communist takeover of Nanchang, and the loss of the Nineteenth Route Army to move into the northwest. They also accused Sun of appointing three of his subordinates as chairmen of Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai provinces, a move far beyond the scope of his appointment. In their words, "if our army did not take advantage of the situation to move on the northwest, a great opportunity would have been lost and we would have had no way out."¹⁷⁰ In their final assessment of Sun Dianying and their own actions under his command, the officers labeled him disloyal to the central government by contrasting national armies with those of warlords. "We wish to be soldiers of the nation-state, not the tools of a private man," and they encouraged all soldiers and officials to return to the national fold.¹⁷¹ Although such "confessions" are highly unreliable as accurate historical sources, we can nevertheless see how Sun Dianying was being defined as that nefarious obstacle to

¹⁶⁹ Telegram from Ma Hongbin, Ma Hongkui, and Ma Bufang to Party Central, Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, and Chiang Kai-shek, et al. (19 January 1934) MGDA2, 7.

¹⁷⁰ Sun's subordinates, Xi Enbo et al. to Party Center, Lin Sen, Wang Jingwei, Chiang Kai-shek, and He Yingqin (20 January 1934) MGDA2, 8.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

national integration—a warlord.¹⁷²

Defeated in what became the decisive battle, Sun nevertheless continued to defend himself to the central and demanding punishment for the northwestern leaders on January 23 and again on the twenty-fifth.¹⁷³ But the noose quickly tightened. Northwestern leaders again issued a joint communiqué on the twenty-fourth. In their words, “the matter was simple. Thinking of the nation as a whole, the stability of the northwest, national laws, and wide news coverage of the event,” the only choice was punishing Sun.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, the press seemed to have decisively turned against Sun, as one *Xijing ribao* title suggests: “All provinces of the northwest already prepared to repel Sun.”¹⁷⁵

Press reports indicated that Sun’s forces had begun their eastern retreat on January 28.¹⁷⁶ Disgrace came on January 31, 1934 with the loss of his generalship, monthly stipend, and position and office in Qinghai. On 31 January 1934, Wang Jingwei telegraphed Beiping, Xian, and all of the northwestern provinces rescinding Sun’s title and office for the agricultural colonization of Qinghai.¹⁷⁷ Punishment came in the form of bombs dropped from Hu Zongnan’s airforce, and infamy remained in the history books.

¹⁷² Fitzgerald (1999), 94-95.

¹⁷³ Sun Dianying to Executive Yuan (23 January 1934) MGDA2, 8

¹⁷⁴ Zhu Shaoliang, Ma Hongkui, Ma Lin, Deng Baoshan, Ma Hongbin, Ma Bufang, Lu Dacheng, and Ma Buxu to all levels of government (24 January 1934) MGDA2, 9.

¹⁷⁵ “Xibei ge sheng: ju Sun yi you zhunbei” [Northwestern provinces: already prepared to repel Sun], *Xijing ribao* (25 January 1934), 6.

¹⁷⁶ “Sun Ma liang bu: Zai Ligangbao xiangchi zhong,” XJRB (28 January 1934), 2.

¹⁷⁷ Draft telegram of Wang Jingwei Rescinding Sun’s Office and Title (31 January 1934) MGDA2, 13.

Conclusion

The dizzying web of regional militarists, political intrigue, and destructive battles that set the stage for this conflict highlights the problematic Nationalist policy of playing fast and loose with military and political titles in their bid to unify China in the Nanjing Decade. When the Japanese in Manchuria or Shanghai, Soviets in Xinjiang, British in Tibet, and negotiations for Mongolian autonomy are taken into account, the border crisis of the early 1930s and Nationalist responses come more clearly into focus. One then sees a nascent nation-state in a perilous struggle for internal stability in the face of the looming threat of dismemberment from nearly all sides. Sun's appointment for the agro-military colonization of western Qinghai province opens up the nature of Republican Chinese engagement through the "Develop the Northwest" movement of the 1930s, and connects Sun to the flood of investigative reports in frontier areas and policy proposals for turning the amorphous frontiers of the Qing Empire into solid borders of the modern Chinese nation-state.

The Develop the Northwest movement had two intertwined goals at its core. As Justin Tighe argues, the dominant themes in *Kaifa Xibei* literature were the economic development of the northwest and "the elaboration and exploitation of the Northwestern space as a national place."¹⁷⁸ In most situations, agricultural colonization achieved both of these goals. Farming increased economic productivity and settled, agricultural households increased tax receipts. Since land reclamation and agricultural colonization frequently took place on the multi-ethnic borderlands of the Chinese state, farming

¹⁷⁸ Tighe, 96.

families tended to bring more Han Chinese to minority lands.¹⁷⁹ But at times, agricultural colonization could pit the goals of political control and economic development against each other. This chapter has argued that Sun Dianying's appointment, and the political and military conflict that followed, was one such event.

Sun Dianying's mission to colonize western Qinghai could have potentially increased the central government's control of China's western borderlands, but only at the expense of Ma Bufang's own regional power. Full-scale, military agricultural colonization of the Qaidam basin would have strained this pastoral region's environment, thereby damaging the goal of economically developing the northwest. Qinghai's leaders, Ma Lin and Ma Bufang, thus took a conservationist tone to oppose Sun's appointment from an economic perspective. And the unified northwestern opposition to Sun Dianying's western advance also threatened the political stability of this essential borderland. Thus, Ma Lin and Ma Bufang turned the dual goals of agricultural colonization against each other; they opposed a central government order with the very discourse that justified the policy itself. Although the attempted implementation led to war in Ningxia, and the man responsible for carrying out this policy suffered defeat and disgrace, the plan to open up the northwest remained.

Only weeks after Sun's Western Qinghai Land Reclamation position was cancelled, Qinghai's provincial government published a five-point policy proposal for opening up Qinghai. Echoing the language of the "Develop the Northwest" movement, Qinghai's plan spoke of imperialism, invasion, and northwestern development. It called

¹⁷⁹ Mette Halskov Hansen, *Frontier People: Han Settlers in Minority Areas of China*, (Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 1, 5, 18-20.

for improvements in transportation, defense, irrigation, banking, healthcare, as well as the “improvement” of mobile pastoralists and the wool industry.¹⁸⁰ Print media continued in to the 1940s advertising the wonders of agricultural colonization in the Qaidam basin of western Qinghai.¹⁸¹

Despite going to war to prevent Sun Dianying’s military agricultural colonization in 1933 and 1934, Ma Bufang’s Qinghai provincial government would itself send soldiers to farm in the Qaidam Basin during the 1940s. Qinghai’s government formed the Qaidam Agricultural Colonization Bureau in 1945, an organization responsible for overseeing the one thousand troops sent to Qaidam to farm. Primary and secondary sources alike judge that this was a fairly successful effort at military farming in the Dulan and Qaidam regions of western Qinghai. The Qinghai Construction Department’s 1946 report noted that nearly 5,500 *mu* of land in Dulan county were being cultivated by Mongols and Tibetans.¹⁸²

Ma Bufang also came out of the Sun Dianying conflict with a firm grip on Qinghai’s frontier economy. In 1938, Ma Bufang used the Nationalist government’s call to prevent any supplies from assisting the Japanese to fully monopolize the province’s wool trade into a unified system with government oversight. Through Xiehe Company, Ma Bufang was able to set standard prices for all fur and skin products, funneled them through a warehouse and distribution system loyal to him, and resold them in coastal

¹⁸⁰ “Qinghai niju kaifa Qinghai yao’an xian xiang quanguo jingweiyuanhui jianyi,” *Xijing ribao* (3 February 1934)

¹⁸¹ “Chaidamu lai ke xiaoyan hua tunkun” [Smiling faces of guest agricultural colonizers in Chaidam], *Xibei ribao* (17 February 1943), 2. “Tiantang kenqu Chaidamu—fang Wu chuzhang” [Land reclamation heaven, Chaidam—Interviewing director Wu], *Heping ribao* (24 December 1943), 6.

¹⁸² Qinghai sheng jiansheting (1946), Ch. 6 Agriculture, 3-4 and “Qinghai sheng jun min kenghuang dimu shubiao” [Chart of amount of land reclaimed by military and civilians in Qinghai province]. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 656.

urban centers and abroad.¹⁸³ Xiehe trading company published its organization's by-laws and regulations for receiving, warehousing, and processing skins, furs, and medicinal products.¹⁸⁴ Its monopoly over pastoral and medicinal products was backed by a bureaucracy that collected documentation on products as they were received, stored, and sold. The organization's motto, included in the regulations, was "we will work so that the people do not fear us. We will work so that the people do not ignore us." The document also gave two simple dialogues guiding workers to vehemently deny that they were a monopoly or that they harmed the people's economic interest. "No...No...No...Absolutely not" was the response to those questions in the second precept of this enterprise.¹⁸⁵

Qinghai's authorities also continued to supply horses to the Nationalist government. Twenty years after its founding in 1921, the Menyuan horse farm had raised nearly 7,500 horses. Datong county opened a major military horse breeding center in 1936. This farm provided 1,200 horses for the Nationalist government. By the time of the PLA's conquest of Qinghai in 1949, the Datong military horse farm had over five thousand horses, three hundred head of cattle, over one thousand sheep, and over one thousand workers.¹⁸⁶ Xiehe's sibling company, Dexinghai, also engaged in the lucrative horse husbandry industry. By the time Xiehe and Dexinghai folded into the Northwest

¹⁸³ Qinghai sheng gongshanglian, 63-65.

¹⁸⁴ *Qinghai xiehe shangzhan zuzhi guicheng ji tongying pimao yaocai zanxing banfa* [Qinghai Xiehe branch organization regulations and standard method for processing skins, furs, and medicine], (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, c. 1938). Although Qinghai provincial library's copy of the document is undated, it is likely that these unified regulations were promulgated after 1938.

¹⁸⁵ Qinghai Xiehe shangzhan (c. 1938), 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 663-666. Cui and Zhang (2008), 106-107.

Pastoral Company in 1947, it had branch horse farms and grazing fields in nearly every county of the province.¹⁸⁷

The Nationalist government's disavowal of the "rebellious" Sun Dianying in favor of the Sino-Muslim leaders of Ningxia and Qinghai provinces, Ma Hongkui and Ma Lin, poignantly demonstrates the strength regional resistance to the centralizing power of the Nationalist state. At the same time, however, Sun Diangying's disgrace reaffirmed the necessity of provincial militarists using the language of nationalism to resist Nanjing's political centralization. Sun was the "rebellious warlord" while Ma Lin and Ma Bufang of Qinghai remained "loyal officials." Ma Bufang seems to have come out of this event in a strong position. He solidified his military power in Qinghai and with the central government, and set the stage for a greater control over, and profit from, his province's development. This was the last military conflict between Ma Bufang and the Nationalist central government, but competition for political control continued into the 1930s. But the black and white logic of "national" versus "warlord" remained, and would be used against Ma Bufang later.

¹⁸⁷ Cui and Zhang (2008), 107.

Chapter Four

Schooling at the Frontier: Structuring Education and Practicing Citizenship in Qinghai, 1911-1949

It was a clear summer morning in the “ancient” town of Huangzhong, a short distance south of Xining. The high mountains, rushing streams, and tree-lined paths inspired one observer to wax poetic about his surroundings. What really moved this reporter, however, were the clear, energetic voices of young students reciting their Chinese lessons. Every morning for over a year, sounds of schooling had echoed through the town. These sounds made him feel that the “ancient town was progressing.”

On this morning in 1937 a reporter was observing a class at the masses literacy school in Huangzhong. The teacher called on a twenty-three year old student and asked what nationality he was. “I am a Qinghai person from China. No... wait, I am a Chinese person from Qinghai.” The teacher corrected the student, stressing that they all were Chinese, and as such, they all were brothers. And they were under attack. Everyone knew what the Japanese armies were doing, the teacher lectured. As a light rain began to fall, a student asked where the famous Commander Ma Biao was. Commander Ma Biao? He was fighting the Japanese down in the east. The cavalry from Qinghai that he commanded had fought well--killing the enemy, taking supplies, and bringing honor to all “Chinese from Qinghai.” The students were not to worry. With brave soldiers like Ma Biao, the Japanese aggressors were sure to meet defeat.

Now the teacher turned to the day’s lesson. A simple story about a young villager, one just like the students themselves, would introduce basic literacy in a functional

manner. This boy's name was Zhang Xiaosan, and he lived just south of the village. His family home faced a river and was nestled below a mountain. This young man worked hard all day in the fields, with no free time for himself. When he was not working the fields, he was off fishing by the river or collecting firewood in the hills above. All of his efforts were directed at supporting his family, and the teacher hoped that all of his students would learn from the fictive Zhang Xiaosan and model themselves after his stoic productivity. As the teacher explained each sentence of the textbook, the students practiced reading in unison. After reciting the lesson to the teacher's satisfaction, he then reviewed the text, making sure to stress the standard, national pronunciation of each word.¹

In this chapter I describe Qinghai's public school system as "schooling at the frontier." This refers to deepening the influence of modern, national education on the people who live near the margins of Chinese cultural influence. Geographically, the focus is on Xining and the seven largely agricultural counties originally under its administration. Schooling the frontier, then, describes how the evolving movement to perfect a nation-wide education system to train modern, active Chinese citizens was applied to the northwestern frontier.

Lower literacy rates, economic poverty, spatial distance, different languages, cultures, and livelihoods all did their part to shape Qinghai's school system from the bottom up. Political power, government funding, desire to directly shape local society increased with the establishment of local government. Since building a modern education

¹ Zhi Kang, "Huangzhong Huijiao cujinhui minzhong shizichu suomiao" [Description of Huangzhong's Islam Progressive Council's masses literacy school], *Xin xibei* 2.1 (1937), 121-122.

system was the avowed goal of political leaders and professional educators alike, the state brought schools along with it. Yet developing a so-called modern school system in Qinghai cannot be solely understood as a civilizing mission, or only as a tool of nation- and state-building for the modernizing governments in Nanjing, and to a lesser extent, Xining. All of these themes, however, were present in contemporary sources.

Local peoples also struggled to build school systems that reflected their cultural and religious traditions. Previous works of frontier history should remind us that the differences, changes, and transitions inherent in frontiers also present opportunities for adaptation, recreation, and synthesis. It should come as no surprise, then, that three major school systems took root in Qinghai during the first part of the twentieth century. Frontier schools for Mongols and Tibetans (Ch. 5) are another case study of tailoring a school system to potential students. It also powerfully illustrates the how schooling across cultures involves a process of learning in order to teach. Semi-private schools for Hui people represent one hybrid school system (Ch. 6), simultaneously shaped by modernizing currents in Islam, the Ma family's political, economic, and military power, and the often-troubled relationship between Hui people and the Republican Chinese state.

From Chow Tse-tung on the May Fourth Movement to Yeh Wen-hsin's study of university student cultures, and Suzanne Pepper's research on political struggles in the Chinese Civil War, scholars have focused on student participation in culture and politics.² These foundational works, however, have in general been limited to coastal, urban

² Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolutions in Modern China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960). Yeh Wen-hsin, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000). Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California press, 1978).

spaces. This chapter seeks to broaden our understanding of twentieth century Chinese education through a detailed study of how modern schooling came to China's northwestern frontier. Justin Tighe's work on Suiyuan province is one notable exception. He argues that province's poverty and backwardness became central attributes of both local and outside images of Suiyuan. Not only was the local educational enterprise seen as a natural solution to problems of poverty and backwardness, but also became "the cultural and intellectual component of Suiyuan's construction."³ This chapter will also draw from more recent studies of education and citizenship in the early twentieth century China. Robert Culp's research on new spatial and temporal organization in secondary schools in the lower Yangzi region has inspired the sections on school infrastructure and student citizenship.⁴ Unlike Culp's monograph, sources available for this project led to focusing on the essential task of training effective teachers for public schools in Qinghai. In this respect, Cong Xiaoping's work on teachers' schools from the early Republic through the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937) serves as a model for the chapter sections on village normal schools and teacher work obligations.⁵ Unlike Cong's study, this chapter will trace changes in teacher training and supervision into the 1940s.

School Infrastructure

Robert Culp convincingly argues that schools and the publishing industry were two institutions that shaped the infrastructure of teaching citizenship in Republican

³ Tighe, 153-154.

⁴ Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁵ Cong Xiaoping, *Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

China. In Culp's words, it was "[w]ithin the institutional frameworks of schools and publishing companies, [that] diverse social and political groups engaged one another over the meaning of citizenship."⁶ This section will address the slow but steady growth of public schools, one of Culp's two institutions of modern education, in the lowlands of northeastern Qinghai. As we will see later in the chapter, the publishing industry did not build an institutional presence in Qinghai during the Republican period. Instead, up-to-date textbooks approved by the national Ministry of Education remained sorely lacking in Qinghai until 1949.

This was a process of starting from scratch, building out from Xining, to the newer, agricultural counties, and only then toward the pastoral regions up in the southwest. The extreme rise in elevation outside of the lowland river valleys should not be taken lightly. Ma Bufang's military labor was only able to finish the road to Yushu early in the Civil War during 1946. Schooling at the frontier, then, refers to the deepening influence of modern Chinese education within the river valleys of northeastern Qinghai.

Qinghai's nascent school system slowly responded to changes coming from central education authorities. Between 1902 and 1905, the Qing Dynasty's New Policy reforms forever altered the face of Chinese schools. School regulations in 1902 and 1904 ended the Neo-Confucian academic system and 1905 saw the cancellation of the imperial civil service exams.⁷ The Qing government then established an empire-wide, central administration for the new-style school system. Following imperial orders, provincial

⁶ Culp, 19.

⁷ Glen Peterson and Ruth Hayhoe, "Introduction," Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Yongling Lu, eds. *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 3.

authorities established education administrations at the provincial, prefectural, and county levels. Authorities in Xining then a prefectural city under Gansu province, transformed the better Confucian academies in the agricultural regions around Xining into low and high primary schools. Datong county, a county to the northwest of Xining founded in 1761, also turned Confucian academies into the county's first new schools. Slightly less reputable than its counterpart in Xining, Datong's Qingxing Academy grew into a high primary school.⁸

Xining's first organization devoted to managing schools in its territory opened in 1915. Ma Qi (1869-1930), the military commander of Xining and father of Ma Bufang (1902-1975), established an Education Department within his administration. This incarnation of the Education Department would control the region's schools until Qinghai became its own province at the beginning of 1929. The newly formed provincial government secretariat oversaw education for two years, until Qinghai province's Education Department opened in 1931.

The school system enacted in the early 1930s would remain largely unchanged throughout the next two decades. When Ma Bufang became chairman of the Qinghai provincial government in 1938, he enacted local government reforms that indirectly influenced the school system. He changed school nomenclature in 1942, replacing the low and high primary schools with citizen schools and central citizen schools in 1942.

From humble beginnings, schools in Qinghai would grow in an organic fashion, with students becoming teachers and teachers becoming administrators. In fact, Qinghai's education administration described the school system in biological, if mixed, metaphors.

⁸ Nie Shouren (1926), 366.

Primary school was the foundation of education, secondary school was its heart, and normal schools trained teachers--the mothers of education.⁹ The foundation of Qinghai's school system grew dramatically in the Republican period. Although records are scattered and incomplete for the first three decades of the twentieth century, it appears that some of the original agricultural counties around Xining were in fact building schools at that time. Higher up the Yellow River, Guide county seat had one low primary school in 1919, which would grow into a high primary school in 1926.¹⁰ Datong county, northwest of Xining in the Huangshui River valley, had 42 primary schools in 1926.¹¹

From under 30 primary schools in 1910, Qinghai already had 278 primary schools on the eve of the region becoming a province in 1928. Primary schools growth continued in the 1930s: from 613 in 1934 to 652 five years later. After a reduction in the number of schools during 1940, primary schools again grew steadily through the 1940s. After peaking at 963 schools in 1947, the number of primary schools dropped to just over 700 at the close of the Chinese Civil War in 1949. [See Table 4.1: Qinghai Primary Schools and Students, 1910-1949]

Just as the infrastructure of primary schools expanded under the watch of the Ma family militarists and provincial rulers, so too did student enrollments. Fewer than 200 students in northeastern Qinghai attended primary schools in 1910. Guide county alone reported over 1, 300 primary school students in 1926. Slightly under ten thousand children studied at primary schools in 1928, and that number more than doubled to nearly

⁹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting, ed. *Qinghai jiaoyu gaikuang* [Overall situation of education in Qinghai], (Xining: Qinghai sheng jiaoyu ting, 1934), 2-3. Ma Bufang, *Zhuxi dui bensheng jinhou jiaoyu de zhishi* [The chairman's instructions concerning this province's current and future education], (Xining: Qinghai sheng jiaoyu ting, 1944), 2.

¹⁰ Zhang Zuozhuo (1932), 16b

¹¹ Nie Shouren (1926), 366

26, 000 students in 1934. Thus, in the first five years of provincial government in Qinghai, primary schools more than doubled and the number of students grew more than 260 %. Growth slowed over the next five years, from 1934-1939, as Qinghai's army was increasingly active to the east of the province, against Sun Danying, the Red Army, and the beginning of war with Japan. From 1939 to 1940, the number of primary school students grew an astounding 200% of 1928's enrollment. From roughly fifty thousand in 1940, primary school students would peak in 1947 at just under 81, 000, or over 800 % of primary school students in 1928. The final two years of Ma Bufang's rule in Qinghai witnessed a precipitous drop in primary school enrollment. Nevertheless, 400% more children received primary schooling over the twenty years of provincial rule in Qinghai.¹²

The Heart of Education: Qinghai's Secondary Schools

Xining's preeminent center for Confucian learning in the region, Wufeng Academy, became Xining middle school in 1906.¹³ The lack of qualified teachers, however, forced the school to close and fold into Gansu's No. 4 Middle school in 1914. This short-lived school nevertheless marked the first secondary education in Xining. Xining's next secondary school, the Haidong Technical and Normal School, opened in 1918. Some secondary education took place under Xining's Mongol and Tibetan School in the late 1910s and early 1920s, and these schools will be discussed at length in the following chapter. From 1922 until 1934, the national school system combined middle, normal, and technical education courses in combined middle schools. In 1927 Xining's

¹² See Table 4. __: Qinghai Primary Schools and Students, 1910-1949.

¹³ Cui, Du, and Zhang (2002), 779, 781-782.

Mongol and Tibetan Normal School grew into the Xining Frontier Prep School (*Xining choubian xuexiao*), the region's main institution of secondary education until the early part of the next decade.¹⁴

After enacting provincial government for Qinghai in 1929, authorities in Xining followed Nanjing's lead in reorganizing the secondary school system. With the formation of provincial government in 1929, Qinghai had five secondary schools. In the early 1930s, Qinghai implemented a secondary school system that would last, largely unchanged, until 1949. This system once again separated middle, technical, and normal schools, and this tripartite secondary school organization remains in China today. Qinghai's only public high school opened in 1935, after provincial middle and normal schools were joined. But schooling at the frontier was not a smooth process. Like the Xining Middle School in 1914, Qinghai High School closed after only one year of operation.¹⁵ From one secondary school in 1929, Qinghai province had five in 1934, and would hold between five and seven public secondary schools for the next decade, including a middle school, normal school, technical school, and normal schools for girls and for Mongols and Tibetans. Secondary education in Qinghai peaked in 1947 at thirteen schools, but fell precipitously to three schools by 1949.

Secondary school enrollment naturally mirrored the growth of schools. Student enrollment in Qinghai's secondary schools slowly but consistently rose over the 1920s. Fewer than forty students were enrolled in 1920 at secondary schools, including middle, normal, and technical courses. Enrollment rose in 1925 to over sixty students, and

¹⁴ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 2-3. Zhang Dingbang (1983), 61-62.

¹⁵ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, ed. *Qinghai sheng zhengfu gongzuo baogao* [Work report of the Qinghai provincial government], (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, May-July 1936), 26.

jumped considerably to over 110 students in 1926.¹⁶ From 323 students at the Frontier Prep School in 1929, the number of secondary students in Qinghai's public school system hovered between 150 and 200 percent of 1929's enrollment numbers until 1940. Nearly eleven hundred students attended public secondary schools in 1945, and that number almost tripled to nearly 2,900 students in 1947, or nearly 900% of 1929's secondary students. By 1949, however, secondary students had dropped to nearly a quarter of their peak two years earlier. Just over seven hundred students were in secondary schools on the eve of the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. [See Table 4.2: Qinghai Secondary Schools and Students, 1910-1949]

Technical schools were also emphasized during the 1930s as a means of improving local industry and economic productivity through vocational education. Documents from Guide county in 1930 indicate that a commoners' factory had been built in the previous decades.¹⁷ Formed in 1931, Qinghai's provincial Education Department promoted technical schools that focused on utilizing the frontier region's wool trade. In 1945 three technical schools operated in the province. The strains of the Chinese civil war, however, would force one to close, leaving only two secondary technical school at the eve of the People's Liberation Army takeover.¹⁸

Although secondary schools were concentrated in the provincial capital and only city, Xining, some efforts were made to spread secondary education into the agricultural counties. Long known for its scholarly success, Ledu county established the first county-level middle school in 1931. This school would remain the best of its kind over the next

¹⁶ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaocha tuan, 3.

¹⁷ Yao Jun (1930), 737.

¹⁸ Li Chengde (1983), 104-105.

decade, and the provincial Education Department elevated it to provincial level in 1944. Qinghai Normal school split in 1938 to form Hualong and Minhe counties' simple normal schools.¹⁹ Some lowland, agricultural counties also began to open middle schools in the early 1940s. Guide Low Middle School opened in 1942, and Huangyuan and Xunhua counties established their own low middle schools two years later in 1944. At the same time, simple normal schools opened in Ledu, Datong, Huzhu, and Huangyuan counties. In Ma Bufang's secondary school reorganization in 1946, Ledu, Guide, and Huangyuan county middle schools folded into Xining Middle School.²⁰ Finally, the national government opened a few secondary technical schools outside of Xining during the early 1940s.

Despite impressive growth in secondary schools and students, Qinghai's school infrastructure failed to impress most commentators at the time. The provincial education department in 1934 took a dismissive tone when describing the "so-called" secondary education in Xining before 1929. One year later, a writer for a Chinese geography magazine bemoaned a lack of adequate facilities and insufficient funding in Qinghai's public schools. This author blamed disruptions to life in Qinghai's villages due to military activities and conscription. One reporter found "nothing positive to talk about" concerning Qinghai's public schools. All were "lacking in funding and talent" and "several schools [were] quite similar to broken-down hotels."²¹

¹⁹ Cui, Du, and Zhang (2002), 794.

²⁰ Li Dexian (1965), 77. Li Chengdao (1988), 125-134.

²¹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 2. Shen Huanzhang, "Qinghai gaikuang" [Qinghai's overall situation], *Yugong* [Evolution of Chinese geography] 2.11 (1935), 25-27. Fan Changjiang (1936), 153.

Education authorities in Qinghai certainly faced daunting geographic obstacles to building an infrastructure of modern schools. Indeed, one could argue that the obstacles to building the infrastructure of education were defining characteristics of schooling at the frontier. Education officials and reformers throughout Republican China, however, were generally dissatisfied with the condition of public schools in China proper. When discussing the growth of village teacher schools in 1930s Henan province, Cong Xiaoping observes that “[e]ven as the number of teachers’ schools increased, school facilities, teachers, and students failed to meet the standards of the Ministry of Education. Had the Ministry of Education attempted to enforce its standards, [one] inspector lamented, most village teachers’ schools would have had to shut their doors.”²² Another scholar likewise observed that a constant dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary Chinese education efforts was a defining characteristic of twentieth century education reformers. Historians have noted the an optimistic faith that education could forge a modern nation combined with “a permanent sense of dissatisfaction with the actual state of education in each succeeding period.”²³ Although the obstacles faced by education reformers in Qinghai were certainly daunting, similar challenges could be found throughout the Republic of China.

The “Mother of Education”—Teacher Training

²² Cong, 151.

²³ Glen Peterson and Ruth Hayhoe, “Introduction” *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*. in Glen Peterson, Ruth Hayhoe, and Yongling Lu, eds. *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 3. Stig Thogersen, “Learning in Lijiazhuang: Education, Skills, and Careers in Twentieth-century Rural China,” *Ibid.*, 238-239.

In the early twentieth century the traditional village teacher suffered a widespread, negative cultural stereotype—backward, with low social prestige, no practical skills, and limited knowledge outside of classical literature. Overall, this so-called “Mr. Traditional Academy” was an obstacle to various modernizing reform efforts. From the 1920s on, however, a new kind of teacher emerged in the villages. This teacher had been mainly or exclusively education in the modern system, often products of growing, tuition-free Teachers’ schools. But this was by no means a simple process, as repeated criticism of the quality of teachers in the province indicates.²⁴ Recent studies have focused on the unique role institutions of teacher training played in twentieth-century nation and state building, pointing out that teachers were the first occupational group with an institutionalized, school-based training. In this sense, professional teachers were one of the many new occupational groups that developed in the early twentieth century—a major change from what one scholar has called “the most marginalized group in Chinese officialdom.”²⁵

A lack of qualified teachers plagued education endeavors in Qinghai.²⁶ Qinghai’s education authorities heavily emphasized standard teacher training in their efforts building a new school system. Education reformers criticized the dearth of qualified teachers as a vehicle for promoting their own education reform agenda. Since the 1918 opening of the Haidong Occupational and Normal School (*Haidong zhi fan xuexiao*),

²⁴ Stig Thogersen, “Learning in Lijiazhuang: Education, Skills, and Careers in Twentieth-Century Rural China,” Petersen, Hayhoe, and Lu, eds. *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 243-244.

²⁵ Cong, 25. Thogersen, 241.

²⁶ Cui, Du, and Zhang, 783.

Qinghai began training teachers for its developing primary education.²⁷ The nascent normal school system, however, would not pay real dividends until the 1930s and 1940s. No sources from the county level during the 1920s and 1930 references the number of teachers in their schools. These sources, however, do give detailed data on schools, the size of buildings, number of students, their ages, and the capacity percentage at which these schools were operating.²⁸ The 1926 investigation of Datong county also echoed these perceptions of academy teachers, noting that there were no standardized teacher qualifications and that the curriculum at these academies remained largely unchanged since the late Qing dynasty.²⁹ Even in Xining county, budget constraints, a frequent topic in contemporary education sources, had forced a continued reliance on classrooms led by *shengyuan* degree holders and high school graduates.³⁰

Soon after the founding of the province, the Xining authorities established a committee for standardizing teaching credentials and regulations for the accreditation process. Created in response to the Ministry of Education's guidelines, this committee was responsible for regulating examinations, teaching materials, employment applications, grading standards. It was under the supervision of the Education Bureau.³¹

²⁷ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 2-3.

²⁸ *Qinghai sheng Bayan xian fengtu diaocha gaikuang* (1930), 6b-7a.

²⁹ Nie Shouren (1926), 381.

³⁰ *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), 314.

³¹ Qinghai sheng zhongxue ji shifan xuexiao jiaoyuan jianing weiyuanhui, ed. *Qinghai sheng zhongxue shifan ji xiaoxue jiaoyuan jianing weiyuanhui fagui huibian* [Collection of regulations for appraising Qinghai province's middle school, normal school, and elementary school teachers], (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhongxue ji shifan xuexiao jiaoyuan jianing weiyuanhui, 1921), 1-2. This source is catalogued in Qinghai's Provincial Library as having been published in 1921. But the source itself repeatedly refers to Qinghai *province*, which did not form until 1929. While the content of the regulations seems similar enough to the John Dewey-influenced national education reforms in 1921-1922, I will treat the Qinghai teacher regulations as published in 1931. This date makes sense in that the provincial education department had just opened in that same year.

The new bureaucracy for teacher appointments and accreditation regulations reflected a growing momentum towards standardization and bureaucratic control. Sharp distinctions were made between graduates of old and new style schools, and a distinct hierarchy privileging graduates from modern institutions of higher education, teacher training schools, and similar institutions of higher education. The government also wrote itself into these regulations as the highest arbiter of a teacher's fitness for employment.

Under the 1931 regulations, most teachers needed to pass an official examination before receiving certification and employment, but recommendations from a committee member were also sufficient to gain employment.³² All applicants were required to produce identification, recent photograph, diplomas, and “proof-of-service identification” (*fuwu zhengming shu*). Applicants who had lost their identification papers, had lost their political rights through criminal convictions, and those with “really bad habits” were ineligible for employment in Qinghai's school system. Another disqualified group, however, were those whose words or actions opposed the guiding principles of resistance and national reconstruction.³³ Testing for new teachers would be held at least every two years.³⁴

The primary school teacher accreditation regulations certainly privileged educational achievement in its teachers, but not all schooling was equal in the eyes of the committee. Graduates from Simple Normal Schools or Teacher Training Short Courses need not have previous teaching experience. High-level middle school graduates, or “old-style” school graduates needed over one year of primary school teaching experience.

³² Qinghai sheng zhongxue ji shifan xuexiao jiaoyuan jianding weiyuanhui, 3-4.

³³ Ibid., 7-8.

³⁴ Ibid., 17, 23.

