A PRAGMATIC EXPERIMENT OF RURAL CONSTRUCTION MOVEMENT:
THE SELF-GOVERNMENT OF WANXI IN SOUTHWESTERN HENAN, 1930-1940

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SUMMARY

This thesis discusses the local self-government of Wanxi from two perspectives. One is from the central-local relationship, and the other is from the local state building. In the 1930s, some local elites in Wanxi organized mintuan - or the People’s Militia - to suppress the rampant banditry in this remote and hilly region. On the base of powerful local armed force, these elite drove the Guomindang’s administration out of this region and established a local self-government. In the following ten years, they successfully resisted the Guomindang provincial government’s effort of resuming its rule in Wanxi. The local self-government of Wanxi seriously challenged the authority of the state. As such, the history of the local self-government of Wanxi was regarded as a vivid case of Guomindang’s failure in extending the state power.

Although it impeded the process of power centralization, the local self-government of Wanxi was one significant rural reconstruction experiment in the 1930s. The elite that ran the local self-government, contributed to the stabilization of the social order, improved the local economy, and developed the rural education in this region. In this thesis, their activities were known as the “local state building”. This term refers that when the central or provincial government was incapable of stabilizing and developing the rural society, the locality, and especially the bandit-and-poverty-ridden counties such as Wanxi, could find itself a feasible way of social development. In the long run, this kind of local effort would prove to be helpful for the national modernization.

In the Rural Reconstruction Movement of the 1930s, Wanxi had a distinctive
feature, which came from its political dimension. When compared with other rural reconstruction experiments, Wanxi did enjoy full autonomy. The autonomy of Wanxi was generated from the local self-government, and the self-government was based on the powerful local armed force. Therefore, we can argue that the local self-government of Wanxi was a blend of local militarization and rural reconstruction. To add, the experiment of Wanxi was led by local elites. They were much less utopian in their vision as compared to the intellectuals in the Rural Reconstruction Movement. The pragmatic dimension of this experiment had contributed greatly to Wanxi’s rural reconstruction work.
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Introduction

Wanxi

Wanxi is located in the southwestern part of Nanyang City of Henan Province, China. It consists of several counties, such as Zhenping, Neixiang, Xichuan, Deng, and Xixia. Because Nanyang was known as “Wan” in the ancient time, the local residents call these counties “Wanxi”—“the west of Nanyang”.

Wanxi is a place where three provinces—Henan, Hubei, and Shaanxi—meet. It is surrounded by mountains such as the Mountain Range Qinling and Dabie. In this region, although the number of cultivated land is very small, hills can be seen everywhere. Therefore, the local people call Wanxi “Seven mountains, one river, and minute land (qi shan yi shui liang fen tian)”. The traffic in this region is extremely poor. In the 1920s, Wanxi was about four hundred kilometers from Kaifeng, the capital city of Henan Province. It was far from the Beijing-Hankou and Lanzhou-Xuzhou trunk railways. Due to its closeness and lack of cultivated land, Wanxi was one of the most backward regions in Henan.

In those days, Wanxi was suffering from the persistent instability and abject poverty. Under such circumstances, bandits became extremely rampant and their frequent and brutal looting, kidnapping, and killing put the society of Wanxi into chaos. Unfortunately, the local governments of Wanxi were incapable and indifferent. Hence, they could not stop the disturbance caused by bandit gangs. To make things worse, some senior officials of the county governments even colluded with bandit chieftains. The worsening situation and the discontent with the local governments
motivated local elites of Wanxi, especially those who were educated and intelligent, to take the initiative to prevent the society from falling into the abyss of disorder.