Attendance at two short-term teacher-training courses could substitute for classroom experience. Teachers who had graduated from “old-style countryside normal schools” or a county-level normal school need at least one year of experience and three completed teacher-training sessions. These regulations obviously valued higher education in the new system, but it was not necessarily an expression of modernist disdain for “Mr. Traditional Academy.” The Qinghai teacher accreditation guidelines recognized the value of teaching experience separate from the teacher’s diploma. The Education Bureau could approve teachers with three or more years of experience in primary schools without testing.³⁵ Yet, for all the high standards included in these teacher regulations, teachers only had to receive a 60% grade.³⁶

The provincial government, via the Education Bureau, had firm control over the teacher certification process. This included accredited teachers from other provinces, who had to receive government approval even if they were not required to take the oral exam. Furthermore, all exceptions to the guidelines in this document had to go through the provincial government, including exceptions based on outstanding teaching experience, publications, and a personal recommendation by a committee member. Finally, the provincial government itself had the sole power to grant diplomas.³⁷ This reflected a drive for centralized regulation of schools, led by the national Ministry of Education’s new curriculum completed in 1932 and 1933.

How many teachers did Qinghai’s school system actually have in the early 1930s? And what sort of credentials did they bring to the table? At the primary school level,

³⁵ Ibid., 21.

³⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁷ Ibid., 16, 24.

Qinghai had a total of 25,854 students and 1003 teachers. This was roughly 1 teacher for every 25 students. Going a little deeper into the data, there were 20,440 students and 774 teachers in the province's 563 low-level primary schools. This amounted to a 1:27.5 teacher: student ratio. The much smaller and fewer high-level primary schools had 5414 students to 229 teachers—a 1:23.6 teacher: student ratio.³⁸ The Education Department's policy of building two high-level primary schools in each county and one low-level primary school in each village led to quick growth and very well could have conscripted many untrained yet literate teachers into the new primary school system. Impressive growth in schools was thus tempered with problems of quality control.

Qinghai's secondary schools had just fewer than two hundred teachers in 1934 and the ratios with students were much lower than in the province's primary schools. The eight secondary schools in Qinghai in 1934 had an average teacher: student ratio of one teacher for every 3.2 students. This impressive ratio, however, hides major differences in each school. The provincial No. 1 Female Normal School had more teachers (32) than students (25)! The provincial No. 1 Vocational School had a one to one ratio of students to teachers, but only 30 students. When these two anomalies are removed from the calculation, we reach a ratio of one teacher to roughly every five students in Qinghai's secondary schools.

The oldest and largest secondary schools in 1934 were Provincial No.1 Middle School and the Provincial Normal School. Both had been in operation, if under different names, since at least 1912. They both enjoyed enrollments of over 200 students and thirty to forty teachers apiece. Roughly 30% of their teachers were university-educated and

³⁸ Qinghai sheng jiaoyu ting (1934), 14-15.

40% were graduates of normal schools. The Woman's Normal School only had 20% college-trained teachers, (as did Ledu Middle School) but a high 70% of their teachers graduated from normal schools. The provincial No. 1 Occupational likewise had 70% normal school-trained teachers. The second Provincial Occupational and Ledu Middle schools had around 50-60% normal school graduates on their staff. The precursor to Kunlun Middle School, the so-called Hui Middle, enjoyed 20% college-educated and 40% normal school-educated teachers (but a much larger budget). And finally, the provincial Mongol and Tibetan Normal School had 40% normal and 60 % middle school graduates.³⁹ Teachers at Qinghai's Normal School had a similar distribution of degrees, 30% university, 40% normal schools, and 40% the mysterious "other."⁴⁰

Despite low total numbers, one can certainly say that trained, professional teachers were making their presence felt in Qinghai in 1934. One study of education and teachers in Shandong province's Zouping county only finds 30% of village educators had received any form of modern teacher training.⁴¹ In this light, Qinghai's percentage of professional teachers was not as low as some contemporary portrayals might lead the reader to believe.

The cultural standing of professional teachers in Qinghai did not necessarily improve, despite the high demands and years of training. Fan Changjiang, reporting on Hui education in Qinghai, cited a friend's detailed knowledge of Qinghai's political environment in 1936. But he qualified that statement by noting that his friend, Liu Xigu,

³⁹ Ibid., 13-14

⁴⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁴¹ Thogersen, 243-244

was “only a middle school teacher.”⁴² Some contemporary observers described the “terrible” qualifications of Qinghai’s middle school teachers, with math being the worst subject.⁴³ Teacher compensation was also quite low. Standard teacher salaries for middle schools in 1934 were 68 *yuan* a month. Base salaries would be increased depending on the number of core classes the teacher instructed. Staff received 6 *jiao* per hour of work, but all employees would be paid “at least 20 *yuan* a month.” School principals received 70 *yuan* a month.⁴⁴

By the late 1930s and early 1940s, Qinghai’s normal schools and teacher training courses churned out many teachers now obligated to the public school system in the province. Qinghai had three provincial-level normal schools that ran on a total budget of nearly 41,000 *yuan* in 1939. Ninety-nine teachers worked at these schools, 33 of them in a full-time capacity and 66 part-time teachers. By the early 1940s, Qinghai’s secondary schools had an average of one teacher for every 20 middle school students. Apparently teachers were needed in the province, because the national average was 1:10. Part-time teachers outnumbered full-time educators 60% to 40%, and the vast majority, over 95% were male. On average, teachers had been at their schools for over 2 and a half years. Perhaps this was due to low salaries—only 33 *yuan* a month. Qinghai’s middle school teachers generally spent 65% of their monthly income on living expenses. Even by 1942, only 7% of Qinghai’s secondary teachers had received full training. This was much lower than comparable rates in Gansu, Ningxia, and Shaanxi. Nevertheless, over half of

⁴² Fan Changjiang (1936), 167.

⁴³ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 17. Reference to math qualifications: Zhong Yijiu, “Jiefang qian Qinghai xuexiao jiaoyu de er san shi” [Two or three things about Qinghai’s school education before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (1981), 91-92.

⁴⁴ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 13-14.

Qinghai's middle school teachers had positive views about the future of education in their province. None felt the same way in Ningxia; under 10% in Shaanxi; and 30% in Gansu felt so optimistic.⁴⁵

To The People: Social, Masses, and Village Schools

Based in the province's frontier location and resulting weak school infrastructure and non-existent publishing industry, Qinghai's education authorities and commentators encouraged informal educational activities. Social education, masses schools, and village schools were three prongs of Qinghai's school strategy that aimed at spreading education beyond the schoolhouse.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, translators cum educators introduced the concept of social education to Chinese audiences. Social education's original intention was to counteract rising class tensions in industrializing Japan. Chinese social education institutions during the 1920s and 1930s sought to create education opportunities outside of the standard school system. In this sense, social education reflected a growing chorus of criticism in the late 1920s sought to make school fit the needs of the vast majority of the Chinese population—villagers. Led by famous reformers like Tao Xingzhi and James Yan, Chinese education would take a turn toward the popular and practical.⁴⁶

After its formation in 1931, the provincial Education Department encouraged, funded, and oversaw social education activities. All primary and middle schools were

⁴⁵ Jin Shurong and Yang Xiaosong, *Xibei zhongdeng xuexiao shizi zhi gaijin* [Improving the northwest's secondary school teachers], (Guoli xibei shifan xueyuan yanjiusuo, 1942), 6, 13-14, 25, 37, 52, 92, 126, 136.

⁴⁶ Glen Peterson (2001), 217.

ordered to begin their own forms of social education. In Republican-era Qinghai these included libraries, newspaper reading rooms, athletic fields, lectures, and art troupes. Masses, literacy, and village schools were likewise seen as a part of social education. Despite having simplified standard education to reach a mass audience in villages, this was a serious reform effort by education officials and party members alike.

In Ma Bufang's opinion, Qinghai's schools should aim for practical education relevant to the daily lives of people in Qinghai. In his instructions on provincial education in 1944, Chairman Ma opened with a couplet that summarized his views: "Make education one with life; make education one with reality." Possibly echoing the village education critique of formal schools, Ma Bufang claimed that the time for empty, theoretical discussions had passed.⁴⁷ The Chairman's principles would guide Qinghai's school system through the 1940s, and sought an education system tailored to the lived realities of villagers. While this is a productive approach, it also left rhetorical space to downgrade unrealistic expectations.

One of the newest aspects of twentieth century Chinese education was the implementation of compulsory schooling. School authorities in Nanjing and Xining hoped for universal enrollment but even by 1948 only a fraction of school-age children actually attended regularly, if at all [See Table 4.3: Qinghai's Population, "Educated Population," and Enrolled Students, 1934 and 1948]. Xining, the province's one city, alone could boast of an estimated 80% enrollment rate by 1932.⁴⁸ Datong county in 1926 is a local example of the serious problem of truancy. Although Datong county had over

⁴⁷ Ma Bufang (1944), 1, 3.

⁴⁸ *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), 316.

2,100 primary school students in 1926, one investigation of the county's schools estimated that over 3,600 school-age children were still not in classrooms. Suggested solutions included supplying school supplies and books at no charge and building more commoners' schools for truant children. At this time, Datong already had two commoner schools, the precursor to masses and literacy schools of the 1930s and 1940s.

Complementing the commoner schools were a library, newspaper reading room, and two lecture halls.⁴⁹ Guide county also had newspaper reading room, lecture hall, and anti-foot binding society in the late 1920s⁵⁰ Gonghe, Menyuan, Minhe, and Hualong counties, created between 1929 and 1931 had not yet established social education institutions.⁵¹

Sounding the frequent refrain that Qinghai's location made its people backward, the provincial Education Department in 1934 advocated libraries as a tool to bring new culture to the frontier. Their report claimed that the province had the highest illiteracy rates China-wide, and thus hoped that access to print materials would encourage literacy. Furthermore, the report observed, all civilized countries of the world had libraries in major cities. Qinghai's government and education authorities opened the provincial library in 1935.⁵² After delays due to insufficient funding, influential patrons in Xining and Nanjing saw the institution to completion. Dai Jitao personally purchased a massive collection of Chinese books for the library, the central government in Nanjing offered financial support, and soldiers in Ma Bufang's army built the massive, foreign-style

⁴⁹ Nie Shouren (1926), 367, 379-381.

⁵⁰ Yao Jun (1930), 736-737. Zhang Zuozhou (1932), 438 / 16b.

⁵¹ *Bayan xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), 6b-7a. *Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting* (1934), 5.

⁵² Qinghai shengzhi bianmu weiyuanhui, ed. "Qinghai chuangshe shengli tushuguan" [Qinghai's establishment of the provincial library], *Qinghai lishi jiyao* [Outline of Qinghai history], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 365.

building to house the collection. Overall, the library cost an estimated 50,000 *yuan* and was named after a prominent educator in Qinghai, Zhu Xiu.⁵³

A modern library now graced the provincial capital of Xining, but residents living in counties and villages outside of the city largely lacked access to books and extracurricular education activities. Smaller libraries opened in county seats after 1929, and Qinghai had twelve libraries outside of Xining in 1934. Although the number of libraries dropped from 13 in 1934 to 10 in 1940, the number of newspaper reading rooms nearly quadrupled to 42 reading rooms in 1939 and 1940. Athletic fields likewise grew, from four athletic fields province-wide in 1934 to nine fields five years later.⁵⁴ Social education institutions like libraries and newspaper reading rooms spread during the 1930s.

Another major social education effort undertaken by Qinghai's authorities was building masses schools. Scattered references to masses schools in Qinghai's county towns exist for the 1920s, but it was not until the 1930s that masses schools grew rapidly. Building and running Masses schools were one of the Nationalist Party's main educational activities during the early 1930s. Masses schools dotted Qinghai's northeastern agricultural counties during this period. Party branch offices in Xining, Ledu, Minhe, Huangyuan, Huzhu, Guide, and Menyuan opened and ran the first masses

⁵³ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 5-6. Qinghai shengli di yi zhong xuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifan ke, ed. *Qinghai shengli di yi zhong xuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifanke tongxue lu* [List of students at the Mongol and Tibetan teacher training course of Qinghai provincial no. 1 middle school], (Xining: Qinghai di yi zhong xuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifanke, 1932), 1a-1b.

⁵⁴ Chen Bingyuan (1939), 88-89. Qinghai difang xingzheng ganbu xunliansuo (1940), 5-6.

schools in each county. Far from secret, regional newspapers as far away as Xi'an published reports on these party activities in Qinghai.⁵⁵

Masses schools, like other forms of social education, grew rapidly during the 1930s. In 1934, Qinghai had 42 masses Schools, in which 79 teachers schooled 1,325 students. The densely populated Huangshui River valley counties (Xining, Datong, Huzhu, Ledu, and Minhe) generally had one to two hundred students in masses schools. Ledu county alone had over three hundred students in ten masses schools, all of them built between 1931 and 1933. The Yellow River valley counties, including Guide, Hualong, and Xunhua, had around fifty students in their county masses schools.⁵⁶

When Ma Bufang assumed the chairmanship of the Qinghai provincial government in 1938, he made literacy training one of his administration's Six Major Labors, his signature policy initiative. This form of schooling was inexpensive and the morning and evening classes were designed to suit the daily schedules of Qinghai's farming population. From the inception of the campaign in 1938 until 1943, over 220,000 students completed literacy courses. From sixty thousand students in 1938, however, the trend in literacy school enrollment was a decidedly downward one—from 54,000 students in 1939, the number dipped below 30,000 from 1940 to 1942. Quantitatively speaking, this was striking improvement. Qualitatively, however, the results were less impressive. When the literacy campaign began in 1938, less than half of the students passed the graduation examination. That number dropped to under one-quarter of the

⁵⁵ "Qinghai dangwu zhuangkuang [State of Qinghai's party activities], *Xijing ribao* 8/23-9/1/1933, 6-7.

⁵⁶ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 17-19. "Qinghai Ledu xian minxiao diaocha gong you sanshiliu chuxuesheng yi yi jiu wu ming [Investigation of Qinghai's Ledu county's 36 masses schools and 1,195 students], *Xijing ribao* 1/18/1934.

students in 1939. Examinations were not even held in 1940, 1941, and 1943. Only eighteen percent of the total literacy class students meet the examination's standards.⁵⁷

The popularization and frugality of social and masses education came together in the mid-1930s with the advent of village masses education in Qinghai. Opened in 1936, Xining county's village teacher training program emphasized the frugality of village masses schools in 1937, stressing that village schools must economically and effectively marshal talent and funding.⁵⁸ Qinghai's village masses education was separate from the standard, public schools, and targeted all ages of villagers, especially those younger than twenty years old who had dropped out. Unlike primary schools in villages, village masses schools held morning and evening classes to better suit farming schedules. Village masses curricula was more in-depth and standardized than social education, and although it included some agricultural training it was not an agricultural technical school.⁵⁹

Like much of the Chinese countryside in the mid-1930s, Qinghai's villages were facing an economic crisis. In 1935 alone, thousands of students at Chinese schools had been forced to drop out due to economic pressures.⁶⁰ Qinghai's villagers faced similar economic pressures, with high education surcharges and taxes. Credit was increasingly difficult to obtain, even with usurious interest rates.⁶¹ As a response to deepening economic difficulties in the province, the provincial government temporarily suspended

⁵⁷ *Qinghai minguo ribao* [Qinghai republic daily], (8 July 1943), in Hunsberger, 141.

⁵⁸ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo, ed. *Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo ge jiangyi hedingben* [Bound volume of all lectures from Xining county's village teacher training office], (Xining: Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo, 1937), IMG_1369, 1373.

⁵⁹ Xining xian jiaoyuan xunlian suo, ed. *Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo huikan* [collection periodical of Xining county's village teacher training office], (Xining: Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo, 1937), 34.

⁶⁰ Cong, 165, 170.

⁶¹ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaocha tuan (1936), 1-2 [in Qinghai section].

surcharges and taxes on education in August 1936. These included sales taxes in Huzhu county and grain taxes in Datong, Huangyuan, and Menyuan counties. Xining Simple Normal Schools expenses, normally paid for by a portion of each county's revenue, would likewise be funded through other means. These were tight times for Qinghai's villagers and its provincial government. Provincial authorities had taken obligatory "loans" county merchant associations to fund its operations during the battles with the Red Army in the same summer.⁶²

As Cong Xiaoping has shown key aspect of the modernization process was turning the rural population into productive workers, and education was the primary means for achieving that goal. In a statement of changing priorities, the Second National Education Conference in 1932 limited the growth of standard secondary schools in favor of rural teachers' and technical schools.⁶³ Local teachers' schools, then, became the main institution of secondary education in rural areas. Qinghai's Education Department had noted in 1934 that the "shortage of village teachers [could] not be overstated."⁶⁴ Just as the Nationalist Party administered and publicized masses schools in the early 1930s, the national Ministry of Education moved to sanction and control rural teachers' schools. This process began in 1935 with a flurry of communications between provincial and central authorities concerning village schools and short-term teacher training courses.⁶⁵ By early 1936, Xining county had opened at least three village teacher training programs.

⁶² Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu (August 1936), 12-13. Ibid. (September 1936), 7.

⁶³ Cong Xiaoping, 162-163.

⁶⁴ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 2-3.

⁶⁵ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu (May-July 1936), 35. Ibid. (September 1936), 35. Ibid., (October 1936), 35. Cong, 133, 162-163.

A five-week intensive training session held during the spring festival holiday in February and early March,⁶⁶ the Xining County Village Teacher Training Program was designed to train local teachers to work in local villages. All but two of the over two hundred teacher-training students in 1936 were natives of Qinghai. Only three students in the training program came from other counties, namely, Huzhu, a short trip north from Xining. Trainees at the 1936 program in Xining county reflected a wide range of education levels. Over one hundred trainees had already graduated from secondary school, including middle, normal, simple normal, technical schools. Just fewer than ninety students had completed some form of short-term teacher training in the previous year. Many had already logged years of work in the classroom as well.⁶⁷ Despite their academic accomplishments and teaching experience, all students underwent identical training in preparation for life and work in Qinghai's villages. This illustrates the seriousness with which the Nationalist government and Qinghai's provincial authorities approached training teachers for village schools. Quite a few short-term teacher training courses operated in the second half of the 1930s. Over eight hundred village teachers would graduate in 1939 and 1940.⁶⁸

Lectures at Xining's village teacher training course taught would-be teachers to care about, understand, and try to meet the needs of villagers in the area. These speeches stressed that Chinese farmers were routinely facing shortages of life's essentials, and that economic problems must be addressed in tandem with schooling. The depth of information on rural China presented in these lecture notes was impressive, including

⁶⁶ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo huikan (1937), 34.

⁶⁷ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo huikan (1937), 59-60.

⁶⁸ Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunlian tuan (1940), 6.

data on rice production and importation, population changes, amount of arable land, and inequalities between urban and rural China. The goals of village masses education, then, had to be simple, practical, and geared toward improving villagers' daily lives.

Objectives included literacy, improving farming techniques, uniting the productive skills of villages, and basic self-defense. Against the backdrop of "the current violence of warlordism," village masses education would use the Three People's Principles to construct a new national culture by popularizing education.⁶⁹

The construction of a new national culture tapped into discourses of modernization and education, and Xining county's village teacher training course couched itself in the language of modernism. Like many social education programs, Xining would use modern techniques and Nationalist party orthodoxy to change "unruly and localistic peasant cultures."⁷⁰ Lectures from the training program warned future teachers about obstacles they would face among villagers. Transportation and communication difficulties had blocked the more progressive aspects of Chinese culture from entering villages, leaving the inhabitants "superstitious and conservative."⁷¹

New schools with trained teachers, however, appeared in Qinghai's villages and towns. Masses schools taught over thirteen hundred students in 1934. The combination of masses schools, literacy schools, and short-term classes gave rudimentary education to well over fifteen thousand students in 1939. Ma Bufang's signature literacy campaign

⁶⁹ *Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo ge jiangyi hedingben* (1937), IMG 1356-1360. Yeh Wen-hsin (2000), 172-182.

⁷⁰ Peterson, "Peasant Education and the Reconstruction of Village Society," Peterson, Hayhoe, and Lu, eds., *Education, Culture, and Identity in Twentieth-Century China*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2001), 219-220.

⁷¹ *Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo ge jiangyi hedingben* (1937), IMG 1361-1363, 1367, 1370-1373.

schooled over 200,000 people from 1938 to 1943. Libraries, newspaper reading rooms, lecture halls, and athletic fields offered newly demarcated public spaces for diverse activities that all fell under the umbrella of social education.

Students as Active Citizens?

Qinghai's frontier environment conditioned the limits of school infrastructure, shaping schools from the ground up. Economic conditions in the province's villages presented major obstacles in the way of making education compulsory and widespread. Education authorities responded with a drive to popularize education that suited the needs of village China. Officials, party members, teachers, and students shaped and contested the definition of Republican Chinese citizenship within the infrastructure schools and beyond.

From Ma Bufang down, Qinghai's education authorities sought to guide students in constructive and controllable performances of active citizenship. Teachers played the leading role presenting students with a disciplined yet diverse education. Culp has found that diverse influences and individual teacher agency combined to present multiple lessons on citizenship and its performance. This section will look at performances of cultural citizenship taught in Qinghai's schools. Much like Culp's work on the lower Yangzi region, Qinghai's teachers and students were taught to discipline their actions, bodies, and minds while at school. Athletics, Scouting, and military drill sought to temper characters as well as bodies. Schoolhouse politics also informed students about current events, party politics, and national history. Military drill and political rituals offered opportunities for civic performance, with a dose of propaganda for provincial and

national leadership. Government or school authorities also encouraged, and at times mandated, that students and teachers give back to the community through social service.

Teachers were integral to the overall training of young citizens, often living at the school as full-time role models and authority figures. Culp finds that relationships with teachers were the main vehicle for changing student behavior.⁷² Simply put, teachers were treated as students in Xining county's 1936 and 1937 village teacher training program. As such, the central institutions of modern schooling, standard time tables, categorization of students, surveillance and discipline, shaped their lives during the training course.⁷³ Xining county's teacher training program abstracted enrollees into categories of statistical analysis. Program administrators visualized students' hometown information as a flowchart, education credentials as a bar graph, students' teaching experience as a line graph, and program expenses in the form of pie chart.

Classrooms, school yards, and class distribution and schedules categorized and regimented the experience of space and time at schools. Xining's village teacher training program was likewise run according to detailed timetables that regimented the school day into discreet blocks of time devoted to specific classes and activities. There were schedules for every week in the program, and for every day's activities. Daily plans micromanaged students' lives. They awoke every day at five in the morning. Fifteen minutes were allotted for having their toilet and cleaning their rooms, after which they exercised for a half an hour of calisthenics. The daily flag raising ceremony commenced at quarter to six. Students then had an hour and a half to review their lessons, then

⁷² Culp, 174.

⁷³ Culp, 165.

breakfast from 7:15 until 7:45. Classes began at eight in the morning, and consisted of four 45-minute periods until lunch break at noon. There were three periods in the afternoon, and then a two-hour break until evening classes started at 6 and ran until quarter to nine at night. Evenings were equally regimented, with time for studying, homework, and ten minutes for “talking” before lights out at nine PM.⁷⁴

While class schedules varied from week to week, overall the morning sessions focused on education training. Spiritual lectures preceded lunch every day. The first two periods of afternoon classes tended to focus on primary education, while the third period was devoted to military training. Evening sessions were devoted to current affairs, anniversaries and holidays, and health and sanitation. As the training program progressed, however, administrators designated more and more time for review and discussion. Countryside education took up the last hour of the school day in the fourth week of the program. And after four weeks of intense training in pedagogical and political topics, the fifth week gave ample time for classroom observation and practical training.⁷⁵

One timetable in particular reflected the drive for abstraction and hour-by-hour management of trainees’ time. Armed with a pen and a piece of graph paper, the anonymous author of this chart broke the 742 hours of the entire training course down into sixteen categories. Sleep, review, chatting, eating, cleaning, entertainment, resting, and vacation occupied just under half of the time in teacher training. The other half included education courses, common-sense education, military training, spiritual lectures, observation and practice, and village education topics.

⁷⁴ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo huikan (1937), 47.

⁷⁵ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo huikan (1937), 35-41, 44.

Surveillance and performance evaluations seem omnipresent in Qinghai's schools, and certainly in Xining's village teacher training program. Each trainee was evaluated based on their class-time training in the topics listed above. Each topic had its own standard evaluation form to boot. Trainees were also responsible for handing in notes on spiritual lectures, class notes, and primary school observation. They had to report their daily activities through standardized forms for the morning, afternoon, and evening sessions. Each trainee had multiple interview sessions with program leaders, and the accompanying bevy of forms included home address, family size and members, economic background, party membership, professional strengths and weaknesses. Trainees had some opportunities to express their own ideas, with forms for evaluating the program's effectiveness and personal views on village and masses education.⁷⁶

Xining county's village teacher training program schooled teachers in a popularized, regimented, and politicized form of citizenship. Teachers were categorized, scheduled, and assessed in a school environment that reflected the dominant trends in the mid-1930s in China. One suspects that this training would be reflected in their classroom management and relationships with students. Student classifications, timetables, and surveillance institutions were certainly present in some of Qinghai's schools. Kunlun Middle School, the flagship institution in Ma Bufang's Islam Progressive Council school system and one of the two best schools in Qinghai during this period, certainly exemplified a regimented and even militarized, modern school.⁷⁷ Kunlun's model of modern, Muslim citizenship will be discussed in Chapter 6.

⁷⁶ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo huikan (1937), 48-51.

⁷⁷ Kunlun zhongxue (1946).

Like many modern Chinese schools, Qinghai's students would be taught new behaviors along with new information. Rules of behavior and the watchful eyes of teachers trained good manners and new hygiene. Ma Bufang himself mandated a hygiene regimen for all students, teachers, and staff of Qinghai's schools in 1944. Everyone had to bathe, clip his or her fingernails and toenails, and do laundry on a weekly basis.⁷⁸

Students also had opportunities for extracurricular activities, and one notable example was joining the Scouts. Scouting cultivated morals, etiquette, practical skills, teamwork, nationalism, and it provided avenue for personal success outside of the classroom. Since the first Chinese Scouting Association opened in China in 1915, the organization's handbooks had stressed etiquette and hygiene, such as no spitting, keeping one's teeth clean and fingernails clipped. The Nationalist Party asserted its control over Chinese Scouts at the beginning of the Nanjing Decade (1928-1937), and made it a mandatory class in all secondary schools after 1934. Nearly two-thirds of Chinese Scouts in 1934, however, were concentrated in the lower Yangzi region.⁷⁹

Qinghai's Scouting organizations started fitfully in 1931, when the first national Scout branch office opened. The province's Scouts grew to 540 children in 1934. One participant in Qinghai's Scout administration, Wang Jianping, recalled in his oral history that a C.C. Clique member controlled the Scouts while Ma Bufang had his hands full commanding troops against Sun Dianying's armies in Ningxia in 1934. Ma would quickly reign in Wang's control over the Scouts, and the organization more or less

⁷⁸ Ma Bufang (1944), 18-20.

⁷⁹ Culp, 178-181, 184-185, 188.

worked for Ma Bufang after 1936.⁸⁰ Qinghai's village teachers were also trained in the history, rules, and drills of Chinese Scouts in the middle of the decade. Xining county's village teacher training program had over thirty pages of notes on the goals, rules, and activities of Scouting.⁸¹ By 1937, over 8,200 children in Qinghai participated in Scouting, including two hundred girls.⁸²

Qinghai's Scouts faced the same problem that all educational activities faced in the province: lack of funding and appropriate equipment. Since Scouting was so focused on practical training and skill acquisition, facilities were quite important. One investigation, however, observed that "in an impoverished area, we should have impoverished Scouts." Despite the material shortcomings of the frontier province, Qinghai's Scouts should not only work in school grounds, but spread out into the streets and into nearby villages, ready to follow orders, serve society, and sacrifice for the nation. This education investigation especially encouraged opening Scout troops among Qinghai's Mongol and Tibetan population in the hopes that his could strengthen their "weak national sentiment."⁸³

Athletics, along with Scouting and outdoors activities, formed a kind of frontier physical culture to train student bodies.⁸⁴ Ma Qi's garrison school for the children of Mongol and Tibetan nobles had physical education in its curriculum in the first years after the fall of the Qing in 1911. Missionary schools had also implemented some sports

⁸⁰ Wang Jianping (1965), 104-107.

⁸¹ Xining xiang xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo ge jiangyi hedingben (1937), IMG_1376-1392.

⁸² Wang Jianping (1965), 112.

⁸³ Guolin Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaocha tuan (1936), 12-14.

⁸⁴ Culp, 163-208. Andrew D. Morris, *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

classes in the 1910s, and the Ninghai Islam Progressive Council schools all had standard athletics courses beginning in 1922. Xining No. 1 Middle School also had physical education and sports competitions in the latter part of the 1930s.⁸⁵

Qinghai's frontier environment and general poverty limited the effectiveness of school-based athletic training. Wang Hesheng, writing in 1933, felt that "Qinghai students are largely the sons and brothers of agricultural laborers, with naturally strong bodies." That they lived in the "mountain wilds" made them, in general, stronger than people in southeastern China. Observing the spirit of suffering, patience work ethic, and "dark red color of their muscles" made Wang think he could perceive "the inheritance from earlier days". These admirable qualities, Wang wrote, were being poorly served by the insufficient athletic infrastructure in Qinghai's schools. All secondary schools in the province either had incomplete or nonexistent athletic facilities. Similarly, Qinghai's gym teachers only qualified for calisthenics instruction and had not respectable athletic experts serving as teachers. Wang noted, however, that since even coastal Chinese schools were short on sport teachers, one could not expect distant Qinghai to be any better. Even Qinghai's military training for secondary students was, in Wang's view, no more than aerobics.⁸⁶

In the same year as Wang's dismissive review of Qinghai's athletics, the Qinghai Sport Conference opened in Xining. *New Qinghai* magazine covered the event, recording the conference's four-fold goal for Qinghai sports. Conference organizers hoped to create a sports atmosphere, use sports to save the country, cultivate the habit of exercising, and

⁸⁵ Fang Xiebang (1984), 72-74.

⁸⁶ Wang Hesheng, *Yundong guize huibian* [Collection of athletic rules], (Lanzhou: 1933), 1-2, 14.

promote productive exercises (*shengchan yundong*). Over the next three years, students at Xining's secondary schools, most notably Xining Mongol and Tibetan School, trained and competed in various competitive athletics. A group of former student-athletes and current teachers led by Zhang Deshan, Zou Guozhu, Tan Mingyi, and Song Jilian, organized Qinghai's team for the Sixth National Sport Conference in Nanjing. Despite Ma Bufang's reported obstruction, the central government funded team Qinghai's travel expenses. Led by team captain Zhang Deshan,⁸⁷ Qinghai's athletes represented the province in a wide array of track and field events. The soccer team, however, was disqualified from their first match because they lacked regulation uniforms.⁸⁸

Athletics developed strong bodies and encouraged competition, and Qinghai's schools seem to have trained students in games that many remember from their own school days. Ma Bufang's 1944 regulations included basic athletic facilities in every level of the province's schools. Ma Bufang advocated sports that would build people with "strong bodies and full spirits", but he eschewed "fancy" exercises that were divorced from the lives of Qinghai's villagers. Chairman Ma especially emphasized traditional outdoors skills like camping, mountain climbing, outdoor cooking, swimming, horseback riding, and archery. These activities had been handed down from Qinghai's elder generations and Ma Bufang ordered that they should be preserved and cultivated.⁸⁹

Qinghai's students were not only trained to be disciplined, ethical, and nationalistic citizens. Students were important participants in national and provincial political rituals. Weekly memorial meetings, daily flag-raising ceremonies imbued school

⁸⁷ Wang Fake (1985), 125-128.

⁸⁸ Fang Xiebang (1984), 74-76.

⁸⁹ Ma Bufang (1944), 18-20.

with political significance. Weekly Memorial Meetings in honor of the late Sun Yat-sen were one of the Nationalist Party's two main ritual forms. Enacted at the same time every week and with identical ritual orthopraxy across the country, weekly memorial meetings were mainstays at China's schools during the Republican period.⁹⁰ The Xining county village teacher training program reflected the central practices of Nationalist Chinese political ritual. Teachers-in-training opened each morning with a political lecture during the national flag-raising ceremony. Every Monday morning at 7 AM, the training center's staff, teachers, and students all gathered in observance of the weekly memorial meeting. A military review of the teachers-in-training was held, as were nighttime military exercises. And Ma Bufang sent a military representative to inspect the teachers-in-training.⁹¹

Just as every school day and school week began with political rituals, national holidays and anniversaries marked certain dates for ritual performances and accompanying political lessons. October 10th as National Day was the main national holiday in the first decade of the Republic. The Yunnan Uprising that spelled the beginning of the end for Yuan Shikai's erstwhile restoration attempt was also celebrated at many schools after 1916. After 1929 the Nationalist party mandated nearly thirty holidays for observance at all schools and public organizations, and these gradually replaced lunar holidays in the lower Yangzi region. In its drive for ideological uniformity, the Ministry of Education distributed summaries and discussion points for

⁹⁰ Culp, 228-233.

⁹¹ Xining xian xiagocun jiaoyuan xunlian suo huikan (1937), 35, 69-70.

each of the national holidays.⁹² Xining's village teacher training program included these talking points for use in village schools.⁹³ Through such repetition of ritual orthopraxy across the nation, students and teachers at Qinghai's schools participated in the Nationalist drive for uniformity with the party at the center of national holidays. Orderly ritual performance also "worked to produce the school community as a legitimate social group in the organizational framework of the nation-state."⁹⁴

Military reviews were the second major form of Nationalist political ritual during the 1930s. Scout jamborees became a familiar form of military review in the first two decades of the Republic.⁹⁵ Ma Bufang held a military-style review of the Qinghai Scouts on April 10, 1936.⁹⁶ Qinghai's schools and students figured prominently in rituals commemorating Ma Bufang becoming acting chairman of the Qinghai provincial government in May 1936. The ceremony's commemorative volume showed group photographs of Teachers, Staff, and Students of Qinghai's secondary schools. Scouts marching and posing at attention for the ceremony honoring the now-acting provincial chairman in Xining. Schools, students, and Scouts were key pieces in the pageantry celebrating Qinghai's military and political leader.⁹⁷

During the Nanjing Decade, individual and collective service gained importance in Scout training, just as it was emphasized in schools and educational programs, like the New Life Movement's Summer Labor Service Program. This kind of government-

⁹² Culp, 212, 223, 225.

⁹³ Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunlian suo ge jiangyi hedingben (1937), IMG_1412-1422.

⁹⁴ Culp, 226, 230.

⁹⁵ Culp, 228, 233.

⁹⁶ Wang Jianping (1965), 105.

⁹⁷ *Fengming zanli Qingzheng jinian* [Commemoration of accepting the order to temporarily manage Qinghai's government], (Xining: Gu Baoni gongdetang, May 1936), IMG_0719, 0720, 0736, 0757, 0758.

sanctioned, "constructive" community service activities "conformed to a vision of civic action outlined in Nanjing-decade civics textbooks: citizens organized in state-sanctioned groups contributing selflessly to the public welfare under party guidance."⁹⁸ Qinghai's provincial government sought to turn student energies to productive labor for the betterment of the society. Although battles with the Red Army during the summer of 1936 forced the cancellation of student labor-service plans, community service remained an emphasis in Qinghai's schools.⁹⁹ Beginning in 1936, Qinghai's Scouts were used as the vanguard of the tree-planting campaign. Xining's suburbs were divided up and given as tree-planting territory for schools' Scout troupe. Scouts were also used in Ma Bufang's Six Major Labors as propagandists, workers, and inspectors. One contemporary administrator even recalled Scouts participating in night-time raids on those suspected of opium possession!¹⁰⁰

Ma Bufang again mandated community service for all students in Qinghai in 1944. Primary school students above fourth grade should devote one week to ten days a year to age-appropriate community service. High primary school students had to commit over two weeks per year. Secondary school students should work for public benefit one month a year. Farming, road repair, and irrigation maintenance were some of the activities student work-service could include.¹⁰¹ Students and schools continued to

⁹⁸ Culp, 194-195.

⁹⁹ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu (May-July 1936), 26.

¹⁰⁰ Wang Jianping (1987), 107-108.

¹⁰¹ Ma Bufang (1944), 34-37.

contribute to the reforestation of Qinghai's "lowland," agricultural counties. In 1946 alone Qinghai's schools planted a total of 960,142 poplar, willow, and pine trees.¹⁰²

The proliferation of normal schools and teacher-training courses created a growing group of petty intellectuals that became a new political force during the 1930s and 1940s. As Cong Xiaoping observes, village normal schools offered "courses specifically designed for preparing students to teach in rural areas [like] rural economy and cooperative, agriculture, irrigation, rural education, and people's education,..., a wide-ranging curriculum into which teachers inserted socialist works on materialist history and class analysis." Furthermore, village teachers were often ideally placed for local organizational activities in their home villages. This combination of training and local familiarity made them sometimes difficult for the Nationalists to control. Popular print media frequently accused teachers of communist allegiance during the 1930s.¹⁰³ Many teachers like the ones trained in Xining county's village normal class spread into village schools in the late 1930s.

Political activism among students was an important route for performing citizenship in Chinese schools. Even in the population and educational core of China--the lower Yangzi region--student political activism seems to have been weakened by smaller networks of radicals.¹⁰⁴ Although far from definitive, the sources consulted for this project indicated that student political activism and radicalism were correspondingly weaker in the frontier region of Qinghai. Wang Jianping's oral history makes one reference to student self-government committees in schools in the 1920s. One

¹⁰² Qinghai sheng jiansheting (1946), 26-29, 34-38]

¹⁰³ Cong, 159-160, 180.

¹⁰⁴ Culp, 252.

contemporary administrator recalled that principal Zhu Xiu's advocacy of May Fourth-style education represented greatly influenced the students. Xining No. 1 Middle School had political posters on its walls in 1930, including "Students focus on doing big things, do not focus on being a big official," and "When studying don't forget national salvation." Although student activism decline in the early 1930s, anti-Japanese propaganda appeared during wartime. Secondary schools students also formed anti-Japanese organizations after the Manchurian Incident in 1931, but they were quickly co-opted and neutralized by provincial authorities.¹⁰⁵ Qinghai's low population and limited school facilities would certainly have limited the potential for radical networks among the schools, but these networks were present. This is due, in part, to school authorities and Ma Bufang closely monitoring schools and the teachers working within them.

Returning the Favor: Teacher Agency and Obligations in Qinghai, 1937-1949

One of the most important forms of citizenship taught in schools was returning the favor as teachers. Normal school or teacher training graduates had to work for a time in government schools to repay debts incurred over the course of their tuition-free training. Returning the favor, then, was both a job requirement and a performance of citizenship learned in school. Financial support was therefore one means of controlling schools and, by extension, teachers. Strict teaching obligations and bureaucratic obstacles against higher study upon graduation accompanied government generosity during one's schooling.¹⁰⁶ Qinghai's Education Department called in those debts with a new level of

¹⁰⁵ Wang Jianping (1965), 108. Li Dexian (1981), 71-72.

¹⁰⁶ Cong, 134.

oversight in the early 1940s. Starting in 1941, Qinghai's normal school graduates had to have three years of teaching service recorded in the booklet before they could receive their diplomas!¹⁰⁷

Qinghai's education authorities seem to have been serious about intensifying its oversight of the province's teachers in the 1940s. This is evident from the service handbook issued to all normal school graduates as they entered the workforce. Beginning in 1941, the provincial Education Department's service handbook added a new level of bureaucratic oversight for new teachers. Part identification booklet, evaluation form, and journal, this service handbook was used as a record of normal school graduates' teaching and special work projects. To be used for ten years, this booklet's blank forms had to be filled out once a semester, including forms for work-related travel, community service projects, continuing studies, evaluations, communications log, and diary. The diary form, shown below, had to be filled out for review by the department. In a bit of micromanagement, the diarist had to include to date, "difficult problem," and "solution method."

Distributed to normal school graduates, this booklet represented a government attempt at regulating teachers and. The copy consulted for this project was stamped as property of Hualong Simple Normal School. Hualong and Minhe counties' simple normal schools formed in 1938 when Qinghai No. 1 Middle divided into the two county schools.¹⁰⁸ Having graduated from tuition-free teacher training schools, graduates were expected to return the favor by laboring in the province's school system. All promotions

¹⁰⁷ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting, ed. *Shifan biyesheng fuwu shouce* [Service handbook for normal school graduates], (Xining: Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting, 1941), 1

¹⁰⁸ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 794.

would be based on evaluations contained in this collection of forms, and these would in part be based on evaluations made officials at least at the county education inspector rank. County government leaders and county education officials were also involved, with most forms including spaces for their seals. Locality was also emphasized in these forms, since all appointments and service projects had to be carried out in the appointed region.¹⁰⁹

Qinghai's normal school graduate handbook also included important laws, guidelines, and political ideology to guide the teachers in their education work. Nationalist Party member regulations, the Citizen's Contract (*guomin gongyue*), Ministry of Education regulations, telegrams from Chiang Kai-shek and other GMD leaders on education. References to Nationalist ideology like national salvation, the Three People's Principles, and Sun Yat-sen abound in the text of this handbook.¹¹⁰

As highly educated, politically conscious role models for impressionable students, teachers also represented a potential threat to Ma Bufang. Cong Xiaoping's work on teachers' schools in Republican China demonstrates the important, at times politically threatening, role that trained teachers played in the protests of the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, Cong demonstrates that village teacher training schools were prime for Communist Party activities and recruitment.¹¹¹ Some students-turned-teachers organized a Nationalist-affiliated periodical that was at times critical of Ma family rule. A secret political group at Xining Middle School, the New Qinghai Construction Brigade, had its membership charter discovered by provincial government allies in 1944. Ma Bufang

¹⁰⁹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1941), 1, Forms 8, 9, 12.

¹¹⁰ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1941), 4, 13-32.

¹¹¹ Cong, 160.

moved swiftly to assure the loyalty of the groups leaders with administrative or government positions.¹¹² When another branch of the New Qinghai Construction Brigade was discovered at Provincial Ledu Middle School two years later, Ma Bufang ordered that the school closed, and all students and faculty moved to Xining Technical School. Although local objections led to the school's return to Ledu the next year in 1947, Ma once again tried to reorganize Ledu Middle in 1949. The PLA takeover of Qinghai just as fall semesters would have started made his plans moot.¹¹³

Likely motivated by financial restraints and concerns about political control, Ma Bufang ordered a major reorganization of Qinghai's secondary schools in 1946. The official announcement of the reorganization plans cited the common obstacles in schooling at the frontier as justification for this change in policy. They included distance from the provincial capital, difficult geography, closed off transportation, fiscal weakness and uncertainty of payments, and a continued lack of qualified teachers. The announcement reflected Chairman Ma's renewed emphasis on regulation and standardization among Qinghai's schools, by arguing that the obstacles "made it extremely difficult to standardize middle school education and certainly affected the political strategy of building education." The provincial government therefore "has decided to gather all middle schools in the provincial capital of Xining, so as to concentrate human and financial capital, to improve content, and to learn from and encourage each other towards mutual initial improvement."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Wang Fake (1985), 128.

¹¹³ Li Chengdao (198), 134.

¹¹⁴ Qinghai sheng canyihui, ed. *Gao quansheng zhongdeng xuexiao xuesheng shu* [Book of proclamations for students in province's secondary schools], (Xining: Qinghai sheng canyihui, 1946), 4-5.

Ma Bufang also issued directives on Qinghai's education system in 1944. These orders stressed that every school fully adhere to the appropriate education laws and regulations. Unstandardized, unregulated schools that did not toe the line were, in his estimation, education that tricked people.¹¹⁵ He called for a thorough appraisal of school supplies, government-run disbursement of necessary yet missing education facilities, like desks, lamps, and the like. Textbooks also needed to be standardized across all levels of schools. The provincial government would pay for all funds for new education materials and facilities. Should the government be unable to deliver these funds, Ma Bufang repeatedly offered to personally meet any shortfalls. He estimated that completely rehauling the system would require more than ten million yuan.¹¹⁶ He also demanded better reports on the property owned and maintained by each of the province's schools. Noting that previous "don't ask, don't tell" attitudes had allowed for some school principals to line their pockets with proceeds from selling off school property. The government would assess each school's property and, if need be, redistribute wealth from certain schools to make up for shortfalls at others.¹¹⁷

Alumni Careers and Contributions

Perhaps the best way to assess the overall contribution of local schools is analysis of alumni careers and contributions. Recent works on modern Chinese education recognize or directly utilize alumni biographies in such a fashion.¹¹⁸ Like Cong Xiaoping's work, this section draws from student hagiographies compiled by historians in

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁶ Ma Bufang (1944), 7-9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 14-16.

¹¹⁸ Cong, 167-168. Culp, 264-265. Thogerssen, *passim*.

Qinghai.¹¹⁹ From Deng Chunlan and her sisters at Beijing University in 1920, over three hundred high school graduates studied at Chinese or international institutions of higher learning before the beginning of Communist rule in the autumn of 1949. A combination of the national and provincial government support, scholarships, and private patronage supported higher academic study for many young people from Qinghai. That secondary school graduates had to continue their studies elsewhere reminds us what the province itself lacked—post-secondary education. Nevertheless, most graduates returned home to contribute to many different fields through their professional careers before and after 1949. That their schooling, careers, and lives crossed the “1949 divide” should remind us of the continuities in Republic and PRC school histories.

From 1920 until 1949 Qinghai’s secondary schools sent just under 350 graduates to universities across China. Many graduates enrolled at universities in the northwest and Beijing, including Xi’an’s Northwest University, Northwest Normal School, Lanzhou University, Beiping University, Beiping Normal School, and the Central Political Institute (CPI) in Nanjing. Fewer Qinghai graduates studied in Sichuan’s universities, Fudan University, and Tibetan Buddhist Institutes. And a few matriculated at Beiping’s Qinghua University. The most popular majors for university students from Qinghai included Normal and education courses, humanities, law, politics, economics, agriculture, medicine, and veterinary medicine. Quite a few students also chose Tibetan language and literature, frontier administration and education, math, journalism, and engineering.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997).

¹²⁰ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 10.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to integrate Qinghai into the familiar story of the growth of modern, public school education in Republican China. From the cancellation of the imperial civil service examinations and the corresponding growth of academies in the first decade of the twentieth century, this chapter has highlighted the difficult process of building such a school system in the agricultural regions around the river valleys of northeastern Qinghai. Education reformers faced challenges that were intimately connected to province's population distribution and the geographical boundaries of the growth of local government. Despite the aforementioned obstacles, public schools in Qinghai province integrated students into the rhythms, rituals, and rules of the schoolhouse, thus connecting Qinghai's schools with the politicizing and modernizing project of education in Republican China. Classes, drills, and activities taught students about their responsibilities as active citizens in the Chinese Republic.

Teachers were an especially important group in the process of schooling at the frontier. Training effective teachers was a major goal of Qinghai's education system, since teachers played a key role in training generations of students. But teachers also represented a potential political threat to Ma Bufang's rule, and he therefore took measures to guard against student or teacher political activism. Nevertheless, schools did grow during the Republican period, and trained teachers increasingly filled classrooms in the province. The intensive growth in the Huangshui and Yellow River valleys would not spread up to the highlands of Qinghai. Thus, schooling at the frontier could only go so far in the first half of the twentieth century

Table 4.1: Qinghai Primary Schools and Students, 1910-1949

Year	Primary Schools	Students	Enrollment Growth (1928=100)
1910	28	184	
1928 ¹²¹	278	9887	100
1934 ¹²²	613	25, 854	261
1939 ¹²³	652	28, 594	289
1940 ¹²⁴	577	48, 402	490
1945 ¹²⁵	947	51, 532	521
1947 ¹²⁶	963	80, 984	819
1949	717	40, 540	410

¹²¹ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 787.

¹²² Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting, ed. "Qinghai sheng ge xian xiao xuexiao jiaoyu zhuangkuang biao" [Chart on primary school education situation in Qinghai, by county]. *Qinghai jiaoyu gaikuang*, (1934), 14-15.

¹²³ Chen Bingyuan, "Qinghai zhi jiaoyu zhuangkuang" [Qinghai's education situation], *Xin xibei* 2.1 (1939), 88-89.

¹²⁴ Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunlian tuan, ed. *Kangzhan jianguo shiqi zhong zhi Qinghai jiaoyu* [Qinghai's education during the war of resistance and nation-building period], (Xining: Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunlian tuan (1940) 3-4.

¹²⁵ Data for 1945 and 1949 are drawn from Liu Chengde, "Jiefang qian Qinghai xuexiao jiaoyu de yipi" [A glance at Qinghai's school education before liberation] *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1 (Xining: Qinghai yinshuaiguang, 1983), 104-105. The author was head of Qinghai's Education Department from 1945-1949.

¹²⁶ Xibei tongxun ziliao shi, comp. "Cong shuzi shang kan Qinghai [Looking at Qinghai by the numbers] *Xibei tongxun* 2.7(1948):,18. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 789.

Table 4.2: Qinghai Secondary Schools and Students, 1910-1949¹²⁷

Year	Secondary Schools	Students	Enrollment Growth (1929=100)
1910			
1929	1	323	100
1934	6	412	128
1937	7	710	220
1939	5	530	164
1940	6	642	199
1945	5	1072	332
1947	13	2885	893
1949	3	705	218

¹²⁷ Zhang Dingbang (1984), 61-62. Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 13-14; Shen Huanzhang (1935), 26. I have included Shen Huanzhang's enrollment statistics for Qinghai High School, opened March 1934, which was not included in the Qinghai Education Department's 1934 report. Liu Manqing (1937), 87-88. Chen Bingyuan (1939), 88-89. Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunlian tuan (1940), 4-5. The original chart included Hui Middle School and the Provincial Mongol and Tibetan School. I have removed those two schools from the above chart. They will be dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6. Data for 1945 and 1949 are drawn from Liu Chengde (1983), 104-110. Xibei tongxun ziliao shi (1948), 18. Cui, Zhang and Du (2002), 789.

Table 4.3: Qinghai School-Age Children Statistics in 1934, By County¹²⁸

County	School-Age Children	Enrolled Students	Unschooling Children
Xining	37, 760	9, 440	23, 230
Ledu	11, 497	2, 521	8, 976
Huzhu	15, 674	3, 674	12, 000
Minhe	5, 041	4, 041	1, 000
Guide	4, 613	645	3, 968
Menyuan	3, 800	1, 226	2, 574
Huangyuan	3, 950	2, 206	1, 744
Datong	13, 966	4, 189	9, 777
Xunhua	4, 676	1, 444	3, 232
Hualong	3, 914	1, 845	2, 069 ¹²⁹
Tongren			
Gonghe	3, 166	150	3, 160
Dulan	833	0	833
Yushu			
Nangqian			
Total	108, 890	31, 381	77, 536

¹²⁸ Liu Manqing, *Bianjiang jiaoyu* [Frontier education], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 85-86. Liu is citing Zhu Mingxin, "Qinghai jiaoyu" [Qinghai education], *Tuohuang* 2.1 (1934).

¹²⁹ No Salar or Tibetan children are included for Hualong's statistics.

Chapter Five

Schooling Mongols and Tibetans: Adaptation and Centralization in Qinghai's Frontier Education System, 1911-1949

From 1945 until the fall of 1948, Sheng Jingxin moved from a Nationalist party office around Labrang Monastery to the high grasslands of Golok (Ch. Guoluo) in southern Qinghai. He oversaw the construction of three campuses for National Guoluo School, and created a “nomad-style” school (*yournushi de xuexiao*) for over 200 students in 1946.¹ The curriculum reflected the practical approach to basic schooling common to masses schools and social education activities, with classes on written Tibetan, Chinese language, basic science (*changshi*), arithmetic, singing, and occupational courses like iron- and woodwork. Sheng found the students in Guoluo to be engaged learners, open to new practices and concepts, and eager to teach what they had learned to family members. He also took pains to meet the local power brokers and cultivate good relationships with them. Banquets, letters of recommendation from influential local headmen, and clear disavowals of any relationship with, or support for, Ma Bufang were among the strategies he chose. By adapting to local customs, Sheng gained the assistance of Tibetan leaders building the first schools in this remote and inhospitable region. Sheng stated that he wanted to learn the lay of the land, so to speak, “in order to take advantage of these relationships to smoothly begin [his] work.”²

¹ Xingzhengyuan xinwenju, ed., *Bianjiang jiaoyu* [Frontier education], (Nanjing: Xingzhengyuan xinwenju, 1947), chart 6.

² Sheng Jingxin, “Jiefang qian chuangan ‘Guoli Guoluo xuexiao’ de jingguo” [Process of setting up the ‘National Guoluo school’ before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 17 (1988), 115-116, 119-120.

Sheng Jingxin had other motives as well. He was a Nationalist intelligence agent sent to build schools. In the course of his work, Sheng manipulated local power brokers and reported on what he had learned. Recorded at a later date, his oral history account is largely devoted to recounting the details of each tribe, who the leaders were, and what connections they had to other headmen in the region. For Sheng Jingxin, schooling and spying were two sides of a single national project.

Sheng Jingxin's work building primary schools for Tibetan in Golok highlight many of the themes present in frontier schooling efforts in Qinghai during the Republican period. Although local people and authorities in Xining had already laid the foundation, his work from 1945 until 1948 represented the culmination of the Nationalist central government long process of exerting its control over frontier schools. That he purposefully designed schools suited to the lifestyles of the pastoral people in Golok also demonstrates the increasing degree of adaptation to local conditions in frontier schools. Finally, Sheng's role as a teacher and intelligence agent is a rather dramatic illustration of how national politics were ever-present in frontier schools.

Although Ma Qi is not known for his commitment to the education of Mongols and Tibetans, his appointees nevertheless established the beginnings of a frontier school system during the 1910s and 1920s. Early frontier schooling efforts, however, were hampered by institutional connections to Ma Qi's military. The Xining Tibetan Language Research Society, on the other hand, was intimately involved in the process of cross-cultural negotiation and translation activities. Serving as a kind of frontier post-secondary academic institution, the Xining Tibetan Language Research Society took talented cross-

cultural scholars and gave them the opportunity for high-level training for careers in frontier education and governance.

Qinghai's provincial frontier schools grew out of Ma Qi's military garrison and slowly created a foundation for later Mongol and Tibetan schools. It was a long, hard slog creating the infrastructure and training teachers needed to staff the growing frontier school system. Local educators and officials recognized the obstacles to spreading the modern public school system into the highlands of Qinghai. The creation of the Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Advancement Committee in 1933 was an attempt by Qinghai's authorities to involve local Tibetans in developing and overseeing schools tailored to the regions' minority peoples. The harsh military rule of Ma Bufang's Muslim cavalry and his Southern Qinghai Border Garrison's role in frontier schooling, however, jaded local Tibetans against provincial-run frontier schools. The garrison's "special" boarding school will highlight this point. Despite local Tibetans' understandable opposition to Ma Bufang's rule, provincial frontier schools developed strategies that the central government frontier schools would later adopt.

In 1931, the central government in Nanjing dramatically shifted its frontier policies in an attempt to neutralize the frontier militarists like Ma Bufang and Liu Wenhui, including a comprehensive plan to nationalize minority education. Local or provincial "schools for Mongols and Tibetans," then, became part of a centrally administered "frontier education" system. Practically speaking, the Nanjing government brought talented students from Qinghai and other regions to Nanjing as well as building national frontier schools in Qinghai. Building off frontier schooling strategies designed at the provincial level, national frontier schools enjoyed higher funding, better teachers, and

tighter control by Nationalist Party operatives. With these advantages over provincial schools, national frontier education efforts spread schools farther than their provincial counterparts. They also implemented diverse occupational education suited for local ecological conditions and resulting economic activities. But we cannot forget that these were political institutions—sites for education as well as intelligence gathering.

Frontier education in Qinghai was not just about the inexorable march of the center to the periphery, or of political control expanding to the frontiers. Some locals in Qinghai also actively created new forms of hybrid schools. From a pedagogical perspective, these schools seem to have the highest chance of actually creating a school system that would meet local needs. Unfortunately, these are also few and far between and have the least amount of historical sources from which to tell their story. Nevertheless, this chapter will discuss some hints of locally established hybrid schools in Qinghai from the late 1910's until 1949.

Frontier Education as Civilizing Mission

In the standard version of Chinese culturalism, the frontier is where the civilizing mission occurs—teaching Mongols and Tibetans about China, its language, and socio-political systems. Unlike late-Qing civilizing missions, this mission was not grounded in the ideology of Confucianism; instead, Mongols and Tibetans would be educated in nationalism, party politics, and modernism.¹ Frontier education in Qinghai represented a recognition of the multi-cultural and multi-linguistic make up of the Qinghai frontier, and

¹ Steven Harrell, ed. *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 3, 7-8.

an attempt by the authorities in Xining and, increasingly, the central government and Nationalist Party, to train a cadre of scholars, educators, and bureaucrats ideally suited to the needs of Qinghai's societies and indoctrinated in the latest Nationalist ideology. When Ma Qi opened the Mongol and Tibetan School in 1917, he spoke of changing the thought of each people. The frontier must be pacified, in his words, and the way to do that was through schools. He would also demonstrate his sympathy for Mongols and Tibetans by educating them and giving medical assistance.²

Local historical sources from Qinghai in the late 1920s and early 1930s certainly presented the view that these regions were beyond the pale of civilization and therefore lacked any semblance of education. Despite having a history of schools since at least early in the great Qianlong Emperor's reign in the mid-eighteenth century, the Guide county's official gazetteer still noted that it was "beyond the boundary" (*jingwai*) in 1930. Surrounded by Qiang (Tibetan people), the gazetteer states, the people here did not establish schools, nor did they even read.³ Before Gonghe enacted county government in 1929, it was a "barren wasteland...situated in wild lands, with no education to speak of."⁴ Menyuan county, established as its own county at the same time as Gonghe in July 1929, had essentially been northern Datong county. Following much of the same rhetoric as

² "Liu nian chun er yue, Xining chuangan Meng Fan xuexiao" [Second month of spring in the sixth year, Xining opens Mongol and Tibetan School] from "Gan Ning Qing shilve ziliao," zhengbian 29, 10, in Lai Bingde and Ma Xiaoqin, eds. *Qinghai Huizu shiliaoji* [Collection of historical materials on Qinghai's Hui people], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2002), 361-362.

³ Yao Jun (1930) 735-736.

⁴ *Gonghe xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Investigation of local customs in Gonghe county], (1932), XTZCGBXB, 629, 632.

Gonghe's 1932 investigation, Menyuan was described as located on the distant frontier (*bianpi*) and education was consequently "extremely closed off" (*bisai*).⁵

Central government frontier laws and publications explicitly state their political agenda. According to the 3rd meeting of the Central Executive Committee (*zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui*) on September 3, 1931, frontier history education should show intermingling Chinese ethnic groups followed by geography stressing connections between the "interior" and the "frontier". The agenda of moral education (*xunyu*), articulated in 1931 had three goals for schooling Mongol and Tibetan students. Use scientific knowledge to "break up" their superstitious views of their environment; use national consciousness to break up tribal thinking; use discussions of international events to create patriotic citizens.⁶

After the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the resulting territorial crisis facing the Nationalist state only heightened the need for capable linguists, officials, and teachers. The 1932 graduation ceremony of Qinghai Middle School's Mongol and Tibetan teacher training course drove this point home. The task of saving the country awaited the graduates, and the commencement speeches called for students to continue their studies, serve society, protect the party-state (*dangguo*), and enlighten the people of the frontier. Widespread education was essential in the battle against local peoples' "superstitions," and qualified teachers were needed to "penetrate Qinghai's interior to build an education system (*xingban jiaoyu*)." These schools would "make all Mongol and

⁵ *Menyuan xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZCGBXB, 637-638.

⁶ Jiaoyubu Meng Zang jiaoyusi, ed., *Bianjiang jiaoyu faling xuanji, Zangwen yizhu* [Selected frontier education statutes with translation into Tibetan], (Jiaoyubu Meng Zang jiaoyusi, May 1944), 2.

Tibetan peoples understand the relationship between Qinghai's Tibetan frontier and national defense.”⁷

In its comprehensive report from 1934, the Qinghai Education Department echoed that the targets of frontier education were restricted by historical prejudices, their herding lifestyle, and tribal organization. Thus their customs were relatively wild (*xi su xiang ye*). But the Education Department, in tandem with the provincial government and Ministry of Education, would work to school them to “open up their knowledge and improve their customs.” Yang Xiyao, author of the Education Department's 1934 report, hoped that twenty years after schools had been built for Mongols and Tibetan, they would all be able to speak Chinese, which would allow them to “share prosperity with the people of the interior and follow them in evolution” (*tongsui jinhua*).⁸

Interviewed in 1936, an official in Qinghai's Education Department stated that the overall goal of this school system was assimilation and cultural elevation. Their strategies to that end were Mongol, Tibetan, and Hui teacher training, promotion of Chinese literacy, and making education widespread.⁹ This was one goal of frontier education-- “working hard to make Qinghai become an integral part of China” (*nuli shi zhi chengwei Zhongguo miqie zhi yipian*).

Frontier education was designed to increase economic productivity, improve the people's lifestyles, promote athletics and health education, and give a basic understanding of national defense. Broadly speaking, these goals were similar to the education agenda in China's public schools elsewhere. But the major difference

⁷ Qinghai shengli di yi zhongxuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifanke (1932), 1a-2b.

⁸ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 9-10.

⁹ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 9.

remained--assimilation of non-Han groups into a unified national culture (*yi qiu quanguo wenhua zhi tongyi*).¹⁰ From Nanjing or Xining, calls rang out for the assimilation of Mongols and Tibetans into Chinese language, culture, and politics. But frontier-schooling efforts remained hampered by practical limitations and this led to a limited implementation strategy. But from the very beginning of modern education in Qinghai, writers/officials recognized the limitations that Qinghai's different peoples, languages, and cultures would place on a standardized, modern education system.

Thus, Qinghai's frontier school system was both a "civilizing mission" and a state-building project. Provincial and national schools had the same goals—changing cultures, connecting frontier people with the Chinese nation, and training future frontier educators and civil servants.

Tibetan Buddhist Education Traditions

Qinghai was not just a cultural frontier between Han China, Sino-Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists. For many Tibetan Buddhists in Amdo, this space was home, and, moreover, a region central to Geluk Tibetan Buddhism. Kumbum Monastery (Ch. Ta'er si) just south of Xining is the birthplace of Tsongkaba, the founder of the dominant Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism often called "Yellow Hat" and posthumously the first Dalai Lama. Even into the 1930s and 1940s, the two main leaders of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, were intimately connected to Qinghai. The 9th Panchen Lama died in Yushu's Laxiu Monastery in early December 1937, and the 10th Panchen was born in Xunhua county. Moreover, the current 14th Dalai Lama was born in Xining

¹⁰ Xingzheng yuan xinwenju (1947), 2.

county in February 1940. A. Doak Barnett met the young Panchen at Kumbum monastery in 1948, and described a young child surrounded by pro-Chinese advisors deeply involved in frontier politics.¹¹ This should remind us that frontiers run both ways, and peripheries are also core regions, depending on one's perspective.

Far from the “empty, barbarian” frontier described in contemporary Chinese sources, the space that would become Qinghai province had over 320 Buddhist monasteries in the early twentieth century. Although detailed and exact records are lacking, sources show that by the late 1910's, Qinghai's monasteries housed around 26,000 monks. Hualong county alone had two monasteries with over 3000 monks each. Lajia Monastery in Dulan had over 1000 monks in residence. Dulan and Datong counties each had one monastery with over 500 monks. There were ten monasteries with over 200 monks in the province, and at least 13 monasteries with over 100 monks.¹² Southwestern Qinghai's Yushu region alone had just under 100 monasteries and more than 12,000 monks in 1919. Longxi Monastery was Yushu's largest, with over 800 monks. The region also had one monastery with over 500 monks, 2 with over 400 monks, 8 monasteries with over 300, 7 monasteries in excess of 200 monks. And thirteen monasteries in Yushu had over 100 monks.¹³ [See Table 5.1: Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai, late 19th - early 20th Century]

Buddhist monasteries not only were religious centers, but also often were schools for monks-in-training. Students would often spend 5-6 years in their local monastery,

¹¹ A. Doak Barnett, *China on the Eve of Communist Takeover*, (New York and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 232.

¹² Kang Furong (no date, Qing), 28-38.

¹³ Zhou Xiwu (1920). YSJSJ 2, 50-56.

receiving a literary education in preparation for the penultimate *geshey* degree. Exceptional scholars could then be invited to attend a monastic university in Lhasa, where they would spend thirteen years in doctrinal schools. Monastic students would generally begin their serious study around fifteen or sixteen years old at a monastery university. Tibetan monasteries schooled monks in an intensive religious training modeled after Indian monastic schools from over one thousand years ago. Much like Confucian academic education and Muslim mosque schools, texts were learned through rote memorization. But students were tested on their knowledge through formal debates, and thus argumentation skills were highly prized. Writing composition, viewed as the responsibility of clerks and secretaries and thus inimical to religious knowledge, was not emphasized in the great monastic universities in Lhasa.¹⁴ But Buddhist education did value literacy. One author of an investigation of Qinghai's Gonghe county observed since the area was part of the Tibetan Buddhist cultural sphere, when someone needed a literate person, locals would turn to someone from the monastery. Yet this kind of literacy was learned through studying Buddhist text, the document notes, and was thus limited to the Tibetan language.¹⁵

Some local Tibetan religious leaders and local elites bought into the importance of bringing modern education to the Qinghai-Amdo frontier. Some progress had been made establishing Mongol and Tibetan primary schools in local villages during the 1920s. In 1919 a Mongol and Tibetan Low Primary School opened its doors in Gonghe, but “closed quickly” soon thereafter, with no reason given in the investigation. This school would

¹⁴ David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, (Boston and London: Shambala, 1986), 237-239.

¹⁵ *Gonghe xian fengtu diaocha ji* (1932), XTZCGBXB 15, 637.

later change into the county's No. 2 High Primary School, and had an operating budget of 400 foreign silver dollars a year, invested by most likely two of the local Tibetan headmen or local monasteries, Upper and Lower Guomi.¹⁶ Datong county also began building Mongol and Tibetan Schools in the 1920s. One was located in northern Datong county and had 27 students over 8 years old. Nie Shouren's investigation in 1926 offers tantalizing, if limited, information on the school's organization. Nie characterized the school as "co-administered" with the 9 monasteries, five peoples, and Buddhist monks.¹⁷ A Low Primary School for Girls opened in the Guide county seat during this year, as did a Low Primary School for Mongols and Tibetans in Dongchegou.¹⁸ Living Buddha Gulangcang and other Ningma ("Red Hat") monks opened a full primary school for Tibetans in Hualong county's Yishenzha village. Opened at some point before 1932, this primary school continued its operation until 1949.¹⁹ These schools would be fascinating case studies of early hybrid schools, but unfortunately the lack of historical records leaves historians to only wonder what exactly "co-administered" with monasteries actually meant.

Although some initial steps had been made towards schooling in pastoral areas in the 1920s, establishing hybrid monastic schools proceeded only slowly in the early 1930s. In 1931, Qinghai's Education Department regulated that all monasteries in the province had to open at least one primary school. This regulation attempted to achieve

¹⁶ Ibid., 637-638.

¹⁷ Nie Shouren (1926), XTZCGBXB, 366-367.