The local elite painstakingly reorganized and trained traditional militias, and did their best to upgrade them into a well-organized, strictly disciplined, and combat-worthy local armed force, which was called mintuan, or commonly known as the people’s militia. Among them, Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang, Chen Shunde, and Ning Xigu made many contributions to build up mintuan. Peng was born in the Zhenping County and had served in General Feng Yuxiang’s army for a long period of time. Subsequently, he was promoted to a senior military position. Ning came from Deng County and was educated in the Whampoa Military Academy. He participated in the two Northern Expeditions in the 1920s and was a veteran soldier. Bie was a famous military strongman in Neixiang County and he had a powerful private army even before the local self-government of Wanxi. Chen was born in a noble family in the Xichuan County and was an active political figure in Nanyang. The four men created the new mintuan and began suppressing bandits. In 1930, Peng Yuting persuaded the other three leaders to incorporate their troops and establish a unified local self-government in Wanxi.

Peng Yuting was a “regionalist” and had one distinctive political idea, which

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1 General Feng had very good impression of Peng’s performance in his Northwest Army. Peng left the Army in 1927. Subsequently, he began his self-government work in Zhenping. Feng did not know much about Peng’s work. After 1930, Feng was defeated by Jiang Jieshi, and became a less significant figure in Chinese politics. It was impossible for Feng to give much more concrete assistance to the local self-government of Wanxi.

2 One of Chen’s forefathers did great work in suppressing Nian Rebellion—a collaboration army of Taiping Rebellion—and was awarded an honor banner from the imperial court.

3 In this thesis, the term of regionalist has two types. One is separatist, who advocates that the locality should be totally independent from the state. The other is not separatist, who just argues that the locality should enjoy more autonomous rights to develop the local society. Speaking generally, the second type
he called *reshaped sanminzhuyi* (the Three Principles of the People). In his mind, when the countryside was in chaos, and the central or provincial government was too weak to give help, the countryside should take its own action to solve serious problems that it was facing. In other words, in the chaotic time of the 1920s and 1930s, the *locality* should have full-fledged autonomy and became the vital player of stabilizing and developing the rural society. Meanwhile, the central government would *ideally* approve and support the full autonomy. If the central government would not like to grant autonomy to the locality, the latter could, as Peng advocated, seize power from the state. To him, this radical way of seizing power should not be viewed as “separatism”, because its goal was not to build a separatist regime, but to help the countryside to resume the social order in a critical time. The countryside had to do it on its own because there was no available official effort in improving the rural society. More interestingly, Peng defended himself painstakingly that his political solution was inspired by Sun Zhongshan’s idea, and declared that Sun’s ideal of promoting the full-fledged county-level self-government laid the solid foundation for his “regionalism”. Peng said that his regionalism and Sun’s *sanminzhuyi* shared the same spirit and the difference was just in the scope that they could be applied to. In his words, while *sanminzhuyi* was suitable for the whole China, his regionalism met needs of the locality at the county level.

Peng’s idea was regarded as the guiding principle of the local self-government of Wanxi. The leaders of the counties of Wanxi agreed with him unanimously. In the
region of Wanxi, gaining and maintaining the full autonomy was the prerequisite for promoting the local self-government and rural reconstruction work. In fact, from 1930, the Guomindang’s provincial government of Henan did not have any idea how to resume the official administration in Wanxi. The Guomindang’s county governments in Zhenping, Neixiang, and Xichuan were mere figureheads and all administrative affairs were controlled and manipulated by leaders of the local self-government. The situation was not changed until the Sino-Japanese war broke out, and especially after Bie Tingfang’s death in 1940. In the ten years between 1930 and 1940, the local self-government of Wanxi not only suppressed successfully the banditry, but also resisted the penetration of the Guomindang’s provincial government, relying on the powerful mintuan. In the meantime, the self-government of the counties of Wanxi contributed to developing the rural economy, improving the elementary education, and changing the general mood of society. As a result, in the 1930s, the local self-government of Wanxi was regarded as an important experiment in the Rural Reconstruction Movement (RRM).

“Why Wanxi?”: The Significance of Wanxi to Republican Chinese History

In the process of research, this study discovers that there are three attractive and significant features in the history of the local self-government in Wanxi: First, the relationship between Wanxi and the Guomindang’s provincial government of Henan; Second, the theory of local self-government proposed by Peng Yuting, which Peng called “a reshaped sanminzhuyi”; and finally, Wanxi’s rural reconstruction work.
First and foremost, the local self-government of Wanxi was a spontaneous response to chaos and poverty. Since the late Qing, Henan was greatly disturbed by banditry. Wanxi was one of the centers of banditry in the province. Local elites lost their confidence in the official administration and acted on their own to suppress the bandits. Their solution was to establish a local armed force (*mintuan*). In addition to organizing *mintuan*, these elites, encouraged by Peng Yuting, decided to promote local self-government in Wanxi and try to find a feasible way of improving local politics and developing local agriculture, industry, and education. In 1930, Peng initiated the Joint Defense Conference of Wanxi, in which local leaders suggested that they could integrate the *mintuan* into one group and launch the local self-government of Wanxi. Bie Tingfang was selected as the chief commander of *mintuan*, and Peng became the spiritual leader of Wanxi.

The local self-government of Wanxi can roughly be divided into two periods. The first period was from 1930 to 1933. Zhenping was the center of self-government and Peng was the leader. Peng was a man of thought. In the process of suppressing bandits, he found that banditry was just one of reasons that caused chaos in the countryside. If anyone wanted to change fundamentally the rural area, there must be a systematic plan of social development. To put the plan into practice, the countryside must have enough political power to promote a full-fledged self-government. Peng never believed that the central government or the provincial government would have any interest in developing a remote and poor region such as Wanxi. Furthermore, the county governments of Wanxi had neither the capability nor willingness to stabilize
and develop this region. The official administration in Wanxi was inefficient. If there was no official help at all, Wanxi must act on its own to solve the problem of instability and poverty. After the establishment of self-government of Zhenping, Peng resolutely cut the connection with Guomindang’s county government and even executed the county magistrate of Zhenping in public. Consequently, Zhenping and the provincial government were in open conflict.

In that time, General Liu Zhi was the chairman of Henan government. He was loyal to the central government and identified with the centralization of power. When he was appointed as the chairman of Henan, he swore to fulfill the state’s tight control over the grass-root society in this province. The radical action of Peng Yuting in Zhenping enraged Liu. In 1933, with the approval of the provincial government, one of local gentries of Zhenping, who was unhappy with Peng’s self-government policy, bribed Peng’s bodyguards and assassinated Peng. Consequently, the local self-government of Zhenping was stopped and the provincial government resumed its control over this county. After that, the center of self-government of Wanxi shifted to Neixiang County, and Bie Tingfang became the leader.

Peng’s tragic end taught Bie a valuable lesson. He changed the strategy and did his best to avoid direct conflict with the provincial government. First of all, Bie strengthen his control over the mintuan. Because of the mintuan, it was not easy for Liu Zhi to launch a military attack on Wanxi. Additionally, Bie employed all his social relations to move ingeniously in the provincial government. In Chapter 2, this thesis discusses in detail what Bie and his friends did. In just one decade, from 1930 to 1940,
Wanxi successfully resisted the provincial government’s effort of resuming the state power in this region. However, when Bie passed away in 1940, the local self-government of Wanxi came to an end.

This thesis tries to discuss the local self-government of Wanxi from the perspective of state-society relations. Generally speaking, in modern China, the relations between state and society are antagonistic. State always does its utmost to extend its power top-down, while the local society tries its best to avoid state control. The local self-government of Wanxi vividly illustrates this scenario. From the viewpoint of statist and centralist, what Peng and Bie did, without any doubt, was “reactionary” because they operated in contrary to the ruling party’s effort in creating a powerful and centralized modern state. The fact that Wanxi kept its semi-independent status for ten years was not good for the central government because it demonstrated Guomindang’s failure in modern state building.