¹⁸ Yao Jun (1930), QHDFJZWZ, 735-736.

¹⁹ Shen Tongqing, "Wo suo zhidao de Gulangcang hufo" [The living Buddha Gulangcang that I know]. *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 16 (1987), 79. Shen's oral history does not give an exact date for the opening of the full primary school for Tibetans in Hualong. Since Gulangcang died in 1933 and participated in opening and running the school, we can assume the school opened before his death.

uniformity across Qinghai's diverse ethnic and religious landscape, but implementation would proceed slowly, if at all.²⁰ In the late 1930s Qinghai's education authorities again advocated establishing primary education facilities and classes in all of Qinghai's monasteries. They based this on perceived successes in increasing the amount of Chinese language and standard-style education in mosques. They felt that basic, new style education in Qinghai's Buddhist monasteries could ride the prestige of Buddhist leaders.²¹

Much like the Qinghai provincial government, central government regulations for frontier education also mandated that every monastery open primary schools. The Central Executive Committee's "Temporary Method for Improving Frontier Monastery Education," published in July 1940 ordered all mosques and monasteries to open masses education centers, newspaper reading rooms, masses low primary schools, and continuing education programs. Whenever temples held major ceremonies, local education authorities were to use the opportunity for social education. These included lectures on customs (*tongsu*), exhibitions on Chinese (*neidi*) culture, and literacy campaigns. Wireless radios were also to be provided to the monastery.

Temples were also to school their students in at least one hour of Chinese language classes daily. Temple education authorities could contact local education authorities or the Mongol and Tibetan Committee for assistance finding a suitable teacher. Local education authorities were also to periodically hold meetings with religious leaders, investigate all temple schools annually, and report every winter to the

²⁰ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 15.

²¹ Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunliansuo (1940), 17.

Ministry of Education and the Mongol and Tibetan Affairs Committee. Contemporary sources are unclear as to whether results were reported directly to the central government, or through Qinghai's provincial authorities. Cao Shuxun, a widely read scholar of frontier education (including references to Owen Lattimore), thought that this regulation was "extremely good" (*shen shan*). But he lamented that only very few places had actually implemented it. These proposals, however, were all to be evaluated in light of local needs and the economic abilities of the region or religious center.²² This directive allows us to see that both provincial and national frontier education authorities hoped to bring the entire complex of modern schooling to the frontiers.

Frontier Negotiation, Translation, and Education: Xining's Tibetan Language Research Society, 1920-1938

One of the most pressing needs of Qinghai's frontier schools in the early part of the twentieth century was training a corps of teachers and officials able to move between the multiple languages and cultures that interact in the Qinghai / Amdo frontier. In the aftermath of the northwestern Muslim rebellion in the 1860s, pacification commissioner Zuo Zongtang built numerous community schools to acculturate former rebels through education. Training a cadre of local interpreters and clerks, however, was also an essential part of Zuo's strategy.²³ Likewise on the Sichuan-Kham frontier in the first decade of the twentieth century, commissioner Zhao Erfeng followed the suppression of a

²² Cao Shuxun, *Bianjiang jiaoyu xinlun* [New discussion of frontier education], (Zhengzhong shuju, 1945), 38-39. *Jiaoyubu Meng Zang jiaoyusi* (1944), 2.

²³ James Millward, "The Advent of Modern Education on the Sino-Central Asian Frontier", Bradley Parker and Lars Rodseth, eds., *Untaming the Frontier in Anthropology, Archaeology, and History*, (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 261-280.

regional Tibetan rebellion with a Han-centered, direct administration and new-style schooling.²⁴

From the late Qing dynasty through the establishment of provincial rule in 1929, Mongol and Tibetan schooling was largely under the administrative control of Xining's military garrison. Ma Qi's power grew out of this garrison and his military government consistently claimed administration over all of the Mongols and Tibetans in the region. Ma Qi's methods included military expeditions, political advocacy, and at least initial steps towards training teachers for Mongol and Tibetan schools. And those officials Ma Qi appointed to run Qinghai's nascent Mongol and Tibetan schools were intimately involved in the changing politics of frontier administration under the early Republic of China.

Between 1911 and 1935, the only official contact between China and Lhasa was a group sent by the Gansu provincial government in 1920. Ma Qi's man in the delegation intended to negotiate with the Dalai Lama was Zhu Xiu (1887-1928), a native of Huangyuan county.²⁵ Zhu Xiu was deeply involved in frontier administration during the 1920s. Aside from his role as negotiator with the Dalai Lama in 1919, Zhu also led the main land reclamation office from 1923. Furthermore he was the principal of Xining's Mongol and Tibetan teacher training school, the Frontier Prep School, from 1927 until his untimely death in 1928.²⁶

²⁴ Grey Tuttle, *Tibetan Buddhists in the Making of Modern China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 44-47. Xiuyu Wang (2011).

²⁵ YSJSJ 1, 15. Zhao Zongfu (2002), 299. Tuttle (2005), 140.

²⁶ Zhao Zongfu (2002), 301.

Language abilities were a major obstacle to effective schooling across the Sino-Tibetan cultural frontier.²⁷ Recognizing the problem, the civilian administrator for Xining, Li Dan, opened an academic institute dedicated to solve this problem in 1920. The Tibetan Language Research Society was privately funded yet government connections ran deep in this institution. Wu Jun, noted historian from Qinghai and research fellow at the Xining Institute from 1930 to 1933, described the institute as “half-private, half-official.”²⁸ Much like Taixu’s Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Institute in Chengdu, the Xining Tibetan Language Research Council participated in bridging Chinese and Tibetan cultures. The Council in Xining worked translation activities, sent people to study in Buddhist monasteries, trained teachers for Xining’s growing schools for Mongols and Tibetans (many of whom were also involved in frontier politics), and fed the national bureaucracy’s need for transfrontier officials.

Translation was one of the research council’s main activities. Beginning around 1923, the Xining Tibetan Language Research Society engaged in the laborious process of collecting Tibetan sources and compiling a Tibetan-Chinese dictionary. Their dictionary included literature, philosophy, historical geography, medicine, arithmetic, art, politics, religion, and even the Mongol written language in addition to translations between Tibetan and Chinese terms. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this process was that they structured their dictionary according to Tibetan grammar structures. The team that the research council gathered for this project was a diverse group of scholars from the region.

²⁷ Tuttle (2005), 103.

²⁸ Wu Jun, “Cong Zangwen fanyi shuo dao Qinghai Zangwen yanjiushe” [From translating Tibetan language to talking about the Qinghai Tibetan language research council], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 6 (1985), 81. Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 113. Zhao Zongfu (2002), 366-367.

Jampa Namgyel (Ch. Yang Zhifu, 1906-1960) was one of the key translators involved in the project of publishing the first Sino-Tibetan dictionary in China. A native of Huzhu county, he developed the Chinese and Tibetan language skills that allowed him to engage in translation projects at an early age. He entered the Ninghai Mongol and Tibetan Normal School in Xining during 1924, and his linguistic skills quickly gained Li Dan's attention. He was inducted into the Xining Tibetan Language Research Society in 1925, and immediately began working on the Tibetan dictionary.²⁹

The council completed a draft of the Sino-Tibetan dictionary in 1928, and Jampa Namgyel was appointed to take it to Nanjing for editing and publication. Unfortunately, Chinese printing houses apparently lacked any set of printing equipment designed for the Tibetan script. Thus, the product of years' labor in Xining's Tibetan Language Research Society, what would have been the first Sino-Tibetan dictionary in China, never was published. Jampa Namgyel, however, did shorten the council's full dictionary draft, and eventually published the Small Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary. Oral histories and secondary sources on Qinghai portray this second dictionary, published with stone printing in 1933, as still the first Sino-Tibetan dictionary in Chinese history.³⁰

The Tibetan Language Research Society's activities were not limited to dictionaries, publications, and translations. The Tibetan Language Research Society actively worked to bridge Tibetan Buddhist and Chinese cultures. Aside from teaching and translation activities, the society also sent some of its members to study language and Buddhism at monasteries in Qinghai. Two society members, Hou Shengzhen (1911-

²⁹ Wu Jun (1985), 80-85. Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 61-63. Zhao Zongfu (2002), 366-370. Tuttle (2005), 202.

³⁰ Wu Jun (1985), 81-82. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 805. Zhao Zongfu (2002), 367.

1995) and Shen Tongqing (b. 1913), studied at monasteries in Hualong county in the early 1930s.³¹ Similarly, Wen Cunyong (b. 1910) and Wu Jun (T. Awang Quzhe, b. 1914) studied for three years at Longwu Monastery in Tongren county (T. Rebkong) from 1933 until 1936.³²

The organization in many ways acted as a post-secondary frontier school at a time when Xining did not have such an institution. As we have seen, talented linguists were often recruited out of Xining's Mongol and Tibetan secondary schools, thus offering an institution for higher study for talented graduates. The council also offered high-level pedagogical and Tibetan language training for secondary school teachers in Xining. Jampa Namgyel, in particular, devoted a significant amount of time and labor in this endeavor. He reportedly compiled Tibetan-language teaching materials himself, and led local teachers in at least two hours of language and teaching training daily.³³ He continued his commitment to Qinghai's frontier education in his role as education director the Mongol and Tibetan Teacher Course in 1932.³⁴

Talented linguists from the Tibetan Language Research Society took jobs in organizations dedicated to mediating Sino-Tibetan relationships under the Nationalist government. Jampa Namgyel would follow Li Dan on a "courtesy visit" to Lhasa in 1934 or 1935. While in Lhasa, Jampa studied under the influential Sherap Gyatso until 1937. When Sherap Gyatso accepted the Nationalist government's invitation to lecture at major Chinese universities, Jampa Namgyel served as Sherap Gyatso's translator in China.³⁵

³¹ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 89-90, 104-107.

³² Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 83, 113.

³³ Zhao Zongfu (2002), 368.

³⁴ Qinghai shengli di yi zhongxuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifan ke (1932), 1a.

³⁵ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 62. Tuttle (2005), 202.

One recent graduate of the former Ninghai Mongol and Tibetan Normal School (which changed names in 1926 to the Frontier Prep School), Pu Hanwen (1906-1982) from Huangyuan county, joined in 1926. After four years in the society, Pu moved into a position with the national Mongol and Tibetan Affairs Commission in Nanjing. He would later serve as Tibetan language teacher at the Nanjing Mongol and Tibetan school. Upon returning to Qinghai in 1937, he became a Tibetan language secretary for the provincial government, leader of Dulan county government, a teacher at Kunlun Middle school, government inspector, and also worked on the Qinghai-Xinjiang highway project.³⁶

Wang Renbang (1911-1991), for example, participated in the Research Society's activities while studying at the Xining Frontier Prep School and then teaching at Qinghai's Mongol and Tibetan Normal School and the Central Political Institute's Xining campus. Wang then moved from these academic positions into the Ninth Panchen Lama's Xining Office from 1932 until 1935, and continued to work for the Panchen's office even after the influential religious leader's death in 1937.³⁷

Thus, the Tibetan Language Research Society in Xining made real progress connecting Chinese and Tibetan cultures in the 1920s and 1930s. While Taixu's Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Institute in Sichuan may have been "by far the most successful of Republican educational institutions set up to link Chinese and Tibetan cultures,"³⁸ similar efforts were underway in Xining nearly a decade earlier. The Tibetan Language Research Council, therefore, should be included in any discussion of Sino-Tibetan cultural exchange in the Republican period.

³⁶ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 58-59.

³⁷ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 90.

³⁸ Tuttle (2005), 194.

Qinghai's Secondary Schools "for Mongols and Tibetans," 1917-1949

In the early stages of building a standard school system in Qinghai, "frontier education" was largely one in the same with secondary education. Qinghai's school system for Mongols and Tibetans began in the late Qing dynasty, roughly 1908-1909, when the frontier military official, the Xining Affairs High Official (*Xining banshi dachen*), established the Mongol School (*Menggu banri xuetao*). Students at this school were largely the children of the Mongol Banner elites, and local reluctance at having their children educated in the Chinese fashion restricted enrollment to just over 10 students.³⁹ When the Republic was established in 1912, the Mongol Half-Day School remained under Xining's military administration, led by Ma Qi, Ma Bufang's father and second provincial governor of Qinghai. In 1920 Ma Qi expanded the Mongol School's campus to include a normal course, and this institution grew into the Ninghai Mongol and Tibetan Normal School in 1924.⁴⁰

Different secondary courses of study were offered in the Ninghai Mongol and Tibetan Normal School, including middle school, a teacher training course, and vocational course. In 1927, this school changed into the Qinghai Frontier Preparation School (*Qinghai choubian xuexiao*), with Zhu Xiu as its first principal. The Frontier Prep School had just fewer than eighty rooms, including classrooms, labs, offices, and

³⁹ Chen Bingyuan, "Qinghai zhi jiaoyu zhuangkuang" [Qinghai's education situation] *Xin Xibei* 2.1 (1939), 90. *Qinghai san Ma*, 53. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 794-795.

⁴⁰ *Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting* (1934), 8. *Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan* (1936), 14 repeats this paragraph almost verbatim. The dates given in these two primary sources differ slightly from those in Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 794-795.

dormitories.⁴¹ It was something of a comprehensive training school with a curriculum directed at Qinghai's local economy and society. At the insistence of principal Zhu Xiu, the school added vocational classes included animal husbandry, forestry, mining, and wool weaving and would later become Qinghai's first Technical School.⁴²

When Qinghai became its own province in 1929, the Frontier Prep School changed into Qinghai No. 1 Middle School. By 1932, the school had been operating for six years, with six graduating classes of teachers' training courses (*shifan ke*) students.⁴³ On February 15, 1933, the Mongol and Tibetan teacher training class at Xining No. 1 Middle School grew into its own institution—Qinghai Provincial Mongol and Tibetan Normal School. At that time it had 38 students and a budget of 4800 *yuan*. Eleven teachers were employed at this school, with 60% middle school graduates and 40% normal school graduates. The school included a simple normal course and an associated primary school. The school did not give contemporary observers a very good impression. One oral history noted that from its inception, the number of Mongol and Tibetan students was extremely low, and characterized the school as using the name of “frontier education” to gain central government funding.⁴⁴ In 1941, Qinghai Provincial Mongol and Tibetan School had 40 students and 20,000 *yuan* budget per year. Teachers were part-time appointments from other schools in Xining. The Provincial Xining Mongol and

⁴¹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 12-13.

⁴² Zhao Zongfu (2002), 300.

⁴³ Qinghai shengli di yi zhongxuexiao fushe Meng Zang shifanke (1932), 1a.

⁴⁴ Li Dexian, “Jiefang qian Qinghai zhongdeng xuexiao jiaoyu de gaikuang” [Situation of Qinghai's middle school education before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (1981), 79-80.

Tibetan Simple Normal School had 59 students, 19 teachers and a budget of 16,400 yuan in the same year.⁴⁵

Students or Hostages? Ma Bufang's Garrison Boarding School

The Qinghai Education Department sought to overcome linguistic and geographic obstacles through two main strategies. Boarding schools in a core location brought Mongol and Tibetan children to Xining for schooling. Mongols and Tibetans who lived south of the Yellow River did not speak any Chinese and were only recently beginning to interact with people from the interior. Although some of them engaged in agriculture around county towns, but all were pastoralists in distant areas. Mongols living around Qinghai Lake were also included in this group, and the Education Department presented them as much less receptive to new schools. Education authorities understood that very few Tibetans south of the Yellow River would willingly send their children to Xining for education.⁴⁶

Thus, the best way to educate Mongols and Tibetans south of the Yellow River and around Qinghai Lake was compulsory boarding schools (*liuxue banfa*). They recommended sending translators and people “comfortable with local customs” to each tribe to inform them of the government’s new school order. Each year, 66 Mongol and Tibetan children were to be sent to Xining for schooling. All prospective students had to be in good health and around 10 years of age. Among the 66 students, different counties and tribal leaders were required to send annual quotas of students as well. [See Table 5.2:

⁴⁵ Han Qingtao, “Xibei jiaoyu niaokan” [Bird’s eye view of northwestern education], *Xibei lunheng* 9.10 (Nov 15, 1941).

⁴⁶ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 10.

Frontier Student Enrollment Quotas, 1934] Should any tribal leaders resist this order, the response would be “appropriate punishment.”⁴⁷

The Education Department’s plan for Mongol and Tibetan boarding students in Xining seemed to go the extra mile to ensure a comfortable living environment. In the early stages they planned to house 5 to 7 Mongol or Tibetan students at other primary schools in Xining. These students would attend regular, first-year classes. And they would have learned fully in Chinese classrooms and with Chinese textbooks. In some ways this reflected a sort of “study abroad” concept with language immersion to boot. Perhaps it was simple blindness to the handicap of studying in a language other than own mother tongue, or just overzealousness for teaching Chinese language to Mongols and Tibetans. But the report’s claim that any language-related problems should be solved “in a few months” as their studies, school environment, and other students would help them learn Chinese.

The long-term plan, however, was to create centralized dormitory for Mongol and Tibetan students in Xining. While they would attend different schools during the day, at night they would study and live together. All facilities, including clothing and food, must be on par with schools in interior China. While at the school, students would receive a barrage of political education, six years in total of citizen’s curriculum (*guomin jiaoyu*). The goal of this arrangement was to produce graduates who could return to their homes and educate people in an anti-traditional, modernist fashion. Other students would graduate from this school to move into standard middle schools in the province. Once a student has graduated from middle school, they would then become “public affairs

⁴⁷ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 10.

workers” (*gongwu renyuan*) in their home areas. Since all government documents were henceforth to use Chinese, much of their work would be translating for local people.⁴⁸

The Education Department hoped that the language skills of returned students would allow them to gain some local respect and standing, thus making other parents more comfortable with sending their children to be schooled in Xining. As if to assuage parents nervous about their children away from home, the Education Department also suggested male and female adult chaperons living with the students, so that they would not be distracted from studying by homesickness. Outstanding students were to be rewarded with prizes, but rewards would also be spread among their family and tribe.⁴⁹

Not all local people, however, were willing to accept the government’s schools. The Education Department noted as much in 1934. It will be remembered that Mongol nobles paid hefty sums to have Han students replace their children at Ma Qi’s Mongol School in the early years of the Republic. These Mongol nobles gave gifts and annual payments of hundreds of silver dollars avoid sending their children, or at least pay for a Han child as a replacement. One observer stated that most students were from Han Chinese, so perhaps this strategy was successful.⁵⁰

As schools for Mongols and Tibetans appeared in other areas, local skepticism or opposition followed. Zhang Zuozhuo observed that although they had recently opened a Mongol and Tibetan school in Guide county on the banks of the Yellow River, they always felt heavy opposition from local families. He blamed it on “backward” tribal (*buluo*) peoples being trapped in the past. In Zhang’s view, “especially lacking [was]

⁴⁸ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 10.

⁴⁹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 11.

⁵⁰ Chen Bingyuan (1939), 90. *Qinghai san Ma*, 53. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 803-804.

their will to change the old and follow the new.⁵¹ Unpopularity aside, the provincial government continued this policy. For instance, when Ma Bufang inspected Guide county in 1938, he felt that the local people's education levels were quite low. On his way back to Xining through Guide, he stopped and ordered that several local headmen (*qianhu*) send 80, 20, 14, and 6 students, respectively, to Xining for schooling.⁵² One cannot help but think that this must have reminded some residents of military conscription!

The Southern Qinghai Border Region Garrison, headed by Ma Bufang, was a major player in the military conflict in Yushu in 1932 to 1933. This garrison opened its own school in Xining for Mongol, Tibetan, and Salar children in 1932, with Ma Bufang as principal. It was tuition-free, supported out of the garrison's own fund. Students were the children of Mongol, Tibetan, and Salar local elites, ordered by Ma Bufang to attend school in Xining. The school opened in 1934 with an initial class of roughly 20 to 50 students between 8 and 18 years old.⁵³ This school highlights many of the tensions between Ma's Hui military and Tibetans in the region.

The provincial Education Department strained credibility with its assessment of student progress in the school. Noting none of the students could speak Chinese when

⁵¹ Zhang Zuozhou (1932), 8a.

⁵² Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, ed., *Qinghai sheng zhengfu gongzuo baogao* [Work report of the Qinghai provincial government], (June 1938), 12. A travel account by Li Qia in the summer of 1939 painted a much more positive picture of Datong's schools, although it does not specifically mention Mongol and Tibetan schools in the county. Li Qia, one of the Qinghai students in the Nanjing Central Political Institute in 1934 and a member of the anti-Ma New Qinghai Society, accompanied Ma Bufang on an inspection tour of Xining, Datong, and Huzhu in the summer of 1939. His account seems like he was quite impressed by the facilities and appearance of Datong's primary school students. Li Qia, *Kangzhang zhong wanjin de Qinghai* [Qinghai striding forward in the war of resistance], (Xining: Qinghai yinshuaiju, 1939), 30-34.

⁵³ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 12, places the initial enrollment around 50. Zhang Dingbang (1984) 67, puts the number closer to 20, and lists many of the major *tusi* leaders whose children studied there. Considering the Education Department's excessive optimism about the school, I tend to believe Zhang's lower enrollment number.

they first arrived, three months had all students conversing in their newly acquired second language. One Mongol boy, who could not speak Chinese when he arrived, was reportedly able to recite entire Chinese texts by memory. Unbelievable, perhaps, but it was good propaganda. It was presented as a validation of “this department’s Mongol and Tibetan education method, once applied in the future without resistance, using textbooks in local languages, and with teachers conversant in their language will really be great!”⁵⁴ By 1936, the school had 57 students between 8 and 18 years old, and a central government investigation of northwestern education noted that the school had “positive results.”⁵⁵

The Southern Border Region Garrison School evolved into Qinghai Mongol and Tibetan Middle School in 1937. At that time, the garrison transferred management of the school to the Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Advancement Committee. The committee continued to administer the schools for three years. Continued military tensions in Yushu in the early 1940s prompted Ma Bufang to move the Southern Qinghai Border Region Garrison to Yushu. He took over administration of Mongol and Tibetan Middle School in the same year that the Southern Qinghai Garrison moved to Yushu. In 1940, however, the Qinghai Local Government Cadre Training Brigade took over administration of this school, and two years later it would fold into the growing Kunlun Middle School Islam Progressive Council’s Sino-Muslim Middle School network.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 12.

⁵⁵ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaohatuan (1936), 4.

⁵⁶ Li Qingfen, “Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu yizhu Yushu de yuanwei ji qi cuoshi,” *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 7 (1980), 11-18. Zhang Dingbang (1984), 67. Qinghai san Ma: 53. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 804-805.

This school is the clearest example of frontier education for political control. Ma Bufang reportedly confided to a trusted advisor that compulsory, boarding school for children of Tibetan leaders was like raising a young tiger to tame a big one.⁵⁷ Although the source of Ma Bufang's tiger analogy is unspecified in the secondary study that reports it, the sentiment it conveys is quite plausible. Zhang Dingbang's excellent study of early twentieth-century middle school education in Qinghai had an equally provocative if negative description of the students at the garrison school—hostages.⁵⁸

Gray Tuttle has observed that “in the early twentieth century Tibetan Buddhists in Amdo and Kham were in a tight spot. They were caught between the Muslim and Chinese warlords only loosely connected to the struggling Chinese nation-state and the independent Central Tibetan government with which they shared cultural ties but which could not protect them from the warlords.”⁵⁹ Indeed, Tibetan families in Qinghai had real reason to fear the Ma family's provincial armies. Ma Qi had sent troops into Labrang in 1917 and 1925. In 1921 his troops were dispatched on a punitive mission to Guoluo. Ma Bufang's Southern Qinghai Border Region Garrison fought a war in Yushu in 1932 and 1933, and he sent troops into Guoluo again in 1938. Thousands of refugees from Yushu fled Ma Bufang's army, living for several years in an area of the current Tibetan Autonomous Region.⁶⁰ An especially critical report from 1936 scorned frontier education

⁵⁷ *Qinghai san Ma*, 53.

⁵⁸ Zhang Dingbang, “Qingmo Minguo shidai Qinghai zhongxue jiaoyu shilue” [brief history of Qinghai's middle school education in the late Qing and Republican periods], *Qinghai difang shizhi yanjiu* 1.1(1984), 67;

⁵⁹ Tuttle (2005), 139. Tuttle also cites support for this statement from Nietupski, Labrang (1999), 97 and Lipman's dissertation “Border world of Gansu”.

⁶⁰ This is by no means an exhaustive list of the times that Ma Qi or Ma Bufang's troops attacked Tibetan regions. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 578-69, 901-911. *Qinghai wenshi ziliao* [Qinghai oal historical

efforts in Qinghai because of its rapacious government that exploited ethnic divisions. “What most people don’t know is that Qinghai is still in a battlefield, where different peoples govern by mutual oppression.”⁶¹ An oral history of a school builder in Guoluo in 1947 and 1948 was quite explicit in the suffering local residents had endured under Ma Bufang, claiming that Ma Qi had massacred over 7,000 members of one tribe in 1921, and that it only worsened under Ma Bufang.⁶² Tibetan skepticism of provincial troops and frontier schools was therefore understandable.

Qinghai’s Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Progressive Council, 1933-1949

Hoping to build off of the success of the Islam Progressive Council opened in 1922, Xining authorities opened an administration organization devoted to educating Mongols and Tibetans in the province. Just how this organization came to be founded remains somewhat unclear. *The Complete History of Qinghai* states that Tibetan leaders Luosang Xiangqu and A Fushou advocated for the establishment of a committee dedicated to the oversight of frontier education in Qinghai, with the result that the Qinghai Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Progressive Council opened in July, 1933. Newspapers in Qinghai announced the committee’s opening by describing its goals as “awakening Mongol and Tibetan compatriots, making Mongol and Tibetan education widespread, and maintain the survival of Mongols and Tibetans.” This organization, in

materials] abounds with personal recollections of various punitive military expeditions against Qinghai’s tribal population.

⁶¹ Fan Changjiang (1936), 147-148.

⁶² Shen Jingxin, 122.

theory, would run all frontier education activities in Qinghai until the Communist takeover in 1949.⁶³

The Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Progressive Council represented an early instance of Qinghai's provincial government appointing Tibetans to positions of responsibility over frontier education. A Tibetan man from Ledu county, Luosang Xiangqu (1905-1960), was named committee director (*lishi*). Luosang had studied at the Central Political Institute in Nanjing from 1929 until 1931, and would also become the Tibetan language teacher at CPI Xining in 1934. His influential education career led to provincial government positions in the 1940s, including head of the Tongde (formerly southern Guide) county government in 1943, and administrator of construction for the Hainan and Guoluo portions of Xining-Yushu Highway after 1945.⁶⁴

In the estimation of Qinghai's Education Bureau in 1934, Mongols and Tibetans who lived north of the Yellow River were much more comfortable interacting with "people from the interior," some at least partially engaged in agriculture, and more people could communicate in local languages. Thus, the department surmised, they would be more willing to school their children. This strategy was what Yang Xiyao, head of the provincial Education Department, called "building schools in and for the location" (*jiudi shexue*) in the 1934 Education Department report. The Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Advancement Committee implemented this strategy of building schools in Tibetan villages.

⁶³ *Xin Qinghai* 2.3 (1934), cited in Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 804-805.

⁶⁴ *Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao* (1935), 8-10.

Primary school funds normally come from the county government and education bureau. School equipment and utensils, on the other hand, would come from local fees. In the case of Mongol and Tibetan education, however, Qinghai's Education Department argued that the national government must provide the funding.⁶⁵ Two years later Qinghai's government issued new regulations on public support of tuition-free schools, hoping that this would ensure good treatment for Mongol and Tibetan students as well as continued scholarships for poor children.⁶⁶

The Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Advancement Committee was primarily responsible for building and administering frontier primary schools, and faced a difficult task. When the MTCPC opened in 1933, Qinghai had a reported 35 primary schools for Mongols and Tibetans in Ledu, Guide, and Menyuan counties. From 1935 until 1937, the committee oversaw a burst of new Mongol and Tibetan primary schools. Although historical sources disagree on the exact number of schools, it was between fifteen and twenty.⁶⁷ A central government supported investigation team reported that over two hundred Mongols and Tibetan students were attending schools in either Xining or local villages in 1936.⁶⁸ A reliable historical study found 17 Mongol and Tibetan primary schools in the province in 1939, with over 720 students. That number further increased

⁶⁵ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 10. Much like military funding in the 1932-1933 Yushu border war, the Qinghai provincial government repeatedly requested central government funding for frontier schools. In some sense, therefore, provincial authorities opened the door for central government control over Mongol and Tibetan schools. Although many contemporary observers claim that Ma Bufang would only steal education funds for his military, the issue of funding frontier schools should lead us to complicate the simplistic view of provincial / national competition and conflict in Qinghai.

⁶⁶ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, ed., *Qinghai sheng zhengfu gongzuo baogao* [Work report of the Qinghai provincial government], (October 1936), 5.

⁶⁷ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 5. Liu Manqing (1936), 93-94. Wang Keming (1936), 261. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 804.

⁶⁸ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 4.

into the early 1940s, with a total of 44 low primary schools and eleven full primary schools run by the Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Advancement Committee. Although exact statistics for primary school students are unavailable, the Qinghai MTCPCC certainly contributed to education of the province's Mongol and Tibetan children.⁶⁹

Ledu county presents an interesting case study of building hybrid schools. After the Qinghai Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Improvement Committee opened in 1933, some counties also opened branch committees and began building Mongol and Tibetan primary schools. Ledu county opened 7 Mongol and Tibetan primary schools for just under 200 students in 1933 alone. The largest, Maying Mongol and Tibetan Primary School in Shanglangka had 60 students and two teachers. The local “living Buddha” Liaojiao administered two schools in Yanggonggou, one of which was located in Yanggong’s Buddhist monastery. One local study of Ledu’s education system noted that contemporaries saw these two schools as most successful, largely due to the Living Buddha’s commitment to education. Liaojiao was famous for his tendency to use his personal wealth for the poor students there. The curriculum included Chinese language, arithmetic, calisthenics, and four hours of Tibetan language (although no Mongol language were included). After graduation from one of the Mongol and Tibetan primary schools in Ledu, students were sent to Xining’s Mongol and Tibetan Middle School for further study.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Huang Fensheng, *Bianjiang kenzi yuan shouce* [Handbook for frontier agricultural colonizers], (Qingnian chubanshe, 1944), 150. Cao Shuxun (1945), 47. *Xingzhengyuan xinwenju* (1947), 28, 50-51.

⁷⁰ Li Chengdao, “Jiefang qian de Ledu jiaoyu” [Ledu’s education before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 17 (Xining: Qinghai zhongshan yinshuaiguan, 1988), 131.

Sonam Laji (Ch. Zhu Haishan), a member of the Monguor (Ch. *Tu*) people from Minhe county east of Xining, was another Buddhist monk adept at moving through the multiple cultures and languages in Qinghai. Born in 1894, “Lama Zhu” began his studies in the local Zhujia Monastery near his home in Minhe county. Upon completing his early studies, Zhu moved to another center of Tibetan Buddhist culture and education—Kumbum Monastery (Ch. *Ta'er si*)—just outside of Xining. The site where the founder of the Gelukpa order and (posthumously) the first Dalai Lama was born, Kumbum was an important economic, religious, and political center for the region’s Buddhists.⁷¹ With the recommendation of Sherap Gyatso, Sonam Laji would accompany the Panchen Lama to Beijing in 1918, and eventually become the chief of staff for the Panchen’s Nanjing office in 1928. Lama Zhu also assisted many of Qinghai’s first generation of frontier education leaders in their quest to study in China’s urban centers.⁷² In 1933, Sonam Laji returned home to Minhe for first time in many years. During this trip, Zhu recruited over forty talented but poor students from northeastern Qinghai and sent them to secondary school in the Panchen Lama’s Nanjing office. Reminding us of the cultural and ethnic mixture of inhabitants in Qinghai, the students that he recruited included Mongols, Tibetans, Monguor, Sino-Muslim Hui, and Han children from Dulan, Xunhua, Ledu, and Minhe counties.

“Lama Zhu” returned to Qinghai again in 1934, and this time he focused on building Mongol and Tibetan primary schools throughout his native area of Minhe county. Hoping to improve the lot of locals in Guangting, Zhu Haishan called together a

⁷¹ Barnett (1963), 231.

⁷² Qinghai sheng difang wenshi xuehui (1997), 332-336. Xin Huaizhi (1985), 129-133.

school-building committee made up of local elites and county government officials. Minhe's county leader sent one thousand conscripted soldiers to build the first Guanting Primary school, with three classrooms, over twenty teacher dormitory rooms. The school opened in 1934 with nearly 130 students in its first class. Despite being the school's founder, Zhu was apparently unafraid to get his hands dirty—he reportedly labored with the soldiers building the school and joined students carrying stones needed for the school structure.⁷³

Zhu Haishan's Guanting Mongol and Tibetan primary school seems to have followed a largely secular curriculum. Recollections and secondary historical sources recall that Tibetan language and classical Chinese were added on top of the standard primary school curriculum. That local residents apparently called Lama Zhu's schools "foreign schools" only attests to the novelty of modern education on the Qinghai frontier—let alone the new approaches to hybrid frontier schools. In 1936, Zhu Haishan offered his own money to open six other low primary schools for Mongols and Tibetans in Guanting. Soon thereafter, he also opened one low primary school for Mongol and Tibetan Girls in the same area. Despite local objections, Lama Zhu's girls school opened in 1936 with roughly thirty girls in attendance. Over the next two years, he would continue to invest in his native area's burgeoning school system by building a library, purchasing book collections for it, and holding anti-foot-binding activities. This local son and respected religious leader brought many of Republican China's education practices to this frontier area. After only three productive years building schools in his hometown, Zhu returned to monastic life and the national government-supported Xining Normal

⁷³ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 30-31, 49-50. Xin Huaizhi (1997), 332-335.

School incorporated all Guanting Mongol and Tibetan schools into its primary school network.⁷⁴

During the 1930s, however, MTCPC-run primary schools largely remained within the geographic confines of “lowland” Qinghai, north of the Yellow River. And they would not move into Qinghai’s southwestern highland until well after the Nationalist government took over frontier schools in 1937. But those schools built north of the Yellow River appear to have been successful enough to remain in operation after the MTCPC moved to Yushu in 1943.⁷⁵

Central Government Frontier Schools

The first years of the 1930s witnessed a dramatic change in frontier policy for the Nationalist Chinese state. Nanjing appointed the Panchen Lama to the new post of “Western Borderlands Propagation Commissioner” to spread the idea that the Three Principles of the People would strengthen the connection between Tibetans and Han.⁷⁶ This represents an important shift in Nanjing’s strategy in dealing with the Tibetans it claimed to rule. Ma Qi held a similar post in 1914-1915, the Mongol and Tibetan Pacification Commissioner. Although his title changed in 1915, Ma Qi was the national government’s point man dealing with Tibetans in the northwest. Beginning in 1931 with the Panchen Lama’s appointment, the Nationalist government sought to utilize Tibetan religious leaders as its representatives on the Sino-Tibetan frontier. The Panchen not only

⁷⁴ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 30-31, 49-50. Xin Huaizhi (1997), 332-335.

⁷⁵ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 805.

⁷⁶ Tuttle (2005), 162.

replaced a Sino-Muslim warlord, but his dual religious and political role made him ideally suited to this kind of work.

Gray Tuttle has convincingly argued that in absence of effective political ties between Lhasa and the Chinese government, Buddhist co-religionists of both Han and Tibetan backgrounds developed networks of patronage, support, and religious exchange. The increasing number of Han monks studying in Tibet and Tibetan lamas lecturing and holding ceremonies in China Proper were a form of cross-cultural education focused on introducing esoteric Tibetan Buddhism to Han audiences. Central government frontier schools, on the other hand, were the Nationalist government's attempt to create a secular, frontier education network of politically trained and loyal teachers and administrators. Recruiters supported talented students from "frontier provinces" for study and political training in the national capital. The Nationalist government also opened frontier schools in the west, including Xining.

Central government-supported frontier schools were better staffed, higher funded, and more adaptive to the needs of Qinghai's particular frontier environments. Many technical schools grew and focused on Sino-Tibetan language skills, pastoral economics and animal husbandry, and agricultural land reclamation. Furthermore, the national government often took successful schools and elevated them to national status. This gave the schools a steady source of income for their operating budget, party-trained teachers, and at least some level of protection against authorities in Xining. On the other hand, taking over the administration of frontier schools also led to more direct control over managing and training students. Schooling was and remains a political act, and thus the central government's support and management of frontier schools also allowed a higher

degree of political control over talented students from frontier provinces. Nationalist party intelligence operatives often staffed or managed schools and used their positions of influence to gather intelligence about local Tibetan leaders.

Beginning in the early 1930s, Nanjing authorities scoured peripheral provinces for students to train in the national capital. Young scholars from Qinghai had already been studying outside of the province since the late 1910s. Deng Chunlan, a member of Peking University's first all-girls class, and her family members Deng Chunlin and Deng Chunhao had studied in institutions of higher education in Chinese cities and abroad.⁷⁷ Zhu Haishan was a key supporter of Qinghai students studying in other provinces during the 1920s, and also played an integral role in setting up the Mongol and Tibetan classes at the Central Political Institute in Nanjing. Among the beneficiaries of his support were Han Baoshan and Zhu Qing, who studied at Shanxi Legal and Political Institute (*Shanxi fazheng zhuanke xuexiao*), and Shen Huanzhang at the Beiping Wireless Communications School (*Beiping wuxian dian xuexiao*). When one group of Qinghai students arrived in Nanjing, their economic limitations and insufficient scholarly qualifications left them stranded in the capital. Zhu Haishan, then working at the Panchen Lama's Nanjing office, took them under his wing and successfully lobbied Chiang Kai-shek to open a preparatory course at the Central Political Institute.⁷⁸

The Mongol and Tibetan class at the National Central Political Institute in Nanjing opened in January of 1930. After absorbing some Mongol students at a frontier school in the northeast, shut down due to Japanese encroachment into the region in 1931,

⁷⁷ Qinghai sheng defang shizhi xuehui (1997), 30-35, 38-44, 47-51. Zhao Zongfu (2002), 349-355.

⁷⁸ Xin Huaizhi (1997), 130.

the Mongol and Tibetan class grew into its own school in Nanjing in February 1933. In the new school, courses of study included high school, middle school, and continuing education classes. The high school course allowed for different concentrations--standard high school, teacher training, pastoralism, and healthcare.⁷⁹

The Nanjing Mongol and Tibetan School's students came from different frontier provinces around China. Qinghai, however, was the best-represented province in terms of students at the school.⁸⁰ Pu Hanwen, a 28 year old man from Huangyuan county, was the only teacher from Qinghai, focusing on Tibetan language in the middle school course. Qinghai students were well represented, however, in the high-school-level Education administration course. Twelve out of 18 students hailed from Qinghai, including 6 from Xining, 2 each from Huzhu and Ledu, and one from Guide and Micheng. All 8 students in the Agricultural Administration course (*nongye xingzheng zu*) were from Qinghai, including 4 from Huangyuan, 2 from Xining, and one each from Guide and Huzhu. In total, just under one quarter of students in these Mongol and Tibetan schools in 1934 were from Qinghai.⁸¹ In 1935, three out of 18 students in the Nanjing school's second

⁷⁹ Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao fushe Meng Zang xuexiao gaozhong putong, weisheng, shifan, xumu sike biye tongxuelu* [List of graduates from the standard, healthcare, normal, and pastoralism high school course of the Chinese Nationalist Party central political school's associated Mongol and Tibetan school], (Nanjing: Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, 1934), 1-2.

⁸⁰ Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao fushe Meng Zang xuexiao, Baotou fenxiao, Xining fenxiao, Kangding fenxiao zhijiaoyuan xuesheng zong minglu* [overall list of students, teachers, and staff of the Chinese Nationalist Party Central Political School's associated Mongol and Tibetan School, and its satellite campuses in Baotou, Xining, and Kangding], (Nanjing: Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, 1935), chart insert--"Xuesheng tongji zongtu" [Main chart for students statistics]

⁸¹ Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, *Meng Zang xuexiao jiaoyuan ji xuesheng minglu* (1934), 3-4, 14-16.

semester Mongol and Tibetan class were from Qinghai, and one-third of the graduates from the standard high school course also Qinghai natives.⁸²

Mongols and Tibetans were decidedly in the minority at the Central Political Institute in Nanjing and, later, its Xining satellite campus. In 1934, the Nanjing school had 140 Han, 80 Mongol, and 20 Tibetan students. In Xining's campus, over 90% of the students were Han (45) and under 5% were Tibetans (4). No Hui students were enrolled in CPI Xining's simple normal course. Students at both schools ranged from their mid- to late-teens up to into their twenties. Only six students at Xining's campus were over 30 years old. In terms of numbers, Tibetan students in fact dominated the associated Mongol and Tibetan primary. They accounted for around 60 of the roughly 80 male students. The students in the primary school also skewed younger, with some under ten years old and the rest under twenty. There were no Hui students in the simple normal course at CPI Xining in 1935, and only two Hui children were attending CPI Xining's associated primary school in the same year.⁸³

Class lists of the Central Political Institute in 1934 and 1935 show that many of the graduates' careers would be in frontier schools, at least for the immediate future. One half of the 36 students in the first graduating class of the Nanjing Mongol and Tibetan school were from Qinghai, and many of them would show up in frontier schools in Xining. For instance, 5 out of the 7 staff of the Xining Mongol and Tibetan School were graduates of the first semester Mongol and Tibetan class in the Nanjing Central Political School. These included Guo Tongwen a Xining native and head of teacher training; Zhu

⁸² Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, *Xining fenxiao...zhijiaoyuan xuesheng zong minglu* (1935), chart insert-- "Xuesheng tongji zongtu" [Main chart for students statistics]

⁸³ Ibid.

Qing from Huzhu was the school team leader (*duizhang*); Mu Chenggong from Xining was both school manager (*shiwuyuan*) and a history teacher; Ledu native Lu Jiande was head librarian; and Shen Youcai, from Guide, was the Physical Education leader. Other graduates were employed in the Xining schools as teachers, including Wang Zhiying from Xining, Jie Yongling, Zhao Aide, and Mu Jianye.

The Central Political Institute's Mongol and Tibetan School Xining satellite campus opened in October 1934, and would waste little time in training another class of potential teachers and officials. Fifty students were already enrolled in the Simple Normal School course in late 1934. All of these students, notably, hailed from Xining or the original agricultural counties, e.g. Huzhu, Guide, Ledu, Huangyuan, Datong and Minhe.⁸⁴

Somewhat limited historical evidence indicates that CPI Xining's enrollment remained just under fifty students through the 1930s. By the early 1940s, as CPI Xining evolved into National Xining Normal School, enrollment exploded to around three hundred students in 1941, 1946, and 1947. By 1946, National Xining Normal School had over 250 graduates, including 108 middle school, 93 simple normal, and 54 normal school alumni.⁸⁵ In the same year, there were close to one thousand students studying in Qinghai's five national schools,⁸⁶

CPI Xining also committed its institutional support to building and running a frontier primary school system. When the nationally funded Xining frontier school

⁸⁴ Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, ...*sike biye tongxuelu* (1934), 63-65, 88-89, 99-100.

⁸⁵ Zhongyang zhengzhe xuexiao (1935), opening chart, 8-10. Chen Bingyuan (1939), 90. Xingzhengyuan bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), Charts 3, 4, 6. Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 30-31, 49-50.

⁸⁶ Cao Shuxun (1945), 51; Xingzhengyuan xinwenju (1947), 9, Chart 3; Li Dexian (1981), 72-74, 80-81, 83.

opened in 1934, it also established two associated primary schools for nearly eighty students. CPI Xining expanded in 1936 to include an associated Middle School as well as absorbing the seven primary schools for Mongols and Tibetans that Zhu Haishan opened in Minhe county.⁸⁷ Among these Guanting primary schools was a Mongol and Tibetan Girls' primary school. This national frontier schools' primary school network included thirteen campuses by 1939. National Xining Normal School opened more primary schools in 1941, combining preexisting Mongol and Tibetan primary schools in Menyuan county, north of Datong, and Gangcha township on northern shore of Qinghai Lake. By 1946, the Ministry of Education funded over nine hundred frontier primary school students in Qinghai. Although the number dropped to over seven hundred in 1947, roughly ten times more students were enrolled in nationally-funded frontier primary schools than in 1934.⁸⁸

The central government also opened several experimental technical schools that were designed to offer skill-sets necessary for living in the northwestern frontier. A national-level experimental school was built in a northwest suburb of Xining in 1937. The central government's main frontier technical school in Qinghai opened in Datong County in late 1940. In addition to the standard buildings needed to run a boarding school, Datong county's National Qinghai Low-level Technical School also had experimental agricultural and grazing fields. The school also had a large amount of livestock, including over 900 sheep and nearly 320 yaks. The school grew quickly in the first half of the 1940s: from 54 students in 1941, to 80 in 1942, over 150 in 1943, and

⁸⁷ Cao Shuxun (1945), 40.

⁸⁸ Xingzhengyuan bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), Charts 3, 4, 6. Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 30-31, 49-50.

topping out at just under two hundred in 1944. Frontier technical school students dropped soon thereafter. By 1946 there were only 37 students at the National Qinghai Low-level Vocational School in Datong.⁸⁹

The frontier technical school in Datong county trained students in farming, animal husbandry, teamwork and national politics. The curriculum stressed replacing tribal loyalty with national consciousness through a strict regimen of intellectual, physical, and behavioral lessons. These included military training, group drill, group research work, and labor service. The school doctor would also check on students' health as well as provide instruction in health and sanitation. Students received a practical, hands-on education in farming and animal husbandry, integrating scholarship on frontier wasteland reclamation with practice at the school's own fields.⁹⁰ The cutting edge of frontier agricultural studies would also likely have been taught at this school. *A Handbook for Frontier Wasteland Reclaimers (Bianjiang kenzhiyuan shouce)* from 1944, likely among other similar studies, was included in National Qinghai Low-level Technical School's library.⁹¹ Thus, in many ways central government frontier schools applied practical lessons in economic activities well suited for the environments in Qinghai.

National Jinan University's northwestern education report from 1936 emphasized the need for health and sanitation training among Mongols and Tibetans, thereby hoping to bring a standard aspect of modern schooling to the northwestern frontier. It also suggested that Scouting would be useful for the unpatriotic peoples of the frontier. "From

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 49-51.

⁹¹ The title page of the book in Qinghai Provincial Library's collection is stamped with the seal of the school.

the perspective different peoples, the plan for strengthening frontier defense, and for promoting the blending of different peoples, we must urgently develop Mongol and Tibetan Scouts education.⁹² According to the 1943 plan for frontier social education in Qinghai, traveling education teams were to move out into Mongol and Tibetan pastoral areas of Qinghai, and other regions still without schools, to engage in traveling education work. These teams would connect with similar organizations working in health and sanitation, pastoralism, and Nationalist Party groups to bring a multi-faceted social education experience to the province's pastoral population.⁹³

Nationalist frontier schools in Nanjing and elsewhere trained a group of teachers and administrators in party ideology and frontier school pedagogy. Many of these students returned to staff the central government's growing network of frontier schools in western China, and Qinghai in particular. The Central Political Institute's Mongol and Tibetan School opened campuses across China, including Xining, in which they schooled an early wave of teachers trained for the "frontier environment." Satellite campuses opened along the Mongolian, northwestern, and Tibetan frontiers throughout China in 1934. And the goal of these schools was to spread frontier education, to develop all of China's citizens, and help "frontier youth" prepare for higher education and their future careers.⁹⁴

For the next four years until 1938, the Xining Mongol and Tibetan Simple Normal School opened, as did two associated middle schools, and 153 Mongol and Tibetan primary schools. As the Japanese invasion forced the national government to Chongqing,

⁹² Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 14, 16.

⁹³ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁴ Zhongyang zhengzhi xuexiao, ...*sike biye tongxuelu* (1934), 1-2.

central influence over western Chinese provinces increased. And frontier education benefited from the increase in funding.⁹⁵

One key strategy for overseeing national frontier schools was frequent inspections. Miss Liu Manqing undertook one such inspection in 1936, the same year as Nationalist Jinan University's investigation. Liu's report, *Frontier Education*, was published in Shanghai in 1937.⁹⁶ From 1938 until 1947, the central government sent over 30 high-level inspections of northwestern schools. Central authorities also established frontier school regions in 1941 in order further assert its supervision of education activities.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the establishment of nationally-funded primary schools in Guoluo after 1943 coincides with a central government investigation report about the tribal region.⁹⁸

Politics of Schooling Across Frontiers

Central government frontier schools in Qinghai and elsewhere increasingly tailored their regulations and pedagogy to conditions and needs particular to Qinghai's Tibetan populations in the late 1930s and 1940s. These were positive developments in the trajectory of frontier schools in the region and another example of adaptation possible in frontier regions. From the earliest days of the Mongol and Tibetan class in Nanjing

⁹⁵ Xingzhengyuan xinwenju (1947), 1-2. Frontier education funding in 1935 and 1936 was 500,000 per year. In 1937 it increased to over 650,000 *yuan*, but dropped precipitously in 1938 down to 250,000 *yuan*. In 1939 it rose again to nearly 800,000 *yuan*. In the early 1940s, frontier education funding skyrocketed--1.7 million *yuan* in 1940, 5.2 million in 1941, over 8.1 million in 1942, and 11 million in 1943. Cao Shuxun (1945), 68. N.B. The data have not yet been adjusted for inflation.

⁹⁶ Liu Manqing, *Bianjiang jiaoyu* [Frontier education], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937).

⁹⁷ Xingzhengyuan xinwenju (1947), 4, 8-9, 15, 28.

⁹⁸ Meng Zang weiyuanhui diaochashi, ed. *Guoluo diaocha baogao* [Investigation report on Guoluo], *Bianqing diaocha baogao* 8, (Chongqing: Chongqing qianyin, 1944).

during which Qinghai students met with C.C. Clique leaders, Nationalist frontier schools and party politics went hand in hand.

It seems that central government frontier education did train a group of educators and administrators for Qinghai's growing school system. But these trained teachers would cause problems for the Ma family, and especially, Ma Bufang. As Gray Tuttle argues, Nationalist frontier schools "appear to have been trying to train Tibetan cadres for the purpose of returning to Xikang and weakening the influence of the warlord Liu Wenhui there."⁹⁹ Central frontier schools positioned themselves in opposition to frontier militarists like Ma Bufang. Their strategies included rejecting military solutions to China's "frontier problems," criticizing the Ma family's oppressive rule over Tibetans, and attempting to inject a strong dose of Nationalist ethnic propaganda based on Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles and self-determination among minority groups in China.¹⁰⁰ Government regulations for schools, education investigators, journalists, and many students turned teachers wrote and even acted upon their criticisms of Ma Bufang's Qinghai.

Many graduates from Xining Middle School's 1932 class continued their studies in the national capital during the early 1930s, as students from Qinghai studied in the new Nationalist government's frontier school system. Most of these students would experience a highly politicized atmosphere that trained them to return to Qinghai to

⁹⁹ Tuttle (2005), 148.

¹⁰⁰ Tuttle (2005), 158.

promote frontier education and Nationalist ideology.¹⁰¹ Some Qinghai student met with noted C.C. Clique leaders, Chen Lifu and Chen Guofu, while in Nanjing, and under their patronage founded a group dedicated to changing Qinghai's political and social structure along Nationalist Party lines. At least twenty of the students in the first class for Mongols and Tibetans in Nanjing joined a pro-Nationalist group called the "New Qinghai Society," and published a journal that used the goal of introducing Qinghai's history, geography, culture, and politics to a national audience as a vehicle for attacking the provincial government under the Ma family. Han Baoshan and Zhu Qing, who had studied abroad under Zhu Haishan's assistance, were among the participants.¹⁰² Although criticism of Ma Bufang quickly decreased after Ma himself came to Nanjing and offered generous financial support to New Qinghai magazine, central government-supported criticism of Qinghai's government continued in the 1930s and 1940s.

In Qinghai, some frontier teachers including many organizers of the *New Qinghai* journal formed a clandestine group called the New Qinghai Construction Brigade. This group occupied leadership positions in Qinghai's government and secondary schools until the 1940s. Zhou Juesheng, Zhu Qing, and Ma Shengzhi served as the first administration of the National Low-level Occupational School in Datong county, opened in 1940.¹⁰³ The society's organizational guidelines were discovered at No. 1 Middle School in 1944, and

¹⁰¹ The National Central Institute of Political Studies in Nanjing was most similar to Zhongshan University described by Yeh Wen-shin: party-administered, politically motivated, and a feeder for graduates to work in National Frontier schools in Qinghai and across China. Yeh, 172-182.

¹⁰² Zhang Deshan, Yang Shengbin, Niu Zhen, Li Qia, Ma Shengzhi, Tan Mingyi, Zou Guozhu, Zhang Yuanbin, Deng Qinyi, Wang Xieban, Li Zifa, Dong Hanrong, Mu Chenggong, and Mu Jianye were other members of the New Qinghai Society. See Wang Fake, "'Xin Qinghai she' chengli jingguo ji houdong qingkuang," *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 13 (1985), 125-128. Mu Jianye, "Huiyi 'Tujue'" [Remembering *Tujue*], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 53. For a detailed discussion of the Nationalist Party factions, see Hung-mao Tien, *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China, 1927-1937*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), 45-65.

¹⁰³ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 30-31, 49-50.

Ma Bufang moved aggressively to control middle schools and try to coopt the leaders. Zhu Qing, Han Baoshan, Zeng Guozhu, Niu Zhen, and Deng Qinyi chose government appointments over punishment in return for closing down the society.¹⁰⁴

Former students in Nanjing, Zou Guozhu, Ma Shengzhi, Han Baoshan, and Niu Zhen, conspired to write, print, and distribute an anti-Ma Bufang pamphlet at the 1946 National Congress. The author, Han Baoshan, attacked Ma's government in the name of the two million Han, Hui, Mongols, and Tibetans of Qinghai province. Han accused Ma Bufang of never building a school in pastoral areas and finding all number of excuses to block Nationalist efforts to do the same. If this continued, "our Han, Hui, Mongol, and Tibetan children will always be locked outside the door to national education."¹⁰⁵

Nationalist party factionalism was rampant in the national frontier schools in Qinghai. Qinghai's Education Department chief during the Civil War recalled that, from its inception CPI Xining and later National Xining Normal School was under the control of the C. C. Clique of Chen Guofu, Chen Lifu, and Zhu Jiahua. In fact, the first principal of CPI Xining was Ma Shaowu, a noted C. C. Clique member. Ma would also serve as the provincial Education Department head from 1942 until 1945. Internecine factional struggles kept this school in frequent conflict. Not only were the majority of teachers loyal Nationalist party members, but most were also connected to the C.C. Clique. He also recalled teachers in Qinghai's national-level schools also serving as intelligence agents from either the Central Bureau of Investigation and Statistics or from its military

¹⁰⁴ Wang Fake (1985), 128.

¹⁰⁵ *Konggao Qiqhai sheng zhengfu zhuxi Ma Bufang* [Accusing Qinghai provincial government chairman Ma Bufang], (1946), 26. Zhong Shilong, "Nanjing guodahui shang chuxian de fan Ma Bufang shijian" [The anti-Ma Bufang incident that appeared at the Nanjing Congress], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 9 (1982), 58-60.

counterpart (*zhongtong* and *juntong*).¹⁰⁶ Zhang Yuanbin, a native of Huangyuan county and student at the Central Political Institute in Nanjing in the mid-1930s, became a Restoration Society member while studying in the capital. When he returned to Qinghai in 1937, Zhang joined in covert activities like intelligence and organization for the Military Statistics Bureau in Qinghai.¹⁰⁷

Repeating the Pattern in Qinghai's Highlands

Although national-level frontier schools were growing during this period, it should be remembered that political control remained an important goal in these schools. Just as in Xining's early efforts building frontier schools in the 1910s and 1920s, Central government frontier schools were avowedly political institutions that sought to instill party ideology and modern nationalism in its students. It was during this period of increased central control, party factionalism, political struggles and small but significant steps toward schooling children in Qinghai's pastoral areas, that a Nationalist intelligence agent was establishing schools among the tribes of Guoluo. Adaptation to local conditions allowed him build schools in the high grasslands among Tibetan tribes. But political manipulation and intelligence gathering were as much a part of his work as frontier education.

¹⁰⁶ Li Chengde, "Jiefang qian Qinghai xuexiao jiaoyu de yipi" [Glimpse at Qinghai's school education before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1 (1961), 80-81, 109. Li Dexian, "Jiefang qian Qinghai zhongdeng xuexiao jiaoyu de gaikuang" [Overall situation of Qinghai's middle school education before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 72. Yeh Wen-hsin also discusses the connection between intelligence services, the C.C. Clique, Zhu Jiahua, and the "participation" of national schools in provincial cities. Yeh, 176-182.

¹⁰⁷ Zhong Shijiang, "Kang Ri zhanzheng shiqi de juntong zuzhi ji zai Qinghai de ruogan huodong" [Military statistics organization's activities in Qinghai during the war of resistance period], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (Xining: Qinghai renminchubanshe, 1981), 21.

Nationalist frontier schools spread farther into Qinghai's Tibetan areas than provincial efforts had achieved. An experimental high primary school in Dulan county west of Qinghai lake opened in 1936.¹⁰⁸ In 1943 the central government had ordered the establishment of a primary school system in Guoluo (T. Golok), the high, harsh pastoral region in which the headwaters of the Yellow River have their source. Wang Jianguang was the school's first principal, and struggled with the difficult work of opening primary schools in an area long opposed to interference from outsiders. By 1945 he had opened two primary school campuses in two major tribal areas. When Wang retired from the position in Guoluo, Sheng Jingxin, the teacher/spy who opened the chapter, took over. Sheng's oral history account suggests that much of the work Wang accomplished had to be started over from scratch.¹⁰⁹ In 1948 Qinghai's government was still trying to build primary schools for Mongols and Tibetans at the peripheries of the province—Yushu, Dulan, Haiyan, Qilin, and Xinghai.¹¹⁰ Dulan county, on the edge of the Qaidam (Ch. Chaidamu) Basin in western Qinghai, had two low-level primary schools and one full primary school with over 200 students.¹¹¹

The Ministry of Education ordered the establishment of the National Yushu School in 1944, continuing the geographical extension of frontier schools into Qinghai's far southwest. Just like Qinghai provincial efforts to open frontier schools in the distant southwestern Kham-Tibetan regions of Yushu, the first principal of the school faced daunting obstacles. He traveled over two and half months from Xining to Yushu.

¹⁰⁸ Cao Shuxun (1945), 40.

¹⁰⁹ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 70-71. Sheng Jingxin (1988), 115-124.

¹¹⁰ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, ed. *Qinghai sheng zhengfu sanshiqi niandu zhengji bijiaobiao* [Comparative table of the Qinghai provincial government's accomplishments for 1948], (Xining: Qinghai shengzhengfu mishuchu, 1948), 17.

¹¹¹ "Cong shuzi shang kan Qinghai" [Looking at Qinghai by the numbers], *Xibei tongxun* 7.2 (1948), 18.

National school funding could only be sent as far as Xining, and the school therefore had travelers constantly on the road between Yushu and the provincial capital. Even basics like lumber for constructing the school buildings had to be imported at great cost and labor, since Yushu did not produce native forests for lumber resources. Finally, the county government withheld clearance for the school grounds, leading to an added layer of bureaucratic wrangling. Finally, many local families in Yushu were unwilling to send their students to secular schools, preferring instead that their children enter monastic schools for religious training.

As the national Yushu school recruited students in 1945 and 1946 their strategy mirrored that of Xining's early frontier schooling efforts in the 1910s and 1920s. Facing a dearth of willing students from Yushu, recruiters convinced local governments in Xikang province's Gande, Dege, and Changdu (T. Qamdo) to board students in Yushu and the school opened with twenty-nine students in 1945. This is the same strategy as Xining's early frontier education efforts: boarding schools in centralized location. Instead of Xining in 1920, the location for frontier schools in southwestern Qinghai and western Xikang would be Yushu's county seat, Jiegu (T. Gyegu/Jyegkundo). Despite the obstacles, National Yushu School grew by opening simple normal and adult classes in 1946. The school also planned to open medical clinics and experiment with a local newspaper in Yushu.

Thus, while Qinghai's public school system after 1945 saw large decreases across the board in funding, enrollment, and number of schools, the student enrollment rates in Tibetan regions more than doubled—from 1.1% of the estimated number of school-age

children in Qinghai's Tibetan regions in 1945 to 2.4% in 1949.¹¹² Although contemporary sources vary widely in their estimates of Mongol and Tibetan populations in Qinghai during the late 1940s, we can certainly say that an exceedingly small number of Mongol and Tibetan students were receiving education at the time.¹¹³

National frontier schools in Qinghai, however, remained among the least successful when compared to national frontier schools in other provinces. With 690 students in all the national frontier schools in Qinghai during 1947, only Chaha'er province had smaller enrollment. Qinghai likewise was at the bottom of the national barrel in the percentage of Tibetans having received schooling. Qinghai's 0.6% enrollment rate for Tibetans was the only province in China with less than 1% of its "frontier peoples" having received an education. Xikang was a close second, with only 1.5%. Nationalist frontier education reports from 1947, however, lamented the lack of satisfactory results.¹¹⁴ As dissatisfied as this frontier education report might have been, Nationalist frontier schools built upon Qinghai's frontier school infrastructure and made progress not only in spreading schools to heretofore unreached areas but also in new, more adaptive forms.¹¹⁵ [See Table 5.4: Frontier Peoples Populations, School-Age Children, and Students in Each Province, July 1947]

¹¹² Li Chengde (1963), 105. Accurate statistics in pastoral areas and during the Civil War (1946-1949) are difficult to come by. But the author of this oral history was head of Qinghai's Education Department during the period under question, and would therefore have access to the best information. Li Chengde's account is sufficiently persuasive to have made it into the *Complete History of Qinghai (Qinghai tongshi)*, Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 781.

¹¹³ Barnett estimates that there were 160,000 Tibetans in Qinghai in 1948, Barnett (1963), 233. Huang Fensheng (1945) places the number much higher—548,480 Tibetans and 87,370 Mongols in Qinghai in 1944, see pages 50-51. A very cursory calculation based on county populations in 1948 shows that there were over 468,838 Mongol and Tibetans in Qinghai. "Cong shuzi shang kan Qinghai" [Looking at Qinghai by numbers], *Xibei tongxun* 2.7(1948), 17.

¹¹⁴ Jiaoyubu bianjiang jiaoyusi (1947), 60-61.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

Conclusion: Adaptation and Centralization

Power politics and frontier schooling were intimately connected in early twentieth-century Qinghai. Academies were built on the ashes of the great northwestern Muslim rebellion in the 1860s. Cultural chauvinism at times tinted the rhetoric of the civilizing mission. Qinghai's first Mongol and Tibetan schools grew under the support of the frontier military officials in the first years of the Republic; the same military that projected its power onto the most influential monasteries and repeatedly attacked recalcitrant tribes. Many of the educators in Xining's earliest secondary schools were also government officials and representatives in the frontier crises of the 1910s and 1920s. But local people also began building schools tailored for the needs of their own portion of the Sino-Tibetan frontier, and a generation of students produced future teachers.

The contributions of educators and administrators in Xining during the 1910s and 1920s have largely ignored in recent studies of Sino-Tibetan relations during the Republic. Specifically, the scholarly contributions of the Xining Tibetan Language Research Society in the 1920s were important for teacher training and post-secondary academic development. Xining's frontier schools also trained the first wave of scholars and educators who would play key roles in provincial and central government frontier schooling efforts through the 1940s. Having become its own province in 1929, the Ma-family led Qinghai government in the early 1930s crafted different strategies to suit challenges specific to different regions in Qinghai. These included semi-autonomous organizations like the Mongol and Tibetan Cultural Progressive Council building primary schools in Tibetan areas as well as compulsory boarding schools in Xining. The goal of

both provincial and national frontier schools was training teachers and government workers able to transcend the linguistic and cultural divides inherent in this multi-ethnic frontier.

Despite the ultimately limited success of provincial efforts at schooling Mongols and Tibetans, the strategies devised in Xining during this time appear to have been vindicated by the Nationalist government's continuation (and improvement) of these cross-cultural schooling techniques. Under the backdrop of nearly continuous warfare on the fringes of the province, schools for Mongols and Tibetans increased, though slowly.

The Nationalist Party and central government in the late 1930s and early 1940s increasingly exerted their influence over Qinghai's frontier schools, and they would build upon the foundation set up by Xining's frontier schooling institutions. Central government frontier schools spread institutions of education higher into the Tibetan highlands than their provincial predecessors, and in so doing, adapted schools, teachers, and content to the lifestyles of local people. Even as the Nationalist government tightened ideological control over definitions of what constituted membership in the Chinese nationality (Ch. *Zhonghua minzu*),¹¹⁶ the important institutions of schooling across frontiers remained adaptive to local needs.

However couched in politics and power it may have been, early twentieth-century frontier schooling efforts in Qinghai laid the foundation for the top universities in the province today. Qinghai Normal University began in Xining's frontier school system of the early twentieth century. Qinghai Nationalities University continues the tradition of training scholars from and about local cultures. Sadly, it seems politics can still influence

¹¹⁶ Leibold, Chapter 4.

schools in the region. After unfortunately violent riots in Lhasa during the spring of 2008, these universities were tightly controlled and affected for months.

Table 5.1: Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Qinghai, late 19th - early 20th Century¹¹⁷

Region / County	Population 1934	Monasteries	Monks
Xining	163, 599	13	311
Ledu	68, 714	29	1, 025+
Huzhu	94, 701	10	660+
Minhe	54, 913	21	535
Guide	27, 680	45	594
Menyuan	22, 812	6	454+
Huangyuan	23, 715	6	222
Datong	83, 808	13	913
Xunhua	24, 749	19	1, 750
Hualong	23, 485	33	6, 385+
Gonghe	18, 025	11	387
Dulan	43, 200	13	2, 565
Yushu	46, 800	99*	12, 788+*
Total, QH	1, 054, 774**	321	25, 955

*Data are from 1919.

**The Education Department's total population includes 4, 456 monks, or the number the report claims for all monks in the province.

Table 5.2: Frontier Student Enrollment Quotas, 1934¹¹⁸

County or Tribe	Location	Student Quota
29 Mongol Banners	Dulan (N&W of QH Lake)	14
4 major tribes of Hainan	South of QH Lake	12
9 tribes of Guomi	Datong	9
Guide	Yellow River valley	8
25 tribes of Yushu	Yushu county	5
Tongren	Tongren county	5
Xunhua	Yellow River valley	4
4 minor tribes of Hainan	South of QH Lake	4
6 tribes of Golok	Upper bend of Yellow R.	3
A-li-ke 阿力克 tribe	Gonghe county	2
Total	N/A	66

¹¹⁷ Kang Furong, *Qinghai zhi* [gazetteer of Qinghai], (late 19th C.), 28-38. Zhou Xiwu, *Yushu diaocha ji* [Record of investigating Yushu], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1920), vol. 2, 2-11. Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu, ed. *Yushu jinshi ji, xiabian* [Recent events in Yushu, v. 2], (Xining: Qinghai nanbu bianqu jingbei silingbu, 1933), 50-56. Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 15-16.