Through detailed discussion, this thesis also hopes that we can objectively evaluate the local self-government of Wanxi. What this thesis argues is that the local self-government of Wanxi was not separatist in nature. The purpose of Peng and Bie was to, by the way of self-government, free Wanxi from chaos and poverty. Facing the persistent banditry and the incapability of the official administration, these local elite had no choice but to act on their own initiative to solve the serious social problems as soon as possible. The only way of suppressing bandits was to create a powerful local armed force. Hence, these elite promoted local self-government in Wanxi, and implemented a systematic plan of improving the rural society and putting it into actual
practice. They believed that their work could bring stability and prosperity to Wanxi, and in the long run, would be helpful for the state building.

Inspired by Elizabeth Remick’s book entitled *Building Local States: China during the Republican and Post-Mao Eras*, this thesis argues that we can understand the significance of Wanxi from the perspective of “local state building”. It suggests that there are two parallel processes in China’s modernization. One is guided by state, or the central government, which is known as the urban-centered modernization. The other is initiated by the local society. The defect of the state-led modernization is that the countryside plays a less important role in this process. To a large extent, the countryside was marginalized and thus many plans of rehabilitating the countryside failed in the republican period. Such failures made the local elites extremely disappointed. Motivated by regional sentiment and nationalism, they mobilized the resources in their hands and promoted a regional modernization in the region that they lived in. To achieve their goal, they needed to gain more autonomous power. At the first look, it seemed that they were building a local state. In fact, they were implementing those tasks that should be done by the official administration which had failed to do so. In this thesis, the term “local state building” emphasizes not on building a local state, but on the local’s effort in the implementation of the state’s task. Therefore, the term “state building” here, underscores the effort of how to improve the rural society.

Nevertheless, there is a problem: did the state endorse such action? In China, a country that has a long tradition of centralism, promoting full-fledged local
self-government is a “hot potato”. The state was highly suspicious of the local’s effort in promoting self-government, and the local society had no confidence in the state’s promise of granting more autonomous rights. This was exactly what happened in Wanxi. The provincial government of Henan always had a hostile attitude towards the local self-government of Wanxi. The chairman of the provincial government denounced that the local self-governments in Zhenping, Neixiang and Xichuan were “in name” and were just “separatist regimes”. In the meanwhile, the elites of Wanxi never thought that the Guomindang government would like to give a hand to Wanxi. In an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust, there was no mutual action between the provincial government and Wanxi. The local self-government of Wanxi was doomed to fail simply because the state power was much more powerful than the local society.

Leaders of Wanxi knew exactly that the local self-government faced a problem of legality. Peng, the theory-builder of Wanxi, did his best to justify his idea of regionalism at the local self-government of Wanxi. His regionalism was called “a reshaped sanminzhuyi”.

Secondly, the detailed discussion on Peng’s regionalism can be found in Chapter 3. The purpose of his “reshaped sanminzhuyi” was to bridge the official nationalism—Sun Zhongshan’s sanminzhuyi—and regionalism. Peng hoped that by doing so, the local self-government of Wanxi could avoid being accused of being a “separatist”. To some extent, Peng’s idea was convincing. For example, he argued that sanminzhuyi should be regionalized to meet the reality of the rural area. Also, the Chinese revolution was conducted at two levels. One was national, which needed
Sun’s sanminzhuyi as the guide. The other was regional or local. To promote a regional/local revolution, the leader should “reshape” sanminzhuyi. This “reshaped” sanminzhuyi kept the fundamental spirit of sanminzhuyi, which was to create a powerful and modernized China; meanwhile, it gave consideration to the local society’s interest and handled local affairs by pragmatic means.

This thesis argues that we can discuss Peng’s regionalism from the perspective of stratified nationalism. That is to say that the discourse of nationalism in modern China is not onefold but multifold. The discourse of nationalism can be understood nationally and regionally. In the national discourse, it stresses that modernization should be led by a powerful central government, and the local society should be integrated into national goals. When it comes to the state-society relations, the state must be dominant. In such context, the local society can enjoy autonomous right, but it must be given and supervised by the central government. Any discourse and activity that violates the principle will be denounced illegal or separatist. When nationalism is discoursed regionally, it emphasizes that the local society recognizes the authority of state and never claims independence. At the same time, the state should grant more autonomous rights to the local society and allow the local society to play a pivotal role in social development. In other words, state should promote full-fledged local self-government and stop interfering excessively in local affairs. Hence, we can say that Peng Yuting’s idea of local self-government was indeed an example of regionalized nationalism.