¹¹⁸ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 10.

Table 5.3: Frontier Peoples Populations, School-Age Children, and Students in Each Province, July 1947.¹¹⁹

Province	Frontier Nationality	Frontier Population	School-Age Children	Students in School	Students: Children %
Rehe	Mongol	700, 000	105, 000	6, 754	6.1 %
Chahar	Mongol	110, 000	16, 500	523	3.1 %
Suiyuan	Mongol	224, 600	33, 600	1, 282	3.5 %
Ningxia	Mongol	80, 000	12, 000	2, 500	20.8 %
Gansu	Tibetan, Mongol	250, 000	37, 500	9, 319	24.7 %
Qinghai	Tibetan	690, 000	103, 500	680	0.6 %
Xinjiang	Uighur, Kazakh, Mongol, Manchu, other	4, 000, 000	600, 000	318, 316	50.3 %
Sichuan	Qiang Yi	364, 000	54, 600	2, 400	4.3 %
Xikang	Kang Yi	871, 109	130, 500	2, 313	1.5 %
Tibet	Tibetan	1, 050, 000	157, 500	18, 940	12 %
Yunnan	Luosu, Miao, Yi, other	800, 000	120, 000	6, 480	5.4 %
Guizhou	Miao, Yi	1, 430, 000	214, 500	55, 360	25.8 %
Guangxi	Miao, Yao	75, 000	11, 250	4, 650	41 %
Guangdong	Liao	75, 000	11, 000	3, 862	35 %
Taiwan	Gaoshan	134, 836	11, 460	9, 555	83.3 %
Total		10, 853, 945	1, 618, 910	442, 755	21.1 %

¹¹⁹ Jiaoyu bu bianjiang jiaoyu si (1947), 117.

Chapter Six

Schooling Modernism and Training Militarism: The Islam Progressive Council and Muslim Education in Qinghai, 1932-1949

Scene One: Ma Bufang sits in the office Qinghai Southern Border Region Garrison, flanked by his secretary, advisors, and four troops. Suddenly, the secretary hands him a telegraph communication. Tibetan armies have invaded and occupied Yushu! The curtain closes on Scene One.

Scene Two: Two wireless telegraphs connecting the Garrison's Xining office with the troop detachment in Yushu. Ma Bufang sends a series of orders to Commander Ma Biao in Yushu: get ready, dispatch troops, attack! The curtain falls on the second scene.

Scene Three: Commander Ma Biao receiving telegrams from Xining, surrounded by advisors, troops, and local leaders and nobles from the Yushu / Kham region. As Ma Bufang's orders are communicated to the assembled group, local Tibetan elites in attendance exhale with one voice. All sign a blood pact to resist. The curtain closes.

Scene Four: A few Tibetan soldiers bombard the western walls of Yushu. Ma Biao's orders to resist these attacks are the only reason the town does not fall! The curtain falls on Scene Four.

Scene Five: The mountains surrounding Jiegu, looking down on a battlefield. Ma Lu's troops are attempting to relieve the besieged provincial forces. They attack the Tibetan armies, and then fall back. Attack and retreat. The opposing forces alternate their

advances and retreats. [Director's Note: Use real firecrackers to simulate artillery fire. It will help keep the children's attention during the play.] The scene closes.

Scene Six: The battle has ended. Commander Ma Biao, flanked by his advisors and troops, welcomes local Tibetan leaders, who have penitently come to surrender. Merciful Ma Biao accepts their surrender and proclaims that the property and homes of locals will be protected. End Scene 6.

Scene Seven: Peace negotiations in Yushu. Commander Ma Biao and staff stand on one side; the defeated Tibetan army and its leadership are on the other. Via an interpreter, Ma Biao states that hostilities have ended. From today forward, Tibetan troops must leave Yushu and both sides will hold to their original territory. A treaty is signed, and the Tibetan troops all withdraw.

This script was intended to memorialize the 1932 Qinghai-Tibetan war in the Yushu borderland. It was part of Shao Hongsi's speech to the administration and teaching staff of all Islam Progressive Council schools in Qinghai province during the early months of 1936. Shao spoke on different pedagogical techniques that can be used in the Islam Progressive Council schools for Sino-Muslims, and this rough sketch of a play was used to illustrate the value of role-playing in the classroom. His speech laid out seven scenes to this play, complete with stage decorations, cast, and even talking points for student discussion. Shao argued that this play shows the importance of defending national territory, and should connect this territorial conflict over Yushu to the loss of Manchuria to Japanese forces. Those regions, in Shao's view, were one and the same—had Qinghai lost control of Yushu, it would be no different from surrendering the northeast to the

invading Japanese armies. And without Ma Bufang's leadership and Ma Biao's heroism, Yushu in 1932 would have gone the way of Manchuria in 1931.

This speech was reproduced in the first issue of the newly reorganized *Kunlun* magazine in April 1936, a publication run by and devoted to the Islam Progressive Council's network of semi-private schools for Sino-Muslims in Qinghai.¹ Shao's speech covered the cutting edge of teaching techniques, ostensibly shared to improve the quality of education in classrooms across the province. But it was also an exercise in shaping historical memory and asserting the righteousness of Ma Bufang's Qinghai provincial army as it fought to maintain national territorial integrity in the highlands of Yushu. It was a story of Qinghai's Sino-Muslim military defending the Chinese Republic, reinterpreted to school students on their province's leaders, military, and role in national defense. As such, it is a perfect illustration of many issues surrounding the Islam Progressive Council's school system as it developed in Qinghai province under the Republic.

The school play suggested by Shao Hongsi highlights many of the tensions within the Republican Chinese state's "unity of five nationalities" (*wuzu gonghe*). Although IPC schools were building a school system along the lines that central government and Party commentators advocated, IPC schools' connection to the semi-independent Ma family power base raised the hackles of many politically-motivated observers. Islam Progressive Council Schools in Qinghai were also targets of, and participants in, an ongoing debate over the status of the Hui people within the Chinese nation. Were the Hui an individual

¹ Shao Hongsi, "Qinghai sheng Huijiao cujinhui zhaoji suoshu gexian fenhui weiyuanzhang ji geji xuexiao xiaozhang jiaoyuan tanhuahui jingguo" [Notes of discussion conference for all county's branch committee chairman, all schools' principals and teachers in Qinghai province's Islam Progressive Council], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 11-12.

nationality or simply Muslim Chinese? Nationalist commentators in the 1930s appear to have felt threatened by these schools for Sino-Muslims. Critiques followed two main arguments: IPC schools were "too Islamic" or were overly militarized. IPC schools therefore privileged one ethnic group over others and seemed to sacrifice education to the needs of Ma Bufang's military.

In his magisterial work on the Qing conquest and incorporation of Central Eurasia, Peter Perdue points to the importance of the process of "fixing" a people both territorially and psychologically.² James Leibold uses the terms the "frontier question" and the "nationality question" to describe twentieth century incarnation of the same process highlighted by Perdue.³ Joseph Esherick, Hasan Kayali and Eric Van Young point out the essential roles that the military and schools played, among other institutions of modern nation-states, in constructing national consciousness and citizen subjectivity. In these scholars' view, "the schools and the army are the most important institutions to train the citizenry in the habitus of the new nation."⁴ This, the final chapter of the dissertation, is especially appropriate venue to discuss these issues, since the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council's Muslim schools were intimately connected to Ma Bufang's political power—power that grew out of the military under his command.

The Islam Progressive Council's schools had a two-pronged goal: schooling modernism and training militarism. This chapter seeks to situate Qinghai's IPC and its flagship institution, Muslim Middle School, a.k.a. Kunlun Middle, within the context of a nation-wide program of Muslim modernism. This reform movement was led by Sino-

² Perdue, (2005), 43-44.

³ Leibold (2007), 3.

⁴ Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young (2006), 27.

Muslim elites, and geared toward modernizing Islamic education so that the Hui people could claim their place as a part of the evolving and contested multi-ethnic Chinese nation. Muslim modernism, however, was not a monolithic movement. Qinghai's local adaptation of this nation-wide trend, unsurprisingly, reflected the priorities of its Sino-Muslim military leaders. Thus, Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council schools were deeply intertwined with the Ma Bufang's military rule; militarism was equally important as modernism in Qinghai's Muslim education. As such, these schools also serve as excellent illustrations of the two most salient aspects of Qinghai under the rule of the Ma family, and Ma Bufang, in particular.

Mosque Education and Muslim Modernism

Broadly speaking, two periods of reform shaped Islamic education in China. The first movement, mosque or scripture hall education, began in the late Ming dynasty and focused on adapting Islamic education to the cultural milieu of late imperial China. The second reform movement for Islamic education in China began in the early twentieth century, seeking to modernize Islam and nationalize Chinese Muslims. Both movements sought to adapt the teachings of Islam to their environment in China, while maintaining a changing sense of Muslim community.

Since the mid- to late-Ming era, many communities worried that their children were not receiving an adequate Muslim education. One prominent Hui educator, Hu Dengzhou from Shaanxi, led an education movement called "scripture hall education" (*jingtang jiaoyu*). Scripture hall education centered on Arabic and Persian training, orthodox in its lesson plans but less-focused on Arabic and Persian language study.

Instead, it appears to have innovated the Chinese-language phonetic pronunciation of Arabic. Thus, Lipman argues that the main education agenda among northwestern Sino-Muslims over the last two hundred years had been a syncretic blend of fairly orthodox Islamic religious education with translation and transliteration strategies.⁵ By 1601, this “mosque school” system “bore all the hallmarks of a full-blown and transregional education network.” In Ben-Dor Benite’s view, “the existence of an extensive, interregional, semi-formalized, and institutionally complex Chinese Muslim educational network demonstrates that Islam not only survived on Chinese soil but developed its own institutions, values, and ideals.”⁶

As the global system of nation-states solidified into its current form, Muslims from around the world began to accept and own their national identities—from Muslims in China, to Chinese Muslims, so to speak. And the reality of international relations, imperialism, and zero-sum competition between states tied the destinies of Muslims more closely to the nation-states in which they lived. Some Sino-Muslims therefore sought a greater level of participation with the Chinese state, hoping for a corresponding ability to influence the path that China would take. Yufeng Mao’s recent doctoral dissertation has focused on the ways in which early twentieth-century Sino-Muslim elites chose to cooperate with the Chinese state in a process of modernist nation building. She argues that the interests of the Chinese state and Sino-Muslim elites converged, allowing for unprecedented levels of cooperation between these two groups.⁷

⁵ Lipman (1997), 49-51.

⁶ Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 35, 37.

⁷ Yufeng Mao, *Sino-Muslims in Chinese Nation-Building, 1906-1956*, Ph.D dissertation, (George Washington University, 2007), 20-21.

As works by both Yufeng Mao and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite have shown, the Muslim modernist movement was not simply a positive collaboration between Sino-Muslim elites and the Chinese state; rather, it was fraught with tension and conflict from its inception. Feeling pressure from “the rising discourse in which a Chinese ‘nation,’ and Han ‘race,’ played a dominant role,”⁸ Sino-Muslim intellectuals and political elites actively sought to define their community within the Chinese nation, lest non-Muslim theorists of Chinese nationalism do it for them. Muslim modernists had to define what made their community deserving of recognition as a distinct yet integral part of the Chinese nation, often against an increasingly aggressive Han-centered racial nationalism. Thus the reform of Islam, largely through Muslim education, became the essential part of the (Muslim) Chinese nationalist project.⁹

Simultaneously seeking to improve and redefine the Chinese Muslim community and define its place in the evolving Chinese nation, Sino-Muslim modernists generally came from one of two backgrounds: reform-minded religious leaders and Sino-Muslim intellectuals, officials, or military officers. Their reform activities, broadly speaking, came in two waves. The first occurred roughly from 1906-1917 and the second built on these foundations during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰ The Ma family rulers of Qinghai, namely Ma Qi and Ma Bufang, led the modernist reform movement within their territory. Ma Qi first allied his family with a formerly fundamentalist Sino-Muslim collective, guided its transition to a pro-Chinese, acculturationist view. He also opened the first

⁸ Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, “From ‘Literati’ to ‘Ulama’: The Origins of Chinese Muslim Nationalist Historiography,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 9 (2004), 89.

⁹ Benite (2004), 90-92, 98.

¹⁰ Yufeng Mao, 43-44, 104.

modernist Muslim education institutions in the region. The result was a more stable Sino-Muslim unity within the northwest, and stronger base for his family's political power.

Ma Qi's Political Centralization

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, two kinds of schools taught northwestern Hui children—religious education in mosques and government-sponsored community schools. Mosque schools were products of Sino-Muslim intellectual engagement with Chinese scholarly traditions, and thus represented Muslim adaptation to the dominant elite culture in late imperial China. Built upon the ashes of successive Muslim uprisings along the northwestern frontier of the Qing Dynasty, community schools were seen as an effective tool for civilizing, and thereby pacifying, a rebellious frontier population.

Mosques dotted the landscape in northeastern Qinghai in the early twentieth century. There were over 372 mosques in Qinghai recorded in Kang Furong's *Qinghai Gazetteer*. Hualong county had the most with 85 mosques. Xunhua and Datong counties came in second and third, with 63 and 62, respectively. Xining and Minhe were close behind, with 58 mosques each. Menyuan (23), Huzhu (9), and Huangyuan (1) counties had the fewest mosques.¹¹ [See Table 6.1: Mosques in Qinghai, late 19th-early 20th centuries] This number would rise to over 650 by 1949.¹² County gazetteers also offer information on mosques, but generally do not mention schools inside those religious

¹¹ Kang Furong, *Qinghai zhi* [Qinghai gazetteer], (no date, Qing Dynasty), Xuxiu siku quanshu bianmu weiyuanhui, ed. *Xuxiu siku quanshu* v. 649 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1995), 27-28. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 800.

¹² Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 838.

institutions.¹³ According to the best historians in today's Qinghai, Xining's Dongguan Mosque became one of the most respected institutes of Islamic education in northwest China.¹⁴ Dongguan mosque theological school reportedly had 120 religious students in 1947. In the same year, a Christian missionary writing in the English-language journal *Friends of Moslems* noted how the leadership of Xining's Dongguan Mosque controlled the appointment of Islamic religious leaders throughout Qinghai. "The theological college head appoints the ahung to each of the three or four hundred mosques in the province, so that the power of the Moslem [sic] clergy is centralized in Sining [sic]."¹⁵

The Muslim community of northwest China was divided into a patchwork of competing religious solidarities, to borrow Lipman's term.¹⁶ These groups reflected the centuries of exchanging religious and cultural ideas about Islam and new ways of organizing the community of the faithful. Although most Chinese sources rely on the simplistic and often prejudiced terminology of "old teachings" and "new teachings," historians in both China and abroad have done the work of clarifying these misleading appellations. Northwestern Chinese Muslims in the early twentieth century were divided among five major Islamic religious orders, as well as several Sufi orders, or "menhuan," as they were commonly described in Chinese. The Qadim (Ch. Gedimu, often known as the "old teachings"/ *laojiao*) was the earliest arrival in northwestern China. As various

¹³ Yao Jun's Guide gazetteer has the only reference to a mosque school that I have found, only telling the reader about the location of a new primary school, "near the mosque school." Yao Jun (1930), 737. *Qinghai sheng Bayan xian fengtu diaocha gaikuang* [Investigation of local customs and conditions in Qinghai province's Bayan county], (1930), 4a. *Gonghe xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of investigating local customs and conditions in Gonghe county], (1932), 637-638. *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* [Record of investigating Xining county's local customs], (1932), 276.

¹⁴ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 800. Xu Xianlong (2000), 138-141.

¹⁵ Leonard A. Street, "Where are the Chinese Moslems? Tsinghai," *Friends of Moslems* 21.3 (July 1947), 27.

¹⁶ Lipman (1997), xxvii.

forms of Sufi orders came into the region, Qadim solidarities frequently lost members to the new groups. These included Jahriya (Ch. *Zheherenye*), founded by Ma Mingxin (1719-1781) in the eighteenth century; the Khufiyyah (Ch. *Hufeiye*), sometimes called Huasi, or Flower Temple in Chinese; the Qadiriyyah (Ch. *Xiadelinye*); and the Ikhwan (Ch. *Yihewani*) order.¹⁷ The Xidaotang collective (often called “Chinese studies sect,” or *Hanxue pai*) built a unique blend of economic collectivism, corporate businesses, and blend of secular and religious education in southern Gansu. Founded by Ma Qixi (1857-1914), Lipman has described the Xidaotang as a “Sino-Islamic collectivist movement.”¹⁸

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, these institutions, values, and ideals again became the source of inter-solidarity conflict. The most powerful Sino-Muslim military leader at the end of the Qing, Ma Anliang, moved against the fundamentalist Ikhwan and its leader, Ma Wanfu (1853-1934), in the last decade of the nineteenth century, leading to an explosion of violence among Islamic orders in 1895.¹⁹ But the Ikhwan was about to make a striking alteration in its views on interacting with China. “Within one generation of its fundamentalist, antiacculturationist founder, the movement had become an ally of Chinese nationalism, a tool for an acculturating Muslim elite, and an important bridge between Muslim communities and the burgeoning Chinese nation-state.”²⁰

The Ma family of Qinghai threw its support behind the Ikhwan solidarity, and used it to advance their power and prestige. Soon after the founding of the Republic in

¹⁷ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 836-837. Mi Shoujiang and You Jia, *Islam in China*. Min Chang, trans. (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004), 66. Lipman (1997).

¹⁸ Lipman (1997), 186-199.

¹⁹ Jonathan N. Lipman (1984), 298-300

²⁰ Lipman (1997), 200-211. Quote from 205.

1912, Ma Qi brought Ma Wanfu to Xining, where he would remain for the rest of his life. Ma Qi promoted Ikhvani teachings as his own, thereby decreasing the power of the Sufi orders in his territory. But Ma Qi also pushed Ma Wanfu and the Ikhwan to increase its engagement with the Chinese political scene. As Lipman says, “Ma Qi began the process that was to transform the Ikhwan from radical fundamentalist group to a much less divisive, much more China-centered reformist movement.” Ma Qi’s patronage of the Ikhwan was so successful that Ma Fuxiang, father of Ma Hongkui in Ningxia, also encouraged the spread of Ikhvani teachings in his territory.²¹

Ma Qi’s patronage of the Ikhwan was a calculated political decision, aimed at uniting Sino-Muslims, long torn by sectarian divisions, as well as strengthening his own influence. Ma Qi was busy building his personal political and military influence in Xining at the time, and a school for Muslim children was part of his program. This decision would lay the religious foundation for Qinghai’s Islam Progressive Council and the secular, Chinese-influenced education in IPC schools. After 1907, the Xining Dongguan Muslim community school changed into the Xining High Primary School (*xuetang*). Ma Qi would take control of this school in 1917, changing its name to the Tongren High Primary School. The Tongren School once again focused its mission on education the region’s Muslim students. This new-style Muslim education met with strong resistance from parents and leaders among the Muslim community in Xining.

²¹ Lipman (1997), 207-208.

They apparently felt that sending Muslim children to these schools was tantamount to training their children to “follow the teachings of the Han” (*Hanjiao*).²²

Much like the relationship between Confucian academies and twentieth century public schools, or like monastic education and modern “frontier” schools, Ma Qi’s and Ma Bufang’s Muslim modernist schools offered a much more secular education than their predecessors. But like all schools in a modernizing nation-state, they were also vehicles for political control; in the case of Qinghai’s modern schools for Muslims, the Ma family elites sought to reign in the power of the Islamic religious collectives and their clergy. At times, the IPC’s Muslim schools and the educators that ran them were highly critical of the talented “wasted” in Islamic education. An article in *Tujue*, a Sino-Muslim periodical formed among visiting Qinghai students in Nanjing, criticized the restrictive nature of Islamic mosque education, argued for spreading Islamic education outside of mosques, and sought to insert the government into this process.²³ While describing the fault lines among religious solidarities among Sino-Muslims in 1938, Edgar Snow noted the political goals inherent in Qinghai’s Muslim modernist movement. He observed that the “Old” and “New” solidarities allied themselves against what he called the “modern sect” of Ma family militarists. Although Ma militarists called for Sino-Muslims to “accept

²² Ha San, “Ba nian lai zhi Qinghai Huiyu jiaoyu” [The last eight years of Qinghai’s Hui education], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 4-5. Chen Bingyuan, “Qinghai zhi jiaoyu zhuangkuang” [Qinghai’s education situation], *Xin Xibei* (1939), 91-92. Li Dexian, “Jiefang qian Qinghai zhongdeng xuexiao jiaoyu de gaikuang” [Overall situation of pre-liberation Qinghai’s middle school education], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 66. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 800.

²³ “Jiaoyu shang de gongqiu shiyang wenti” [Education problems that we all must strive together to match] *Kunlun* 1.2 (May 1936), 3. The perception of Muslim clergy “ignoring” modern education can also be found in periodicals unrelated to the Muslim modernist movement. Yuan Ren’s article, “Qinghai gaikuang” *Meng Zang yuebao* 11.1 (March 1940), 43, cited by Hunsberger, 162 is another example.

science” and give up some religious rituals, Snow felt that their real goal was to destroy the power of the Muslim clergy in the region.²⁴

Ma Bufang’s centralizing rule was at times in conflict with mosque schools and the religious leaders that ran them. His government mandated an increased amount of Chinese language education in both IPC Muslim schools and Islamic mosque schools. By the 1940s, Ma Bufang also ordered restrictions on the number of mullahs in the province, a move that garnered fierce accusations of being anti-Islam.²⁵ Finally, when writing a proudly defensive assessment of his rule over Qinghai in 1948, Ma expressed his frustration at the amount of talent “wasted” in religious studies. Notably, he directed his comments towards both Buddhist and Muslim clergy.²⁶

Islam Progressive Council Sino-Muslim schools were intimately connected to the political rulers in Qinghai, and grew out of the sectarian strife that characterized much of Chinese Muslim history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but were also examples of Sino-Muslims taking control of their own children’s schooling and creating new forms of modern, Muslim education. In this sense, Qinghai’s Muslim schools were highly adaptive to the socio-historical setting in early twentieth century China, and thus could reflect a more “successful” negotiation of Muslim status in the Republic.²⁷

²⁴ Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, (New York: Random House, 1938), 314.

²⁵ Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, ed. *Qinghai sheng zhengfu gongzuo baogao* [work report of the Qinghai provincial government], (Xining: Qinghai sheng zhengfu mishuchu, June 1938), 11. Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunliansuo, ed. *Kangzhan jianguo shiqi zhong zhi Qinghai jiaoyu* [Qinghai’s education during the period of the war of resistance and building the country], (Xining: Qinghai sheng difang xingzheng ganbu xunliansuo, 1940), 17. *Konggao Qinghai sheng zhengfu zhuxi Ma Bufang* [accusing Qinghai provincial government chairman Ma Bufang], (1946), 26.

²⁶ Ma Bufang, “Jianshe zhong zhi Qinghai” [Qinghai in development], *Xibei tongxun* 2.7 (1948), 3.

²⁷ Dru C. Gladney, “Islam in China: State Policing and Identity Politics,” Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank, eds., *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 152.

Committees and Schools: Qinghai's Institutions of Muslim Modernism

One aspect of Republican Chinese politics was the usage of popular organizations as representations of civil society. We can see the influence of such organizations in railway protection movements and provincial assemblies before the 1911 revolution. Upon the founding of the republic in 1912, sovereignty was officially transferred from the emperor to “the people;” popular civil organizations thus became a key institutional vehicle for state-society interactions. As Henrietta Harrison has shown, successive Republican governments also found that using these organizations in political rituals made a discursive space for “the people’s” participation in the body politic.²⁸ Chinese Muslims also actively built such organizations, beginning with the Islamic Educational Association of [Chinese Foreign Students] in Tokyo, founded in 1908.²⁹ Muslims in China also started their own organization as soon as the republic was formed--the Chinese Islamic Progressive Association, founded in 1912. This organization’s charter marked it as a modernizing, nation-building project.³⁰ The local forms of such organizations, of which the Islam Progressive Council is a member, became a key tool of political legitimation for the northwest Ma family. It would be through the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council that Ma Qi and Ma Bufang would achieve their two-pronged strategy of reducing the influence of the clergy and securing the foundation of their family’s power.

²⁸ Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118.

²⁹ Benite (2004), 90.

³⁰ Yufeng Mao, 39, 58-60.

Before the ashes of the 1911 Revolution had settled, the new Republican government of Gansu province moved quickly to voice its political support for the region's Muslim inhabitants. One of Gansu's first government actions was professing its support for Islam and its adherents in the region.³¹ In 1912 the Gansu provincial government opened the first organization dedicated to supporting Sino-Muslims in the northwest, the Lanzhou Islam Progressive Council (*Lanzhou Huijiao cujinhui*).³²

Following trends in Beijing and Lanzhou, Ma Qi also founded his own organization for Muslim education in 1922, the Ninghai Islam Progressive Council. This organization was the precursor of the Qinghai IPC, and was dedicated to bringing modern educational techniques and schools to the Muslim inhabitants under Xining's jurisdiction. In 1924 Gansu's provincial government changed the organization's name to Ninghai Muslim Education Progressive Council (*Ninghai Huimin jiaoyu cujinhui*). This organization's became the target of political competition between the Ma family militarists in Xining and representatives of Feng Yuxiang's National People's Army in 1929. Facing stout Sino-Muslims resistance to Feng Yuxiang's dominance, Feng's appointee Sun Lianzhong left his post when Feng required military support in his insurrection against Chiang Kai-shek around 1930. Ma Bufang would again bring the IPC under Ma family control when he named himself head of the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council in 1931.³³

³¹ "Shengyihui tiyi weichi Huizu zongjiao" [Provincial assembly proposal to support the religion of the Hui people], *Zhenbian* juan 27 (1912), 13-14, in La Bingde and Ma Xiaoqin, eds. *Qinghai Huizu shiliao ji* [collection of historical sources on Qinghai's Hui people], (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 2002), 352-354.

³² La and Ma (2002), 356.

³³ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 800-802.

The provincial level IPC in Xining was the province's preeminent organization devoted to building and managing Muslim schools. IPC sub-committee's also formed in the counties and local regions throughout Qinghai.³⁴ In this respect, the IPC was similar to the provincial Education Department; county and local sub-committees were the IPC's equivalent to county education bureaus. The IPC had branch committees in Ledu, Huzhu, Minhe, Guide, Menyuan, Huangyuan, Datong, Xunhua, and Hualong counties in 1932. Since Xining county was the most populous region in Qinghai at the time, branch committees of the IPC also developed in regions under Xining's authority. These included Shangwuzhuang and Lusha'er, villages to the northwest and southwest of Xining, respectively.³⁵ Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council also held its own education conference in 1936. This event brought together all branch committee leaders, principals from every IPC school, and some teachers for meetings and speeches.³⁶

Qinghai enjoyed impressive growth of Muslim schools in the half-decade after Ma Bufang took control of the IPC in 1932. From 56 Muslim schools in 1931, IPC school infrastructure grew to include over ninety schools in 1934—78 low primary schools and 13 high primary schools. The number of IPC Muslim schools would hold in the low nineties through 1936, but grew to just under one hundred Muslim schools by the

³⁴ "Huijiao cujinhui zuzhi tiaolie" [Organizational by-laws of the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 1-2.

³⁵ "Qinghai zhi Huimin jiaoyu xianzhuang" [Present situation of Qinghai's Sino-Muslim education], *Xin Gansu* 1.1 (1932) in Lai and Ma (2002), 544-546. Ha San (1936),

³⁶ [1936 Qinghai Islam Progressive Council education conference], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 1-16.

end of the 1930s. From just over 3700 students in Muslim primary schools in 1932, the number of Muslim primary school students would grow to nearly six thousand by 1939.³⁷

IPC schools were most densely concentrated in heavily Muslim regions in the province. A quick glance at enrollment statistics from the early to mid-1930s can illustrate this point. Xunhua and Hualong counties with their high percentage of Hui and Salars had the most students—700 to 800 in each county. The seven original agricultural counties also had large Hui schools as well. Gonghe and Tongren counties, southwest of Xining and much more Tibetan and pastoral regions, had the smallest number of Hui schools and students.³⁸ IPC schools thus mirrored the geographic spread of public schools into this frontier province.

The crown jewel of Qinghai's IPC school system was IPC Muslim Middle School, which opened in 1932 and quickly grew to be one of the best secondary schools in northwest China. In 1933-1934, Muslim Middle School had 70 students and 20 teachers. Its operating budget was 15,326 *yuan* for that year. Of these teachers, four were university graduates, 8 were normal school graduates, four were middle school graduates, and 4 had other qualifications.³⁹ Muslim Middle added high school class after 1935.⁴⁰ Although Hui Middle School's budget apparently dropped to 11,160 *yuan* in 1935,⁴¹ it

³⁷ "Qinghai Hui min jiaoyu xianzhuang" [Current situation of Qinghai's Hui education], *Xin Gansu* 1.1 (1932), in Lai and Ma (2002), 544-546. Guoli Jinan xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan, (1936), 8. Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 17-19. Wang Keming (1936), 261. Liu Manqing (1937), 93-94. Chen Bingyuan (1939), 90-93. Li Chengdao (1988), 131. Lai and Ma (2002), 542.

³⁸ Liu Manqing (1937), 93-94.

³⁹ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 13-14. Liu Manqing, *Bianjiang jiaoyu* [Frontier education], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 88. It is obvious from comparing sources that Fan Changjiang (1936), the National Jinan University's Northwest Education Investigation Team (1936), and Liu Manqing (1937) all used the 1934 Qinghai Education Department's report when researching their own studies of education.

⁴⁰ Li Dexian (1981), 75.

⁴¹ Shen Huanzhang (1935), 26.

remained much higher funded than the standard provincial schools. By 1941 it grew to 487 students, 47 teachers, and annual budget of 70,246 *yuan*.⁴²

Based on the report by Qinghai's Education Department in 1934, primary school students at Hui schools received four times the amount of funding per student than the standard provincial schools. Students in Hui primary schools (both low-level and full primary schools) received 16.68 *yuan* per student. Standard primary schools could only allocate 4.01 *yuan* per student.⁴³ Hui Middle School did receive funding from the provincial Education Department at least in the mid-1930s.⁴⁴ A report on education in the province noted that the IPC and provincial Education Department each provided half of the 90,000 *yuan* budget for Hui schools.⁴⁵

Despite the IPC's connection to the military and fiscal power of the Ma family rulers of Qinghai, founders of Muslim primary schools in counties throughout Qinghai province faced the same obstacles building schools as the provincial government's public schools.⁴⁶ One reporter investigated all county- or sub-county IPC branch committees and their schools in 1935-1936 found a mixture of successful and failing schools at the time. After describing a litany of complaints in several many of the Muslim primary schools in

⁴² Han Qingtao, "Xibei jiaoyu niaokan" [Birds eye view of northwestern education], *Xibei lunheng* 9.10 (1941).

⁴³ Total students in standard primary schools=25,854. Total budget for standard primary schools=103,668 *yuan*. Total students in I.A.C.-run primary schools = 5267 students. Total budget for I.A.C.-run primary schools = 87,830 *yuan*. Data drawn from "Qinghai sheng ge xian xiaoxuexiao jiaoyu xianzhuang biao" [chart on current situation of primary school education in each of Qinghai province's counties] and "Qinghai sheng Huizu xiaoxue jiaoyu xianzhuang biao" [Chart on current situation of Hui people's primary education in Qinghai province], *Qinghai jiaoyu gaikuang* (1934), 14-15, 20.

⁴⁴ Qinghai sheng jiaoyuting (1934), 13-14. Shen Huanzhang (1935), 26. Liu Manqing, (1937), 88.

⁴⁵ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaochatuan (1936), 5.

⁴⁶ For a localized case study of one county's efforts building IPC schools, see Zhang Siyong, "Xunhua ba gong jiaoyu zhi huigu yu zhanwang" [Retrospects and prospects of education in Xunhua's Bagong], *Kunlun* 1.2 (May 1936), 7-10.

Lusha'er, he scolded the branch committee, promptly fired the committee chair, and then appointed one of Ma Bufang's military advisors as the new school principal.⁴⁷ In this instance, the IPC's direct connection to Ma Bufang and his military apparatus allowed for a greater level of oversight and quick response to replace the ineffective principal.

As Ma Bufang centralized the province's political, financial, and military power in 1936, the IPC also worked to rationalize and further control funding for its schools. Up to 1936, IPC school funds came from different sources, including interest, agricultural output from school-owned fields, skin and fur trade income, and local taxes.⁴⁸ The February 1936 meeting of IPC branch committees and school administrators focused on fully accounting for each school's funding, supplies, infrastructure, and pedagogy. Each branch committee representative or school administrator had to fill out a form listing all income and expenditures, school supplies, textbooks, teachers, students, physical education and community service. The IPC would also take extra school supplies and redistribute them schools in need.⁴⁹

Like all of Qinghai's administrative endeavors during the Republic, Muslim education would suffer disruptions and funding deprivation during the almost continuous war of the last two decades of Nationalist rule. Ma Bufang and his network of government and private businesses allowed the IPC schools to operate at a much higher level than public-funded, government endeavors.⁵⁰ There is no denying the distinct advantage that Ma Bufang's personal patronage afforded the IPC and its schools.

⁴⁷ Ha San (1936), 7-8.

⁴⁸ "Ma Jiaoyuzhang goushu kaihui de yiyi ji fangzhen" [Education director Ma's description of the meeting's meaning and strategies], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 4.

⁴⁹ "Xuwen shixiang zhuangkuang biao" [Chart on topics of inquiry], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 5.

⁵⁰ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 783.

Qinghai Islam Progressive Council Schools: Nepotism or Elite Patronage?

The harshest critic of Ma Bufang's rule in Qinghai during the 1930s summarized the state of Qinghai's school system, saying, "Qinghai's education system can be divided between the government-run schools and their counterparts administered by the Islam Progressive Council. Government schools lack both funding and talent. There is nothing positive to say about them. There are several schools quite similar to broken-down hostels...As for the Islam Progressive Council schools...since Ma Bufang is head of the IPC, all of the schools' budgets, buildings, and affairs come directly out of his pocket."⁵¹ But the question remains whether Qinghai's Muslim modernist education movement is best understood as a vehicle for strengthening a warlord's power or as a local manifestation of an elite-sponsored education reform movement?

Indeed, Ma Bufang named himself head of the Qinghai IPC, and, after 1937, principal of IPC Middle School.⁵² His business network also contributed financially to the IPC's educational mission. After 1936, some of Qinghai's only business or industrial enterprises contributed funds to Muslim Middle Schools' budget. These included Qinghai Publishing House, Datong Coal Mine, and Huangzhong Enterprises, all of which were connected to Ma Bufang or his family network.⁵³ Ma Bufang's political and financial power, in fact, backed the Islam Progressive Council, but he increasingly intermixed

⁵¹ Chang Jiang (Fan Xitian), *Zhongguo de xibei jiao* [China's northwest corner], (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1936), 153.

⁵² Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 782.

⁵³ Ma Wushi, Ma Chengfa, and Ding Huangren, "Jiefang qian de Kunlun zhongxue" [Kunlun middle school before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 13 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), 120. Qinghai sheng gongshanglian, "Ma Bufang guanliao ziben de qiye jigou" [The enterprise structure of Ma Bufang's government/official capitalism], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1963), 63-74. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 803.

government and private funds during his time in power. Ma Bufang's personal fortune supported many educational and extracurricular activities during the fiscal deprivations brought about by all-out war with Japan after 1937. He personally funded summer military training for students, bought all of the province's Scout uniforms from Tianjin, and supplied much of Muslim Middle School's budget.⁵⁴ Likewise, during the 1940s Ma Bufang repeatedly offered to personally pay for any shortfalls in education expenses for all of Qinghai's schools, and argued for redistributing funding and property between wealthy and poor schools.⁵⁵

Chengda Teachers' College, the preeminent institution of higher education in the Muslim modernist movement, was also dependent upon patronage from Sino-Muslim elites. Like the Qinghai IPC's middle school in the northwest, Chengda was the institutional banner bearer for the Muslim modernist movement nation-wide. But even this important institution fell on hard financial times in the early 1930s; it was only through the largesse of a new sponsor that Chengda could continue to operate. This new patron was none other than Ma Fuxiang—Sino-Muslim militarist cum Nationalist political figure. Continued fiscal problems after Ma Fuxiang's death would necessitate the central government taking over Chengda in 1941.⁵⁶

As the Chinese state grew more powerful, it increasingly asserted its control over social and civic institutions. This pattern accelerated and intensified during the war

⁵⁴ Mu Jianye, "Minzu jianshe zhong de jiaoyu dongxiang [Educational trends during the process of ethnic construction] *Tujue* 3.7 (July 1936), 19. Ma Xiaoshi, "Ma Xiaoshi xiansheng duiyu Qinghai tongzijun di yi ci jianyue de jiangyan" [Mr. Ma Xiaoshi's speech at the first Qinghai Scout review], *Kunlun* 1.2 (May 1936), 25. Ma Xiaoshi, "Suowang yu gengkuan fazhan bianjiang jiaoyu zhi jihuazhe" [Looking at those planning to use indemnity funds to develop frontier education], *Tujue* 3: 4-5 (May 1936), 9-11.

⁵⁵ Ma Bufang (1944), 7-11, 15-16.

⁵⁶ Yufeng Mao, 83, 86, 103-104.

against Japan. Chapter Five demonstrated how the Nationalists took over institutions of frontier education. Recent historical works have also demonstrated how the Nationalist government centralized its control over frontier provinces, as well as took a more strident stance on enforcing ideological unity, especially in relation to minority groups. Yufeng Mao, thus describes how “the Chinese Islamic modernist program that had started at the initiative of Muslim civil society with the tacit support of the state ended as a state-sponsored program serving state interests.”⁵⁷ Financial weakness was the key method for the central government to take control over Chengda Teachers’ College. Perhaps, then, Ma Bufang’s financial support of the Qinghai IPC and its flagship school was essential in maintaining its semi-independence from central state control.

Although Yufeng Mao focuses her research on the national Chinese Islamic Progressive Association, Chengda Teachers’ College, and its patron Ma Fuxiang, she acknowledges the similarities between Muslim modernizers and Qinghai’s rulers Ma Qi and Ma Bufang. “Other than Ma Fuxiang, warlords Ma Qi and Ma Bufang in Qinghai also promoted modern education through establishing schools such as the Ninghai Islamic School, where religious texts were taught in addition to regular curriculum, and Friday was the day off in the week. While these Muslim warlords clearly engaged in these projects to strengthen their own base of influence, it also seems that they were genuine believers of the necessity of modernizing Muslim communities and integrating the Muslim population into the Chinese nation.”⁵⁸ Yufeng Mao’s statement is correct, but, I think, also reveals the continued influence of anti-warlord nationalist

⁵⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 77.

historiography. Merrill Ruth Hunsberger's dissertation on Ma Bufang is prime example of this viewpoint when he argues "Ma established Muslim schools to serve his own interests."⁵⁹ Similar to scholarship produced during the heyday of "warlord" studies, here Mao acknowledges Ma family contributions, but tempers that by referring to personal motivations of the warlord. While it is certainly true that Ma Qi and Ma Bufang utilized Sino-Muslim modernism to increase their personal power, I would argue that all education activities in twentieth century China were geared towards building a strong nation and powerful state.

Some contemporary observers and historians alike found a nepotistic motivation behind the founding of Muslim Middle School, and historians have followed this interpretation. It should be no surprise that the growth of the IPC's Muslim Middle School coincided with the educational progress of Ma Bufang's son, Ma Jiyuan.⁶⁰ Chen Bangchan relayed a scathing oral history of his time growing up with Ma Jiyuan. His depiction is of a spoiled, fear-inspiring prince coasting through a school system only built (and rigged) for the appearance of his education.⁶¹ On the other hand, one noted historian of the period praised Ma Jiyuan as the first member of his family to receive a modern education. This historian referred to Ma Jiyuan's fashion, desire to travel to the West, love of dancing, and enjoyment of Hollywood movies as evidence of his cosmopolitan transformation.⁶² More than just personal hobbies and a sense of fashion, "the new costume, manners and customs all played a part in presenting oneself as a modern

⁵⁹ Hunsberger, 162.

⁶⁰ Xu (2000), 142. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 802.

⁶¹ Chen Bangchan, "Wo suo zhidao de Ma Jiyuan" [The Ma Jiyuan that I know], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 1, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1963), 63-68.

⁶² Xu (2000), 143-146.

person...Like the classics, the symbols of modernity were taught in schools.”⁶³ Ma Jiyuan’s dashing persona and military accomplishments certain seemed to impress a *New York Times* reporter in the 1940s. He called the IPC Muslim School graduate, “young and handsome General Ma Chi-yuan, who distinguished himself last April in a battle with the Communists in East Kansu.”⁶⁴ Perhaps the IPC’s modern schooling for Muslims was simply an effective vehicle for nepotism. But the Muslim modernization and integration movement was itself a product of collaboration between elite Sino-Muslims and the Chinese state. And, as Ma Jiyuan’s education and later career illustrate, the effects of Muslim modernist education he received, whatever the motivation of the leaders who built it, were deep and long lasting.

Schooling Modernism: New Behaviors & Active Citizenship in IPC Schools

“Men of talent for the twentieth century are not the men of talented [that were needed] for the eighteenth century. Citizens needed by a republic are not the subjects needed in an autocratic county.” This is how a 1936 editorial in *Kunlun* magazine described different forms of subjectivity under autocratic and republican political systems. The article continued to discuss the real-world challenges in building a modern education system for Sino-Muslims, but the goal of education was clear—to create citizens.⁶⁵ The Islam Progressive Council’s by-laws proclaimed the organization’s

⁶³ Henrietta Harrison (2000), 61.

⁶⁴ “Moslem General is Hero in China,” *The New York Times* (27 May 1948), 14. Henry R. Liberman, “Enlightened Rule Bolsters Tsinghai,” *The New York Times* (15 September 1948), 4.

⁶⁵ “Jiaoyu shang de gongqiu shiying wenti” [Educational problems (we must) work together to overcome], *Kunlun* 1.2 (May 1936), 4-5.

adherence to an education system based on the Three Principles of the People.⁶⁶ IPC schools aimed for practical education that would produce patriotic, productive citizens. One article on practical problems that education must overcome argued that educational success was directly connected to how relevant schooling was to daily life.⁶⁷ How were Qinghai's Muslim schools teaching students to be citizens of a republic? What were students' lives like in these schools? In short, the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council Muslim schools created a school environment very similar to Chinese public schools across the country. Fortunately, one student at the IPC Muslim Middle School in the mid-1930s wrote an article in the same magazine describing his life in school. Likewise, the IPC's Kunlun Middle School Teacher Handbook from 1946 gives a comprehensive picture of how this educational institution operated.

Mu Zengxian was a low middle schools student in 1936 and his essay opens a window into student life at Qinghai's Muslim Middle School. This student was impressed with the facilities at the schools, even stating that the quality of life he enjoyed in the dormitory was better than he could have experienced at home. Student lives there, however, were extremely regimented. Bells rang throughout the campus, announcing when to wake up, attend classes, and all other daily activities. Most activities were group-oriented, included sports, student organizations, and communal meals.⁶⁸ Kunlun Middle School's 1946 teacher handbook shows that this educational institution was highly organized, disciplined, and professional. Student and teacher lives were structured down

⁶⁶ "Qinghai Huijiao cujinhui jianzhang" [By-laws of the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), appendix p. 1.

⁶⁷ "Jiaoyu shang de gongqiu shiying wenti" [Educational problems (we must) work together to overcome], *Kunlun* 1.2 (May 1936), 4.

⁶⁸ Mu Zengxian, "Qinghai Huizhong xuexiao de xuesheng shenghuo" [Student life at Qinghai Hui middle school], *Kunlun* 1.3 (June 1936), 17-19.

to the hour on a daily and semester basis. Students awoke at 4:30 in the morning and had to tidy their living quarters before a roll call at 5. After all names were checked, students then had one hour of study time on their own, followed by one and a half hours of calisthenics. Breakfast was served from 7:30 until 8:30 when morning classes started. Students and teachers then had four class periods, lasting one hour each from 8:30 until 12:30 PM. Lunch break lasted until 2 in the afternoon, after which two more class periods preceded school being let out at 4. Dinner lasted from 4:30 until 6 in the evening, but students were also allowed to participate in extracurricular activities during the same time. Evening study hall lasted from 6 until 8:30 PM, then another roll call at quarter to nine. The lights were turned off at 9 pm. The whole process would begin again the next morning.⁶⁹

Kunlun's teachers and administrators appear to have taken student academic performance very seriously. According to Mu Zengxian, the only time students were supposed to work on their own was during the mandatory study period in the evening, and teachers frequently checked on their focus and progress.⁷⁰ In 1946, teachers had to do daily inspections of student academic performance, including their homework, diary, penmanship, math workbook, English notebook, and written and oral recitations of memorized text. Students were awarded prizes or punished based on teacher evaluations

⁶⁹ Kunlun zhongxue, ed. "Qinghai Huijiao jiaoyu cujinhui li Kunlun zhongxue zuoxi shijianbiao" [Qinghai Islam Education Progressive Council Kunlun Middle School Work and Rest Schedule], *Jiaozhiyuan shouce* [Handbook for teaching staff], (Xining: Qinghai Huijiao cujinhui, 1946). Hereafter, KLZXJZYSC.

⁷⁰ Mu (1936), 17-19.

of the above-mentioned categories. Teachers were to compile student grades on a weekly basis and pass them on to teaching advisors and the school principal.⁷¹

Like many at modern Chinese schools, Kunlun middle school students would be taught new behaviors along with new information. Many documents in the 1946 teacher handbook focused on inspecting and enforcing proper student behavior while at school. Behavioral regulations taught proper decorum in a variety of school settings, including in the classroom, kitchen, cafeteria, and even the bathroom.⁷² The watchful eyes of teachers, and the bevy of evaluation forms they had to fill out, enforced these rules of behavior, or else. Unexcused absences and misbehavior would garner a warning, and then further administrative punishment, including informing the parents of students with unexcused absences.⁷³ The school's official policy was to "use strict student management to raise student interest in their studies," and teacher oversight of students appears to have been close indeed. The student management policy called for teachers to learn each student's individual personality and apply extra attention to areas of personal weakness among students. Teachers should also learn as much as possible about students' situation at home and their address. If any serious problems should arise at home, teachers were obligated to inform the school's administration.⁷⁴ There were also forms specifically

⁷¹ "Xuesheng zuoye chengji kaohe banfa" [Method for checking student homework grades], "Kecheng jindu biao tianxie fa" [Method for filling out curriculum progress tables], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁷² "Jiaoshi guize" [Classroom rules], "Chufang guize" [Kitchen rules], "Canting guize" [Cafeteria rules], "Cesuo guize" [Bathroom rules], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁷³ "Jicha renshu banfa" [Method for taking attendance], "Kunlun zhongxue zhongxuebu geji queke xuesheng tongji baogaobiao" [Kunlun Middle School middle school department missing student statistics report for all levels], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁷⁴ "Kunlun zhongxue guanli xuesheng zanxing banfa" [Temporary method for student management], notes 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, KLZXJZYSC (1946).

intended for when the principal interviewed the parents of students.⁷⁵ It appears that Kunlun Middle school's administration sought to learn about each individual student and their families. Overall, student life was highly regimented and managed.

As middle school student Mu Zengxian wrote in 1936, Kunlun Middle School attempted to regulate student bodies through new forms of cleanliness and hygiene.⁷⁶ According to the teacher handbook from 1946, teachers would hold weekly inspections of students' personal hygiene and the cleanliness of their dormitories. Once every three weeks the school administration held a school-wide hygiene inspection. Teachers had to fill out a form for each of these inspections, including the appearance of student dormitories, cafeteria, kitchen, classrooms, toilet, as well as all administrative offices. The inspector also checked each student's, teacher's, and staff's uniforms, shoes, jacket, hats, head, body, and feet, and fill out a standardized cleanliness form.⁷⁷ School rules went so far as to regulate proper student behavior when using the toilet. Students were not allowed to fight for an early spot in line to use the toilet; rather, they should quietly wait their turn in line. The rules for toilet use also specifically told students to relieve themselves in the toilet, and nowhere else, like on the floor next to the toilet. Furthermore, sticking papers or writing on toilet walls was expressly forbidden. Students also had a rotating responsibility to clean the bathrooms daily, and the regulations strove

⁷⁵ “Xiaozhang juwen jiazhang dan” [Form for family head interviews by the principal] KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁷⁶ Mu (1936), 17-19.

⁷⁷ “Kunlun zhongxue qingxi jiancha zanxing banfa” [Kunlun middle school temporary method of hygiene inspection], “Kunlun zhongxue di __ci qingxi jiancha baogao biao (__fenxiao)” [Kunlun Middle School's __st/nd/rd cleanliness inspection report form] KLZXJZYSC (1946). This was a pre-printed form, with blanks for teachers to fill in. There was also space to identify one of the four campuses of Kunlun Middle School.

for a form of mutual responsibility and oversight of bathroom cleanliness among students. Students were encouraged to report any rules violations.⁷⁸

Kunlun Middle School's administration placed great emphasis on student health, even creating a special department dedicated to that purpose. Kunlun Middle's Medical Affairs Organization was responsible for overall school hygiene, prevention and treatment of communicable diseases, and general guidance for strong student bodies.⁷⁹ Medical affairs workers had scheduled times for check-ups at different IPC-run schools in Xining. Mornings were spent at the main office at Kunlun Middle school, but health workers rotated afternoons at different schools around town, including Ximen Girls' School, Provincial Girls' Schools numbers one, two, and three.⁸⁰ Special guidelines regulated student behavior while in the diagnosis room and infirmary. Students should be quiet, orderly, refrain from spitting, and listen to directions from the staff. The diagnosis, treatment, and residence process defined in these regulations is quite similar to the basic process in Chinese hospitals today. A sick students would proceed through the diagnosis room, get medicine from a pharmacy in a separate room, then potentially have an intravenous injection of medicine, or be admitted to residence in the infirmary for serious cases.⁸¹ Kunlun Middle School brought some students in Qinghai an unprecedented level of health education and medical care to its students.

⁷⁸ "Cesuo guize" [Toilet rules], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁷⁹ "Qinghai Huijiao zujin hui li Kunlun zhongxue yiwuzu shebei jihua" [Kunlun Middle School medical affairs organization facilities plan] KLZXJZYSC (1946), regulations 2, 3.1-3.3, 3.6.

⁸⁰ "Qinghai Huijiao cujinhui li Kunlun zhongxue yiwu zu zhenduan shijian fenpeibiao" [Qinghai Islam Progressive Council Kunlun middle school medical affairs organization diagnosis schedule], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁸¹ "Zhenduanshi guize" [Diagnosis room rule], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

It appears that administrators and teachers sought to create a competitive environment at Kunlun Middle School. On the academic side, the school held a series of periodical academic competitions. These included competitions in Chinese language, historical geography, arithmetic, education theory and practice, and natural biology. Teachers would evaluate student performance based on a number of activities. For instance, the Chinese language academic competition included evaluations of student homework and diaries, calligraphy, and recitation. The historical geography category tested student abilities through making an historical timeline as well a maps and charts on Chinese geography. Arithmetic and mathematics competitions included student homework grades and a special math test. Two other competitions tested students' abilities to use an abacus, skills at drawing. For students in the simple normal course of study, their competition centered on designing evaluation tests and turning the results of those tests into statistical charts. Finally, natural biology activities like identifying plants and animals would form the basis of the biology competition.⁸²

Muslim Middle school students enjoyed a wide range of extracurricular activities, including sports. Mu Zengxian wrote that students had four to five hours a week of physical education in 1936. According to this student, the sounds of basketballs and soccer balls echoed on the athletic fields every day.⁸³ In 1946, Kunlun Middle also promoted athletic competitions among its students. The school held competitive events like tugs-of-war, rope jumping competitions, toy-horse races using a bamboo stick

⁸² “Kunlun zhongxue san shi wu niandu di yi xueqi gexiang jingsai kemu yu lanbiao” [Kunlun middle school, first semester 1946, chart on all academic competitions], “Suanshu jingsai” [Arithmetic competition] illustration, “Zhusuan jingsai” [Abacus calculation competition] illustration, “Tuhua jingsai” [book competition] illustration, KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁸³ Mu (1936), 17-19.

“ridden” like a horse, and the common schoolyard communication game—“telephone.”⁸⁴ Other athletic competitions took on a decidedly more military character, like obstacle course races, sprints carrying sand-bags, races that combined running with taking off and putting on school uniforms, and competitions where students had to hold their ground when bumped by another student from the side.⁸⁵ The military training schedule, to be discussed later in this chapter, made an exception for students on the school basketball team, allowing them to practice during military training.⁸⁶

Contemporary observers and historians alike recognize that religious Islamic education was a small part of the IPC’s pedagogy. Mu Zengxian downplayed the religious nature of this school for Muslims, reporting that this school was basically the same as other middle schools. The only major difference was that seventy percent of the student body was Muslim. Two hours per week were devoted to religious study taught by Islamic scholar, but Mu reported that the non-Muslim students were exempt from these activities. This student did, however, blame the utter lack of social activities on the religious nature of the school.⁸⁷ Even the most intense critic of Ma militarist rule noted that religious training and Arabic language classes only amounted to a few hours of class

⁸⁴ The KLMS Teachers’ Handbook included illustrations for “Bahe jingsai” [Tug-of-war competition], “Tiaosheng jiangsai” [Rope-jumping competition], “Zhuma jingsai” [Bamboo horse competition], “Tonghua jingsai” [Telephone’ competition], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁸⁵ Illustrations for “Zhang’ ai jingsai” [Obstacle competition], “Zhangdan jingsai” [Crawling under tent competition], “Tuo chuan yifu jingsai” [Taking off and putting on clothes competition], “Jieli jingsai” [Taking force competition], KLZXJZYSC (1946). Although *jielisai* 接力赛 is normally translated as “relay race,” this diagram clearly shows a person standing straight with arms held out to their sides, while another rams their shoulder into the first person’s ribs.

⁸⁶ “Qinghai Huijiao cujinhui li Kunlun zhongxue di er qi shuke jindu biao” [Qinghai Islam Progressive Council’s Kunlun Middle School second-term military training schedule], KLZXJZYSC (1946), note 6.

⁸⁷ Mu (1936), 17-19.

time a week.⁸⁸ Perhaps notably, Kunlun Middle’s 1946 teacher handbook did not include Arabic or Islamic education classes for middle and simple normal students.⁸⁹

Xu Xianlong, author of a solid study on Ma militarists and northwestern Sino-Muslim society, notes that IPC school curricula were the same as national Ministry of Education regulations.⁹⁰ The 1946 Kunlun Middle teacher handbook included curricula for students in kindergarten, low and high primary, middle school, and simple normal school courses. Aside from the addition of Arabic language courses in low and high primary levels, curricula at the school followed the national Ministry of Education Guidelines.⁹¹ Kunlun’s kindergarten curriculum appears to have diverged from the Ministry of Education’s 1929 curriculum for this introductory level of schooling, including Chinese language, writing, and stories. The 1929 kindergarten curriculum, on the other hand, included music, stories and songs, games, social and natural studies,

⁸⁸ Chang Jiang (1936), 153.

⁸⁹ “Kunlun zhongxue san shi wu niandu zhongxuebu geji geke meizhou jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun Middle School’s low middle department table of weekly class hours by each level and each course of study for the year 1946], “Kunlun zhongxue san shi wu niandu jianshibu geji geke mei zhou jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun middle school simple normal department table of weekly class hours by level and course of study for the year 1946], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁹⁰ Xu (2000), 143-146.

⁹¹ “Kunlun zhongxue youzhiban jiaoxue shishubiao” [Table of class hours for Kunlun Middle School’s kindergarten class], “Kunlun zhongxue chuxiaobu ge nianji jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun Middle School’s low primary department table of class hours according to year], “Kunlun zhongxue gaoxiaobu ge nianji jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun Middle School’s high primary department table of class hours according to year], “Kunlun zhongxue san shi wu niandu zhongxuebu geji geke meizhou jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun Middle School’s low middle department table of weekly class hours by each level and each course of study for the year 1946], “Kunlun zhongxue san shi wu niandu jianshibu geji geke mei zhou jiaoxue shishubiao” [Kunlun middle school simple normal department table of weekly class hours by level and course of study for the year 1946], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

manual work, rest, and feeding.⁹² Thus, the IPC Middle School's curricula largely mirrored the central government's Education Ministry's official curricula.

The Islam Progressive Council school system also brought many aspects of modern education to Qinghai's Muslim population. These included social education organizations like masses and literacy schools. IPC leaders strove to fully implement compulsory schooling among the Qinghai's Sino-Muslims,⁹³ just as public schools in the province and nation-wide did. The IPC also built schools for Sino-Muslim girls in the province, although the quality of this Muslim Girls' School was questioned by the oral history account of its founding and growth.⁹⁴ One article from 1939 recorded a reporter's experiences observing classes at a Masses Literacy school run by the IPC in Huangzhong, just southwest of Xining.⁹⁵ That the IPC built its own publishing house and periodicals attests to the superior infrastructure their schools provided.⁹⁶

With the blessing and support of Ma Bufang, Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council also published a magazine in Qinghai with the aim of giving voice to Sino-Muslim intellectuals, as well as promoting the interests of Qinghai's rulers. A prominent

⁹² H.G.H. Woodhead, ed. *The China Year Book*, (Shanghai: North China Daily News and Herald, 1939), 395. Kunlun zhongxue youzhiban jiaoxue shishubiao [table of class hours for Kunlun Middle School's kindergarten class], KLZXJZYSC (1946).

⁹³ Ma Xiaoshi, "Duiyu Qinghai yiwu jiaoyu genbenshang de ganxiang" [My basic feelings about Qinghai's compulsory education], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), Lunzhe section, 1. "Tongling gexian xiaoxue xiaodong ducu xuesheng shu'e shixing qiangpo jiaoyu" [Ordering all county's primary school superintendents to promote and supervise the number of students to implement compulsory education], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 13.

⁹⁴ "Qinghai Huizu nvzi jiaoyu de xingban yu chengzhang" [Creation and maturation of Qinghai's Sino-Muslim girls' education], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 17, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1988), 135-138.

⁹⁵ Zhi Kang, "Huangzhong Huijiao cujinhui minzhong shizichu suomiao" [Description of Huangzhong's Islam Progressive Council masses literacy school], *Xin Xibei* 2.1 (1939), 121-122.

⁹⁶ "Qinghai sheng Huijiao cujinhui fushe chubanshe zuzhi tiaolie" [Qinghai Islam Progressive Council Publishing House by-laws], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 2. "Qinghai sheng Huijiao cujinhui fushe Kunlun bianjishi" [Qinghai Islam Progressive Council Kunlun Magazine publishing], *Kunlun* 1.1 (April 1936), 3.

Sino-Muslim educator and official, Ma Xiaoshi, founded the journal *Kunlun* in 1936. Contents of *Kunlun* magazine included social, cultural, and political criticism, materials for village education, recent events in the province, and important developments in Qinghai's Muslim education system. It was delivered, free of charge, to government officials, party offices, schools, libraries, social organizations, and mosques in Qinghai.⁹⁷

Kunlun Magazine was also a vehicle for improving the education in Qinghai's Muslim schools. The first issue of *Kunlun* in April 1936 recorded Shao Hongsi's speech at the IPC conference, from which the play on Ma Bufang and the Yushu War was drawn. The full article, however, covered multiple topics that could improve the education in IPC schools. These included facilities management, student organization, health and sanitation, teaching strategies, and practical classroom management.⁹⁸ One article focused on the important relationship between primary school teachers and the students they had the responsibility of guiding. Teachers should encourage academic curiosity among students, have a social scientific mindset, and closely oversee student behavior in order to guide them in appropriate activities. The intended result of primary school education was to create patriotic children with a clear understanding of the nation's current difficulties. The article exhorted teachers to always keep their responsibility to students in mind, and to be nurturing to young children.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Luo Lin, "Jiefang qian Qinghai de xinwen baokan" [Qinghai's news periodicals before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 16 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 91-93.

⁹⁸ Shao Hongsi (1936), 6-13. Shao was the principal of the Tongren school, Ma Qi's first Muslim school in Xining as well as Muslim Middle school's vice-principal at some point after Ma Bufang appointed himself principal in 1937. Ma Wushi, Ma Chengfa, and Ding Huangren, "Jiefang qian de Kunlun zhongxue" [Kunlun middle school before liberation], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 13, (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), 116, 119.

⁹⁹ Chi Ren, "Xiaoxue jiaoshi yu xuesheng" [Primary school teachers and students], *Kunlun* 1.3 (June 1936), 13-16.

Student publications were a small but important part of *Kunlun* magazine.

Qinghai students formed journals and published articles on a variety of topics since the Deng siblings participated in the intellectual foment of the May Fourth movement while studying in Beijing.¹⁰⁰ Other students in Qinghai's Muslim schools also participated in this form of active student citizenship, and their essays can give some insight into the lives of students in IPC schools. One student from a poor farming family shared with readers the travails of a student worried about tuition and living expenses.¹⁰¹ Another wrote a manifesto on the benefits of time management, arguing that students should to schedule their days and learn the self-discipline necessary to live by those schedules.¹⁰² Creative writing and poetry written by IPC students also appeared in the magazine.¹⁰³

From its inception in the early 1930s through 1946, Qinghai's Muslim schools brought contemporary education to a small, but growing, number of students trained in this system. IPC schools followed the trends in Chinese education, most notably the distinct militarization of schools after the beginning of the Japanese invasion in the mid-1930s. When contrasted with the mosque education movement, Qinghai's Muslim schools were not institutions of Islamic education; rather, they were modern schools run by and for the Sino-Muslims who made up most of their student body. One especially strident critic of Ma Bufang's rule noted the secular focus of these schools and the ways in which it would change students. "As a [Hui] youth receives relatively new-style education, he will no longer completely follow the unscientific dictates of his religion.

¹⁰⁰ See discussion in the conclusion.

¹⁰¹ Sun Shenggui, "Qiongnu xuesheng de qiongnu" [The sufferings of a suffering student], *Kunlun* 1.2 (1 May 1936), 28-30.

¹⁰² Yue Bo, "Plan," *Kunlun* 1.2 (1 May 1936), 30-31.

¹⁰³ Duan Youcai, "Spring Freeze," *Kunlun* 1.2 (1 May 1936), 31.

Educated Hui youth will no longer be as strict followers of their religion as their grandfathers and grandmothers.”¹⁰⁴ We should not, however, exclude the “Muslim” character of the IPC’s Muslim modernist education. The next section will illustrate the ways in which IPC leaders and even some students participated in the intense debate about the place of the Hui people in the emerging Chinese nation-state.

Printing Sino-Muslim Politics

As the Nationalist government solidified its power in the early 1930s, they increasingly sought to tighten their control over civic organizations, including institutions of education, and especially organizations devoted to minority groups in China’s borderlands. The Nationalist government took control of Chengda Teachers’ College over financial issues, and the founding of the China Islamic National Salvation Organization 1942 represented a full government takeover of a formerly religious societal organization.¹⁰⁵ One common vehicle for tightening central control over frontier education, in particular, was officially sponsored inspections. Central government investigations in the mid-1930s gave high evaluations of Qinghai’s Islam Progressive Council’s middle school, saying it was among the best in the northwest.¹⁰⁶ One controversial commentator, the pseudonymed reporter Chang Jiang, felt that Qinghai IPC schools’ administration, “especially Muslim middle school, are all excellent. I am afraid to say it is among the elite schools in the northwest.”¹⁰⁷ But for Chang Jiang, as we will

¹⁰⁴ Chang Jiang (1936), 156.

¹⁰⁵ Yufeng Mao, 103-104.

¹⁰⁶ Guoli Jinan xibei jiaoyu kaohatuan (1936), 16.

¹⁰⁷ Chang Jiang (1936), 153.

see below, this was not a completely positive development. Why would this reporter be “afraid to say” that IPC Muslim Middle school was among the best in the region? Chang Jiang’s biggest objection was directed toward the man in charge of the Qinghai Islam Progressive Council—Ma Bufang.

Chang Jiang, the pen name for Fan Xitian, traveled through northwest China during 1935 and published his experiences and opinions in Chinese newspapers. His collected writings were compiled and published in 1936 under the title *China’s Northwest Corner*. Chang Jiang’s writings about Ma Bufang and Qinghai were extremely critical the Ma family’s frontier nation- and state-building, and questioned their loyalty to the Nationalist party-state. In his view, Qinghai’s Ma family dynasty was only interested in their own power, and used their military might to that end, but this led to oppression by Sino-Muslims over the other peoples in the province. “Qinghai’s political, military, and fiscal matters have all left the correct path. Originally they were public activities but now they have turned to private management.” It seems, then, that Chang Jiang was levying an accusation that Ma Bufang was a “warlord,” but without using the specific Chinese word *junfa*. In his opinion, if Ma Bufang was the head of a “private organization,” instead of a representative of the central government, then any positive changes that he might make in Qinghai were still dangerous. For Chang Jiang, “[h]aving a private group training the army, developing the economy, dealing with different groups of peoples, and educating the youth will take [us] down an extremely dangerous road.”¹⁰⁸ He was so serious about this accusation, in fact, that Chang Jiang suggested delaying educating the children of Qinghai until the political situation could be improved. “Education cannot

¹⁰⁸ Chang Jiang (1936), 153-154.

alone solve the problems of the northwest. Instead, it might make the people of the northwest only better understand the problems there and raise some even larger problems that still await resolution.”¹⁰⁹

In the spring of 1936, *Kunlun* magazine responded to the criticism levied by Chang Jiang with equally scathing articles. Ma Xiaoshi, *Kunlun* magazine’s founder and principal of Muslim Middle for several years, penned an especially scathing critique of Chang Jiang’s views of Qinghai’s rulers and military. Ma’s article turned many of Chang Jiang’s criticisms against him in an argument that ridiculed his use of a rhetorical “Muslim Army” boogeyman. Sarcastically wondering what sort of “philosophical dictionary” might define the term “Muslim army,” Ma Xiaoshi accused Chang Jiang of applying double standards to Qinghai’s Sino-Muslims. He noted that Ma Bufang was the commander of an army organized and recognized by the central government. And he wondered why other government armies in China Proper were not called “Han armies.” Qinghai’s armies had successfully defended Chinese territory in the Yushu war several years earlier, and they protected the province and northwest China from the “menace” of the Red Army in 1936. The crux of Ma Xiaoshi’s retort was that Chang Jiang still maintained an “imperial view” of Sino-Muslims along the northwest frontier and did not fully believe in Sun Yat-sen’s espoused equality among the different peoples of the Republic of China.¹¹⁰

In the same issue of *Kunlun*, the Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang Muslim Native Place Association of Beiping also contributed an indignant reaction to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 155-156.