This thesis coins Peng’s way of illuminating his regionalism a “reshaping” of
sanminzhuyi. Peng claimed that his idea inherited the true spirit of Sun Zhongshan’s sanminzhuyi and could be applied to county-level society. The scope of sanminzhuyi was reshaped. The goal of Peng’s explanation was to defend that the local self-government of Wanxi was not anti-government and anti-nation. However, in realpolitik, Peng’s idea was not that powerful. The spontaneity of Wanxi self-government and the existence of mintuan decided that, no matter how attractive Peng’s idea appeared, it could not eliminate the provincial government’s hostility and suspicion.

The situation was embarrassing. Both the state and the local society alleged that they had legality. From the state perspective, we understand that nobody can ensure that the local self-government initiated by local elites, especially by those who have local armed forces, will not become separatist. The armed local self-government was a genuine threat to the state because it violates the basic law of modern state that the armed force should be monopolized by the state. From the perspective of the rural society, under the circumstance that the state cannot give enough support, promoting a full-fledged self-government to facilitate rural reconstruction work is not an evil thing. Nevertheless, in the context of modern China in which the state discourse of nationalism is hegemonic, the ideas of regionalist, or the adapted discourse from the state nationalism, are not welcomed. The appeal for political rights by the local society is therefore neglected.

Thirdly, the local self-government of Wanxi was not only a political event, but it was also an important rural reconstruction experiment. In 1929, Peng Yuting
established a Rural Self-government Institute in a small town of Henan. He invited some influential figures in RRM, including Liang Shuming, the most important theory-builder of RRM, to teach and study rural problems in this Institute. After several months, the provincial government shut down the Institute. Peng returned to Zhenping and began his rural reconstruction work, which included the reshuffling of the grass-root administrative organ, developing the local economy, universalizing the primary education, and so on. The details of these works can be found in Chapter 4.

Among thousands of RRM experiments in the 1930s, the Wanxi experiment had two distinct features that could be regarded as “military” and “pragmatic”. We can therefore argue that without the mintuan, there was no genuine rural reconstruction experiment of Wanxi. On one hand, to promote rural reconstruction in Wanxi, there must be social stability. To achieve this, the self-government must depend on mintuan, which could rapidly eliminate the bandits and maintain social order. On the other hand, to promote rural reconstruction, there must be local self-government in Wanxi. Whether the local self-government could exist and develop depended very much on the local armed force. For this reason, the mintuan was a good administrative tool in mobilizing the rural residents because it was both a military organization and a civil administrative organ.

Rural reconstruction work of Wanxi was more pragmatic when it was compared with other experiments, especially those led by the intellectuals. Experiment such as Liang Shuming’s Zouping project came from an abstract cultural theory, and its goal was to create a utopia in the countryside. Contrastingly, Wanxi had no profound
theory and its purpose was very simple—to give the peasants a peaceful and prosperous life. Motivated by the passion of saving the nation and countryside, intellectuals such as Liang join the RRM. However, in the eyes of the peasants, they were just kind-hearted outsiders. Peasants had no enthusiasm in their plans. In fact, Liang Shuming was very annoyed at this. Nevertheless, the situation was totally different in Wanxi. The leaders of Wanxi were born and grew up in this region. They were very familiar with the reality of the countryside and worked out many feasible programs that won the support of the rural residents.