¹¹⁰ Ma Xiaoshi, “He wei Huijun: ping Dagongbao Chang Jiang suowei Xibei wenti” [What is this “Muslim Army”? A critique of Chang Jiang’s so-called ‘northwestern problem’ in the Dagongbao], *Kunlun* 1.3 (June 1936), 5-7.

Chang Jiang's writings. This article echoed Ma Xiaoshi's accusation of ethnic double standards, but also added two prongs of attack. First, the authors lambasted Chang Jiang's suggestion that educating minority groups along the northwestern frontier had to wait until the political situation there improved. This article also defended the militarization underway in Qinghai's Muslim schools as following the explicit orders of the central government.¹¹¹ Once again we can see political actors using the same justifications for diametrically opposed viewpoints, much like the ways that Sun Dianying and Ma Lin rhetorically fought each other by professing loyalty to the central government, commitment to developing the northwest, and speaking for the people along the frontier that both sought to rule.

Kunlun magazine was not the only journal dedicated to voicing the opinions Sino-Muslims in Qinghai. *Tujue*, started by Sino-Muslim students in Nanjing and supported by Ma Bufang, appears to have been a more sophisticated and more political venue for students in institutions of higher education, yet also firmly situated in Qinghai's version of Muslim modernism.¹¹² Ma Xiaoshi, founder of *Kunlun* magazine, also took to the pages of *Tujue* to defend the Islam Progressive Council's groundbreaking efforts building a modern school system for Sino-Muslims in Qinghai. He also criticized proponents of frontier education for hypocrisy. His argument contained three main points. Many intellectuals and education administrators advocated bringing modern, politically conscious education to the peoples along the Chinese frontier, and frequently lamented

¹¹¹ Shaan Gan Qing Ning Xin Huijiao lv Ping tongxianghui, "Chang Jiang 'Qilian shan nan de lvxing' de fanyin: Shaan Gan Qing Ning Xin Huijiao lv Ping tongxianghui zhi Dagongbao han" [Reaction to Chang Jiang's 'Travels south of the Qilian Mountains: a letter from the Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang Muslim native place association in Beijing to the Dagongbao], *Kunlun* 1.3 (June 1936), 10.

¹¹² Mu Jianye, "Huiyi 'Tujue'" [Remembering 'Tujue'], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 53-56.

the lack of effective frontier education. While trumpeting the necessity of this endeavor, Ma Xiaoshi felt that these commentators ignored the major contributions of the Qinghai IPC in that realm. Instead of building upon Qinghai's IPC as the foundation of frontier education in the northwest, the central government instead chose to focus their investment solely into "frontier schools" for Mongols and Tibetans.¹¹³

Sino-Muslim intellectuals, officials, and educators published articles in *Kunlun* magazine professing their loyalty and contributions to the Chinese nation-state. Mu Jianye wrote about how his leadership of the student military training in Xining corrected long-standing weaknesses in Chinese education, used the Three Principles of the People as its ideological inspiration, and encouraged a spirit of community service among students.¹¹⁴ Others celebrated the contributions of Sino-Muslims in relief efforts for war refugees as a call for more sacrifice in the name of national emergency.¹¹⁵ IPC masses literacy schools also celebrated the active participation of Qinghai cavalry in battles against the Japanese, praising Commander Ma Biao (famous/infamous from the Yushu War) for "fighting the Japanese down in the east...killing the enemy, taking their supplies, and bringing honor to all of Qinghai's people."¹¹⁶

Chang Jiang's criticism of Qinghai IPC school system was part and parcel of a rhetorical attack on Ma Bufang's rule. It thus represented one salvo in the battle over who would control this portion of China's northwestern frontier—the Ma family or the central

¹¹³ Ma Xiaoshi, "Suowang yu gengkuan fazhan bianjiang jiaoyu zhi jihuzhe" [Looking at those who plan to use indemnity funds to develop frontier education], *Tujue* 3.4-5 (May 1936), 9-11.

¹¹⁴ Mu Jianye (1936), 15-19.

¹¹⁵ Mu Letian, "Huimin ying yi shili huanzhu zhongyang kangzhan" [Muslim citizens should use their position to help the central government resist Japan], *Tujue* (1937), 2-3.

¹¹⁶ Zhi Kang, "Huangzhong Huijiao cujinhui minzhong shizichu suomiao" [Description of Huangzhong's Islam Progressive Council masses literacy school], *Xin xibei* 2.1 (1939), 121.

government. Hung-mao Tien's work, among many others, on government and politics in the Nanjing Decade has demonstrated the geographical limits of Chiang Kai-shek's central government. Likewise, James Leibold has shown that the fundamental flaw in Nationalist frontier policy was an inability to reign in what he calls predatory transfrontier militarists.¹¹⁷ Although Chang Jiang praised the effects of modern schooling on Qinghai's Sino-Muslim children, his view of Ma Bufang outweighed any other benefits gained through his rule.

Ma Bufang's religious beliefs and family background, however, certainly complicated the situation. Jonathan Lipman has found that when support for naming Ma Fuxiang as the leader of Gansu in the 1910s swelled among local Sino-Muslims, the non-Muslim opposition was widespread. "A Muslim provincial commander... meant a Muslim-dominated province, with the terrifying Muslim soldiery in control. For people imbued with decades of fear and centuries of memory of Muslim violence, that would have been an intolerable threat." The Beijing government thus decided against Ma Fuxiang's appointment.¹¹⁸ Although Chang Jiang's vehement opposition to Ma Bufang's rule, and, thus, to the Muslim modernist education system he built, was not avowedly anti-Muslim, his position as a Sino-Muslim military governor was undoubtedly controversial. As we shall see, how to define and include Sino-Muslims in the modern Chinese nation-state was a contentious topic.

¹¹⁷ Leibold (2007), 78, 108.

¹¹⁸ Lipman (1997), 172.

The Nationality Question and Naming Kunlun Middle School

In the first half of the twentieth century, statesmen and intellectuals were in the process of defining the Chinese nation and understanding the diversity included therein. A debate over what James Leibold has called the “nationality question” appeared in journals and periodicals and was reflected in changing Nationalist ethnic policies. The various groups of Muslims living in China not only presented a challenge to governments seeking to rule them, but also how best to classify and define their status in the Chinese (multi)nation. Muslim modernists secularized their education system, and in the process worked to nationalize their community. In return, they argued for recognition of the Hui people as a distinct, yet Chinese, *minzu* (alternately, “people,” “ethnicity,” and/or “nationality”). The definition and integration of minority groups were processes contested by the Nationalists, Communists, and Japanese, and remained an unfinished task under the Republic.¹¹⁹

Sino-Muslim elites and intellectuals faced many challenges in their quest for recognition as a unique but integral community in the Chinese nation. At the most basic level, they had to establish the boundaries of their own community. In the late Qing and early Republic, the ethnonym “Hui” described all Muslims in China. Further clarification came from the preceding description before “Muslim,” like “Han Hui” for Sino-Muslim, or “Sala Hui” for Salar. Hui intellectuals were especially concerned that they might be lumped together with Turkic-speaking Uyghurs in Xinjiang.¹²⁰ This was made all the more urgent do to two attempts by Uyghurs to establish their own, independent nation-

¹¹⁹ Benite (2004), 90-91, 98, 104. Leibold (2007), especially 143-145, 153-154, 170-171.

¹²⁰ Lipman (1997), xx-xxi. Benite (2004), 91.

state in Xinjiang. Perhaps an even more urgent challenge was gaining recognition by the Chiang Kai-shek's central government and its ideologues of national unity.

During the 1920s, Nationalist party theorists debated whether the Hui were a full ethnicity, Han Chinese practitioners of Islam, or something in between. The Communist party took a more rhetorically tolerant position, continuously using the term “nationality” for the Hui, and even promising full self-determination in the 1931 Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic in Jiangxi.¹²¹ In preparation for and during their invasion of the Chinese mainland, Japanese propagandists also weighed in on this debate, stressing the exploitation the Hui suffered under Nationalist Chinese rule. The Nationalist reacted by disavowing any conceptualization of ethnic diversity within the Chinese nation, instead espousing “a unitary ‘Zhonghua minzu’ within which no divisions could be recognized.”¹²² One of the founding members of *Tujue*, the Muslim modernist publication for Qinghai students in Nanjing, recalled how his publication frequently weighed in on the debate surrounding the Hui people, their place in the Chinese nation, and the threat of Japanese propaganda.¹²³ The battle over designating the Hui as an religious group, ethnicity, or nationality was much more than just a name; the central government allowed the public use of *Huizu* in 1940.¹²⁴ Jin Jitang, an influential historian who argued that the Hui were distinct from the Han but had only become their own

¹²¹ Leibold, 153-4.

¹²² Thomas S. Mulaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2011), Chapter 1: “Identity Crisis in Postimperial China,” 18-41.

¹²³ Mu Jianye (1981), 54-55.

¹²⁴ Leibold (2007), 153.

ethnicity within the borders of China, was jailed as a traitor in 1945. The nature of his “treason” was that his book had been translated into Japanese.¹²⁵

Ma Bufang’s anti-Communism is a well-known historical fact: his armies decimated one of the Red Armies that ventured into Qinghai in the mid-1930s¹²⁶, and his son commanded Sino-Muslim cavalry against the People’s Liberation Army late into the Civil War. Despite the more tolerant stance taken by the Communists on the question of Hui nationality, we can safely assume that he was not interested in siding with the CCP against Chiang Kai-shek. As much as the Muslim modernist movement hoped for Nationalist recognition of their status as a full-fledged minzu, it remained a process of negotiation between Hui and Chinese elites.

The fact that oral histories and secondary historical works note that most people called the IPC’s high school “Muslim Middle”¹²⁷ certainly attests to the overall focus of Qinghai’s Muslim modernist education. Nevertheless, a central government official visiting Qinghai in the early 1940s suggested to Ma Bufang that the IPC appellation and common name of “Muslim Middle School” was a source of confusion and misunderstanding, since it seemed to restrict the committee’s activities to an ethnic/religious community. As a result, Ma Bufang changed its name to Kunlun Middle School in 1942.¹²⁸ Instead of emphasizing the ethnic or religious nature of the school, he

¹²⁵ Benite (2004), 104.

¹²⁶ John M.H. Lindbeck, “Communism, Islam, and Nationalism in China,” *The Review of Politics* 12.4 (Oct. 1950), 477.

¹²⁷ Li Dexian (1981), 66.

¹²⁸ There is some confusion in the sources reviewed for this project exactly when Ma Bufang changed Muslim Middle school to *Kunlun* Middle School. Some sources say 1940, including Li Dexian (1981), 67. Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 802, on the other hand dates the name change to 1942. These authors cite Luo Lin, “Dui Kunlun zhongxue gengming shijian de kaozheng” [Searching for proof on when Kunlun Middle school changed its name], *Xining dongcheng wenshi ziliao* 3 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe). Since

instead chose a more neutral, geographic term—renaming the school after the mountain chain that ran through the middle of the province.¹²⁹ Thus, Ma Bufang was willing to reduce the power of Islamic religious leaders in Qinghai, secularize the Islam Progressive Council’s education system, and even rename the leading Sino-Muslim middle school in northwest China in order to sound less “ethnic.” His IPC-run Kunlun Middle school at least appeared to deemphasize Islam, schooled a comparatively secular modernism, but seems to have maintained its mission of training militarism.

Training Militarism: IPC Schools and Ma Bufang’s Army

Since the eighteenth century conflicts among Sino-Muslims in the region sprang from waves of active proselytizing by missionaries and the competition for followers by multiple Islamic solidarities. And when threatened by an aggressive imperial government, northwestern Muslims rose up in rebellion. Violence in the latter eighteenth century, the northwest Muslim rebellion in the 1860s and 1870s, and communal violence in 1895 were important in shaping Han Chinese views that associated Muslims with violence.¹³⁰ From county gazetteers to journal articles, diversity of, and conflict between, northwestern Sino-Muslim religious solidarities, remained a commonly discussed topic.¹³¹ This has led Jonathan N. Lipman to argue that “[i]n Chinese writing about

Luo Lin was a student at Muslim/Kunlun Middle school’s high school class from 1938-1943, this project will follow his conclusion.

¹²⁹ Mullaney (2011) has found a similar pattern in Yunnan. After Siam officially changed its name to the more ethnonationalist Thailand, the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission suggested in Yunnan province “[l]anguage...should be purged of ethnic names and replaced with toponyms reflective of one’s place of birth.”

¹³⁰ Lipman (1997). 90, Chapter 4.

¹³¹ *Xining xian fengtu diaocha ji* [record of investigating Xining county’s local customs], (1932), 277. “Xibei Huimin jiaopai bie” [Differentiation of Islamic sects in the northwest], *Kaifa xibei* 1.5 (1934). Ma Shaoyun, *Xibei liang da wenti* [The northwest’s two major problems], (Yinchuan: Ningxia sheng zhengfu

Muslims over the past three hundred years, one theme overrides all others—that of violence.”¹³²

Zvi Ben-Dor Benite’s study of the origins of Chinese Muslim historiography, however, presents a different interpretation on the connection between Muslims military power and the Chinese state. An early eighteenth century history of Islam in China, the *Origins of the Hui (Huihui yuanlai)*, recounts that the first emperor of the Tang Dynasty dreamt that his new empire was threatened and only Muslims from the western frontier could save it. The *Origins of the Hui* became a starting point for the reimagining of Chinese Muslim history, a foundational historical source much like the Confucian-Muslim syncretism of the *Han Kitab*. As such, Benite argues that “[a]bove all, the ever-present task of ‘protecting’ the empire brings essential constancy to Chinese Muslim existence in China (and implicitly, perhaps, rejects the contemporaneous claims that Muslims were ‘violent’ or ‘unruly’).”¹³³

Military force was the basis of the Ma family’s power in Qinghai and the northwest. Qinghai’s Sino-Muslim armies defended national territory in Yushu during 1932 and 1933, but turned against Chiang Kai-shek’s appointment of Sun Dianying to agriculturally colonize the Qaidam Basin only one year later. Qinghai’s Sino-Muslim forces defeated the Communist Western Route Army in the Battle of Hexi during late 1936 and early 1937. Ma Biao gained some national fame by leading Qinghai cavalry against the Japanese in 1939. Conversely, Ma Bufang and his son, Ma Jiyuan, gained infamy for their staunch resistance to the PLA in the latter stages of the Chinese civil war.

mishuchu, 1934). Chang Jiang’s criticism of Ma Bufang, Sino-Muslim militaries, and ethnic relations in Qinghai are also prime examples.

¹³² Lipman (1997), xxx.

¹³³ Benite (2004), 88.

Ma Bufang rose higher and higher in the echelons of power within the Republic of China because of the army he commanded; his military power also gained him the ignoble title of warlord. At the pinnacle of the IPC's Muslim modernist education system, Kunlun Middle School also played a key role supporting Ma Bufang's military, and therefore, political power. As such, it illustrates the complicated relationship between two sides of his historical identity—a Muslim militarist.

Militarization was a major political and educational trend in 1930s China,¹³⁴ yet as an educational activity it was understood and taught in tandem with moral and behavioral self-cultivation. Chiang Kai-shek himself encouraged military and moral cultivation with his 1934 New Life Movement, a movement which Culp views as consistent with over two decades of moral cultivation in Republican Chinese schools.¹³⁵ Military education consisted of classroom instruction on combat, weaponry, fortifications, and communications. Students drilled group marching and movements, marksmanship, surveying, distance calculation, flag signals, and military encampment. Rather than training students to be soldiers, military training in Scouts or otherwise sought the “inculcation of a martial form of cultural citizenship” based upon a performative repertoire of “regimentation, cleanliness, order, and simplicity characteristic of the soldier.” Culp's research finds “the immediacy of the threat from Japan and the seemingly obvious need for military preparation in a world headed toward war drove [student] enthusiasm for military training.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Tien (1972), 39.

¹³⁵ Culp, 163.

¹³⁶ Culp, 200, 202, 205.

Ma Bufang's vision for Qinghai education was a school system that "united politics and education, [and] cultivated both technique and morality,"¹³⁷ and military training occupied an important role. Mu Jianye, former student in Xining and leader of Qinghai's student military training,¹³⁸ wrote how military drill could cultivate technique and morality. Student military training under his management attempted to update the Six Arts of the Zhou (1056-256 BCE) era into a modern form. The art of archery was easily adaptable to marksmanship in the "age of the gun." Driving cars and piloting planes would be the modern equivalent of the feudal art of charioteering. Arithmetic's utility was the same, but the modern "art of arithmetic" would serve as the foundation of science. The military trainer, Mu Jianye, did not emphasize the arts of poetry or music as much as the others. Tempering the body through military training would be complemented with moral cultivation. Nationalist Party ideology, especially the Three Principles of the People, would serve as the central thought for military training, and students would be taught to have a service-oriented mentality.¹³⁹ Instead of ritual focused on etiquette and respect, Qinghai's combination of civil and military schooling would instill orderly, modern values.

Mu Jianye would not have to start from scratch overseeing Qinghai's student military training. Xining Military Commander and Ma Bufang's father, Ma Qi, hired a Baoding Military Academy graduate to drill his soldiers three times a month in 1922. Infantry, cavalry, and weapon practices took place regularly every ten days at training

¹³⁷ Mu Jianye, "Minzu jianshe zhong de jiaoyu dongxiang" [Education trends during ethnic construction], *Tujue* 3.7(1936), 837-841. Ma Bufang (1944), 19-21.

¹³⁸ Qinghai sheng defang shizhi xuehui (1997), 54-56.

¹³⁹ Mu Jianye (1936), 15-19.

grounds in Xining.¹⁴⁰ Scouts with their special blend of drill and manners were active in Xining in the early 1930s. Central government education inspectors noted that nearly all secondary schools in the province had a couple of hours of Scout training weekly.¹⁴¹ Xining's village teacher training program also devoted substantial time to military drill in 1936 and 1937.¹⁴²

The militarization of Chinese education was pronounced, but at times contested. National Ministry of Education made military training for children under twelve years old illegal in 1940. The directive was justified because children under that age were physically unsuited for such activities and they were also unable to grasp the meaning of the many political speeches included in military training. This order was published in the Qinghai Republican Daily newspaper (*Qinghai minguo ribao*) on September 5, 1940.¹⁴³

Despite age restrictions on military training in schools, Kunlun Middle School's 1946 Teacher Handbook included an extremely detailed schedule of military training activities for students. Although military training at this schools also included camping training, the basics of formation drill took up the most time and space. This twenty-three page daily schedule of exercise and group drill testifies to the seriousness with which Kunlun Middle approached student military training. Beginning on Monday September 2, 1946 and lasting until December 15th of the same year, students had six days a week of military drill. By far the schedule devoted the most amount of time to group marching techniques, beginning with the simplest of concepts—standing at attention and standing

¹⁴⁰ Fang Xiebang (1984), 71.

¹⁴¹ Guoli Jinan daxue xibei jiaoyu kaocha tuan (1936), 12.

¹⁴² Xining xian xiangcun jiaoyuan xunliansuo huikan (1937), 69-70.

¹⁴³ Hunsberger, 160.

at ease—but progressed well-timed group marching maneuvers. Weapon training was the focus of classes roughly twice a week over the semester, but these days also included a large amount of calisthenics drills using or carrying gear and/or weapons. September 10th’s class, the only one of its kind, taught students proper etiquette for saluting officers, with variations for inside and outside. The training schedule’s footnotes stressed to teachers that students must move in lock step with their fellow classmates—“your movements cannot be independent” (*xingdong buke ziyou*)—and students to strive to be energetic and happy while marching. Should weather prevent outdoor military training, then the principal could call for a study hall or school-wide academic competitions.¹⁴⁴ Exceptions aside, military training was an important aspect of Kunlun’s education system.

The dominating influence that Ma Bufang’s military exercised upon administration, student life, and future careers was the most frequently commented upon aspect of Qinghai’s Muslim schools. Largely drawing upon interviews with Ma Bufang’s son, Ma Jiyuan, Hunsberger concludes that “Muslim or K’unlun schools, while ostensibly open to all ethnic groups, were primarily centers for training Muslims for both military and civilian leadership positions.” The majority of Kunlun Middle School graduates served as civilian officials in the Qinghai provincial government or as military officers.¹⁴⁵ As Ma Bufang increasingly hewed to Chiang Kai-shek’s priorities and policies during the Civil War, the central government and Qinghai provincial governments’ abilities to focus on educational enterprises was greatly reduced. As the Civil War increasingly turned in

¹⁴⁴ “Qinghai Huijiao cujinhui li Kunlun zhongxue di er qi shuke jindu biao” [Qinghai Islam Progressive Council’s Kunlun Middle School second-term military training schedule], KLZXJZYSC (1946), military training schedule, *passim.*, notes 1, 2, 6, 8, insert on military curricula.

¹⁴⁵ Hunsberger, 162-163.

favor of the CCP, Ma Bufang's overriding goal became his military preparations. This led to cuts across the board in Qinghai's education system. Education funds were used for "temporary" military purposes; teachers were let go; schools were closed.¹⁴⁶

Although Kunlun Middle School maintained a well-rounded educational environment into the 1940s, the Kunlun school network closely intertwined with Ma Bufang's political and military power. But IPC schools were not the only, or perhaps the most important, route to a position as an officer in Ma Bufang's military. In an interview with Merrill Ruth Hunsberger, Ma Jiyuan reported that one of his father's first actions after becoming the full-time provincial governor in 1938 was founding a military officers training academy (*junguan xunliantuan*).¹⁴⁷ Upon graduating from IPC Middle School's high school course in 1938, Ma Jiyuan himself entered the 5th Cavalry and 82nd Army military officers training academy. The first three classes of this military academy trained just under sixteen hundred officers. IPC middle school did serve as a feeder for Ma Bufang's officer training classes—570 IPC middle school students joined the fourth officer training class in 1940.¹⁴⁸ Kunlun Middle School opened three satellite campuses in the mid-1940s; the first and second campuses opened in 1943 and the third opened in 1945. According to memoir accounts, these satellite campuses largely served as feeders into Ma Bufang's military establishment.

¹⁴⁶ Cui, Zhang, and Du (2002), 781.

¹⁴⁷ Hunsberger, 80. According to Hunsberger's account of the interview with Ma Jiyuan, each training class had roughly 400 students and lasted for three months. The curriculum included ideological training like provincial loyalty and the Three Principles of the People, as well as military tactics and strategy.

¹⁴⁸ Zhang Chengzhen, "Ma Bufang juban de 'Qi wu jun, ba shi er jun junguan xunliantuan shimo'" [The whole story behind Ma Bufang founding the 'Fifth Cavalry, 82nd army officers training brigade], *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 12, (Xining: Qinghai Xinhua, 1984), 81-82.

Oral histories and memories talk about Kunlun schools and the Qinghai military forming a political force that united the province's party, government, and military powers under Ma Bufang and his son Ma Jiyuan.¹⁴⁹ In 1946, Ma Jiyuan established the Kunlun Alumni Association (*Kunlun xiaoyou hui*). All employees and graduates of the Kunlun school system were enrolled in the Alumni Association, an organization that offered recommendations for employment, a welfare system (*fuli shiye*), as well as awarding scholarships for further study.¹⁵⁰ The IPC Kunlun school system also served Ma Bufang's political interests by establishing a political and military network loyal to his rule—the so-called Kunlun clique.

One key method for linking Qinghai's military and political establishment with the Kunlun school network was controlling the future careers of students. Kunlun school officials seemed to decide the careers of graduates, placing them in universities around China, Qinghai's IPC primary schools, military training classes, or provincial party and government positions.¹⁵¹ Only eight of the nearly seventy Kunlun graduates who went on to study at institutions of higher education around China had careers in Qinghai's military. The majority of Kunlun graduates who continued their education at universities around China had careers that combined educational activities with local government, party, or business positions.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ba Mingzhe, "Kunlun zhongxue di san fenxiao neimu" [the real story of Kunlun Middle schools' third campus] *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1981), 93-94.

¹⁵⁰ Ma, Ma, and Ding (1985), 124.

¹⁵¹ Ma Mingshi, Ma Chengfa, and Ding Guangren, "Jiefang qian de Kunlun zhongxue" [Kunlun middle school before liberation] *Qinghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* 13 (Xining: Qinghai renmin chubanshe, 1985), 122.

¹⁵² Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), *passim*.

Conclusion

Administered by the Ma family militarists, the Islam Progressive Council (IPC, *Huijiao cujinhui*) established a parallel school system largely for Hui children. Better funded than its public school counterpart, IPC schools were the best in Qinghai and perhaps all of northwest China. An avowed replacement of mosque schools' "scripture hall" education, the IPC schooled their children in a modern, Islamic, and Chinese way, thus connecting Qinghai to a larger program of what some scholars have called the Muslim Modernist movement.¹⁵³ In so doing, IPC schools and, later, Kunlun Middle School successfully implemented a school system that would have made education reformers in China Proper proud. It was also highly militarized, following a trend in Chinese education that grew during wartime in the 1930s and 1940s. And the IPC flagship, IPC Middle School, increasingly filled Ma Bufang's armies with well-educated and loyal young officers during the 1940s. This combination of ethnic solidarity and military training threatened many Nationalist party observers. Likewise, Ma Bufang's staunch anti-Communism and military resistance during the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949) stained the school's reputation after the founding of the People's Republic. Nevertheless, IPC schools offer a fascinating window into "peripheral people" educating themselves.

Qinghai's Islam Progressive Council and its school network were modernist institutions working to integrate Qinghai's Sino-Muslims into the Chinese nation. The IPC, however, was also an important source of Ma Bufang's power, and thus contributed to the militarization of this frontier province's society. Ma Bufang, Qinghai's Sino-

¹⁵³ Benite (2004), 83-109. Yufeng Mao (2007).

Muslims, and the Islam Progressive Council were essential participants in the complex and often contradictory process of nation- and state-building in northwestern China.

Jonathan N. Lipman has astutely summarized this process as follows. “[I]n this period of its greatest modern disintegration, when central power had virtually ceased to exist, China expanded outward through militarism and modernism, cultural centralization without a political center, to incorporate its frontiers more effectively than the Qing had been able or desired to do.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Lipman (1997), 199.

Conclusion

On May 19th, 1919 a young woman from northwestern China issued a clarion call in her country's struggle for female education. In a letter to Cai Yuanpei, former Minister of Education and current president of Beijing University, Deng Chunlan emphasized the distance that her letter had traveled from her home to Beijing. She traced the 4, 000 li journey down the Yellow River on leather rafts, an ancient form of river transport that was still in use in the first half of the twentieth century. Her meaning was clear—home was far, far away from the national capital in Beijing. It was an under populated frontier—the kind of place that would still use leather rafts and that a young, educated woman could become a primary school teacher at the tender age of 18. She painted her native place as a distant, backward frontier¹ that many public intellectuals and government investigators would comment on with differing degrees of derision. But this young woman challenged a towering political and intellectual figure to live by his words. One might say this was the frontier civilizing the center.

Deng Chunlan's writings reveal her knowledge of intellectual currents and academic debates raging through publications in coastal and urban China at the time. She knew that Cai Yuanpei had espoused gender equality as the national Minister of Education in 1913, and she had read his recent lectures on the same topic recently published in Beijing University's school newspaper. She was also an active participant in these published debates. Her letter to Cai made it into major newspapers in Beijing and

¹ Deng Chunlan, "Wo de funv jiefang zhi jihua tong wo ge ren jinxing zhi fangfa" [My plan for female liberation and how I will personally proceed], *Shaonian Zhongguo* [Chinese Youth], October 1919, in *Wusi yundong shiqi de funv wenti wenxuan* [Collection of essays on the women's problem in the May Fourth era], 259-260. Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehu (1997), 30-35.

Shanghai, and she published her plan for liberating Chinese women through education in *Chinese Youth* in the fall of 1919. She took a modernist tone in lambasting the “rotten custom” of separating inner and outer quarters, a reference to gender divisions in late imperial Chinese households. The danger of not breaking women out of these imprisoning customs was simple--national extinction. Lessons about similar reforms from world history confirmed her views. It was a strong argument, bringing national self-strengthening, modernism, and cosmopolitanism to serve the cause of female liberation.

Like many aspiring education reformers in the early twentieth century, Deng Chunlan had a plan. The only way to transcend ancient traditions and ingrained prejudices, she argued, was education. She called for the establishment of a Women’s Improvement Society in Beijing, with associated groups in urban centers around the country. These groups would contribute to the movement through public advocacy in print media, drama troupes and lectures. They would also offer training courses for girls preparing to enroll at coeducational schools. Once educational equality had been ensured, the movement could then proceed to occupational and then full political equality.¹

Claiming to speak for all Chinese women, Deng Chunlan requested that national universities allow female students. Offering herself as a subject in this grand experiment, she suggested that Beijing University open a preparatory class for girls at the university’s associated middle school. If not now, she rhetorically asked, when? This was Deng Chunlan’s challenge to Cai Yuanpei, and he accepted that challenge. In February 1920, she and her younger sister were among the first class of female students at Beijing University’s middle school. The Deng sisters would eventually enroll at Beijing

¹ Deng Chunlan (1919), 260.

University, making them among the first group of women to matriculate at a Chinese university.² This firmly situates the Deng family in histories of education reforms, feminist struggles, and twentieth-century Chinese modernity. Understanding where she was from—the “distant, backward frontier” she described in her letter—only makes her story that much more dramatic.

Deng Chunlan was born in a village in Xunhua in 1898. A small county town on the banks of upper reaches of the Yellow River, Xunhua is roughly halfway between Lanzhou in Gansu and Xining, very close to what would become the border between Gansu and Qinghai provinces in 1929. Her father, Deng Zong, was a local scholar and educator in the region and later in Lanzhou, who emphasized his son’s and daughter’s education equally.

Deng Chunlan’s father, Deng Zong (1882-1955), rode the initial wave of education reform in the last years of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Just after the turn of the twentieth century, Deng Zong was on his way up China’s examination ladder. The Guangxu Emperor’s dissolution of the civil service examination system in 1905 sparked an empire-wide reorganization of Confucian academies into primary and secondary schools, but did not prevent this talented student from entering the new provincial secondary school. After excelling at his studies in Lanzhou, Deng Zong moved to Beijing to study education at Capital Normal School in 1907. He would graduate with honors in early 1911, join the Revolutionary Alliance connected to Sun Yat-sen, and organize Gansu’s Republican revolution in the same year. Upon returning to the northwest, Deng

² Qinghai difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 30-35.

Zong actively built a high-level normal school in Lanzhou and he was rewarded with the job of principal.³

Deng Zong's progressive views shaped Chunlan and her siblings from a very young age. She might well count herself as fortunate to have avoided bound feet, let alone benefit from a forward-thinking father who emphasized her and her sister's education just as much as that of her two brothers. At seven years old, Chunlan began studying at Xunhua's low-level primary school, and her schooling continued at the Girls' Lecture and Study Group in Lanzhou. After graduation, she immediately took a teaching position at a primary school in the area.⁴

The Deng children's studies and future careers, in fact, illustrate many of the ways in which students and teachers in Qinghai learned and enacted their own version of Republican Chinese citizenship. The Deng siblings all left Xunhua and the northwest to study in the leading urban centers in China, Beijing and Shanghai. Deng Chunlan and her sister studied were among the first women to study at Beijing University in 1920. The oldest Deng brother, Deng Chunhao (1900-1974), entered Beijing University's philosophy department in 1918. Chunhao joined the Beijing University Student Team and participated in the famous May Fourth demonstrations of 1919, after which he formed a lecture troupe to spread the movement's ideas around Beijing. At the end of 1919, the Deng siblings, now all in Beijing, formed the Chunxiao Study Society.

The society's journal was an early example of one aspect of the Deng family's active citizenship: publications. In March of the following year, Deng Chunhao joined

³ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 321-323.

⁴ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 30-35.

with roughly forty other students to form the *Xinlong* magazine. Continuing his role as a student leader, Chunhao was named one of three editors and representatives for interacting with school officials. We have already seen two of Deng Chunlan's early writings, and her youngest brother, Deng Chunlin (1903-1931), was perhaps the most accomplished writer in the family. Despite succumbing to sickness at an early age, Chunlin had at least twenty of his travel writings, poems, and articles published. Although Deng Chunlan returned to Xunhua to work as a primary school teacher, her two younger brothers went overseas to the United States for graduate degrees. Chunhao received a Master's Degree from Stanford and his doctorate from University of Chicago. He returned to academic positions and school administration in Lanzhou. The younger brother, Deng Chunlin, initially studied political science at Chicago, but switched to veterinary studies. Chunlin reportedly felt that this course of study would be more relevant to the pastoral northwest. And his work in fact resulted in an important livestock vaccine.⁵

As trailblazers, writers, teachers, administrators, scholars, and scientists, the Deng family of Xunhua county illustrates the diversity of what it meant to be a citizen of the Republic of China. Their ability to transcend the weak school infrastructure on the northwestern periphery of China and reach the vanguard of Chinese education and scholarship was remarkable. And they each returned home to offer more opportunities to the young people of this frontier region.

Deng Chunlan's journey from frontier to center also requires that we think about her home in Xunhua, in what would become Qinghai, and perhaps about the frontier,

⁵ Qinghai sheng difang shizhi xuehui (1997), 38-44, 47-51.

borderand, the border, in different light. This dissertation has argued that Qinghai deserves another look. One view should be as an topographical, ecological, ethnic, cultural, and administrative frontier region ruled and perhaps, partially created by Sino-Muslim frontier militarists.

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