The rural reconstruction work of Wanxi was multi-dimensional. Militarily, the local armed force played a pivotal role in its work. Politically, the local self-government was its premises. Socially, it had an overall plan of improving rural society. Therefore, this thesis coins Wanxi’s rural reconstruction as “developmental regionalism”. That is to say that the practice of Wanxi provided an answer to how to systematically improve the countryside. It also implied that anyone who wants to solve rural problems in China should, first of all, arouse the countryside’s enthusiasm and increase its participation in the politics. In other words, giving the countryside financial and educational help is insufficient and the most important thing is that the state should appropriately retreat from the countryside and make available more political spaces. This would then allow the countryside to find the solution to rural problems on its own.

Lastly, this thesis attempts to contribute to the present scholarship in the following ways: First, this thesis is the so far the most detailed, complete, and
systematic study on the local self-government of Wanxi in Western-language scholarship. Previously, only a small handful of scholars very briefly studied about Wanxi; Second, the paradigm of “local state building” may be helpful for us to understand the spontaneous local self-government in modern China; Third, the discussion on Peng Yuting’s regionalism reveals that the discourse of nationalism was different in the state and the rural society perspective; and finally, to make the military and political dimension of Wanxi distinct in RRM, this thesis sheds some light on why most of the RRM experiments in 1930s did not achieve much satisfying results.

**Literature Review**

Because it happened in a remote region and its leaders were not celebrities of that time, only a handful of Chinese and Western scholars have discussed the local self-government of Wanxi. In his prize-winning book devoted to Liang Shuming - the most influential thinker of RRM - Guy Alitto examines Peng Yuting and the Academy of Village Self-government of Henan set up by him. He argues that the reason behind Peng’s promotion of the rural reconstruction work in Wanxi was that some bandits disrupted his mother’s funeral. After the incident, he made a resolution to suppress the banditry and restore the social order in his hometown. In the process of suppressing bandits, Peng realized that the banditry was just one of the serious rural problems. If he wanted to settle these problems once and for all, he needed a more systematic plan.

With the help of Feng Yuxiang and Han Fuqu, the Governor of Henan, Peng set up the

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Academy, in which the rural reconstruction activists could conduct some research work. Alitto also notices that the self-government led by Peng had powerful militias and refused to pay exorbitant taxes and levies imposed by the provincial government. Finally, the conflicts between the self-government and provincial government led to Peng’s assassination in 1933.

In one of the chapters in *The Cambridge History of China*, Philip Kuhn made a very brief discussion of Wanxi. He categorizes Wanxi as one of cases of the military-type rural reconstruction experiment. Kuhn argues that the local self-government of Wanxi evolved from the militia organization—*mintuan*. He points out that the movement led by Peng Yuting “was, by force of circumstance, anti-government.” Kuhn also explains that if Peng wanted to promote his rural reconstruction experiment in Wanxi, he had no alternative but to prevent the official army and local officials from undermining his plan. But Peng’s way was in diametrical opposition to the ruling party’s efforts of tightening the control over the local society. Consequently, it was impossible for the rural self-government proposed by Peng Yuting to last long.

Zhang Xin’s book, *Social Transformation in Modern China: The State and Local Elites in Henan, 1900-1937*, focuses on the relationship between the state and the local elite. Zhang chooses the northern and southwestern Henan as the two cases

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8 Ibid, p. 359.
in his discussion - the southwestern Henan refers to Wanxi in this book. Zhang contends that unlike the West, the modernization of China commenced from the individuals$^9$. That is to say, the changes of local elites brought about deep changes in the state-societal relation, and such the change initiated the Chinese modernization. In this process, each different region took on a different look. When it comes to Henan, the northern part was one of cores of the province and the changes of local elites led up to a closer cooperation of the state and the society. One the contrary, the southwestern Henan was an outer zone, where one of the results of the changes of local elite was the antithesis between the state and the society. Besides Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang, Chen Shunde, and Ning Xigu, are also mentioned in this book. Thus, when compared with Alitto and Kuhn’s writings, Zhang’s work is relatively more thorough in his discussion on Wanxi.

Shen Songqiao, a Taiwanese scholar, produces a lengthy thesis on the local self-government of Wanxi. He points out that, from the mid 19th century, the local elites in Henan took organizing the local armed force as the method in gaining and maintaining power in the countryside. Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang, and Chen Shunde were some of such typical cases. Depending on the powerful local militias, they toppled down the Guomindang’s rule in Wanxi. In the 1930s, the Central Government in Nanjing tried its best to build an effective top-down social control. As a result, the conflict of Wanxi and the Guomindang’s provincial government of Henan could not be avoided. Shen argues that, the local elites of Wanxi illegally seized the political

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power from the state. As such, the local self-government that they established paralyzed the Guomindang’s official administration. The power of social control, which should be monopolized by the state, was transferred violently into the hands of these local military leaders. From this point of view, Shen’s work draws a conclusion that the local self-government of Wanxi was just a case of “the mode of monopolizing the local political power by the ‘local bullies and evil gentry’ in the Republican period”\(^\text{10}\).

There is a common feature in these studies: all of them discuss the local self-government of Wanxi from the angle of the state-societal relation. Scholars argue that Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang and Chen Shunde stood on the opposite side of the state, and what they did was a reaction to the central government’s effort in extending state power. To conceptualize Wanxi using the state-societal paradigm is very helpful in understanding the political dimension of the local self-government. Correspondingly, the study of Wanxi will also illustrate the complexity of the state building in the Republican period\(^\text{11}\). Based on the history of Wanxi, Zhang Xin concludes that, in the period, the state building had both the vertical complexity—it manifested in the top-down power extension of the central government and the bottom-up penetration from the locality—and the horizontal complexity, which could be seen in an individual province. For example, in Henan alone, the outer and center


\(^{11}\) “State building” in the thesis has two meanings. When it is in the context of central-local relation, it refers to how to build a powerful central government. When it is the context of rural construction, it is about how to develop the local society.
zone exerted totally different influence on the state-building efforts of the Guomindang’s provincial government.  

Nevertheless, these studies neglected the significance of Wanxi in relations to the RRM. Although Alitto briefly mentioned Peng Yuting in his book, we cannot find details of the rural reconstruction that Peng initiated in Wanxi. Similarly, it is impossible for us to obtain more information of Wanxi’s rural reconstruction work in Kuhn’s rough sketch of the local self-government of Wanxi. Zhang Xin points out that the local self-government of Wanxi had a close relationship with the Academy of the Village Self-government of Henan, and argues that it was one of the outcomes of the RRM. However, there is no further discussion on the topic in his book. In Shen Songqiao’s thesis, the author did not attempt to take Wanxi as a rural reconstruction experiment at all.

Currently, there is only one book that concentrates on the rural reconstruction work of Wanxi. Xu Youli argues that the nature of the local self-government of Wanxi was a spontaneous rural reconstruction experiment led by the local elites. The experiment had two distinctive characteristics. One was that the self-defense work, or the existence of mintuan, was the premise of the self-government. The other was the “inwardness” of the experiment. Xu asserts that the two characteristics could not be found in the rural reconstruction experiments conducted by the intellectuals. Therefore, the practice of Wanxi was a “unique” style of rural reconstruction.

12 Xin Zhang, Social Transformation in Modern China, p. 275.
13 Ibid, p. 137.
experiment in the 1930s\textsuperscript{15}.

**Theoretical Paradigms: “Local state building”, “Developmental regionalism”, and Nationalism**

1) Modern state building was the most important content of the political history of modern China. Nevertheless, by examining the history of modern China, we find that the ideal power-centralized state, in which the central government firmly controlled the locality and the state power penetrated top-down without hindrance, was not established in the Republican period. In fact, the state building in this period was only partly successful. The central government controlled some provinces, but its penetration into the rural society was not satisfying, while at the same time, some regions were controlled by regionalists and maintained a semi-independent status. Usually, regions, such as Wanxi, got out of the state’s control were blamed and despised as separatist regimes. However, this thesis hopes to present a more objective discussion on it, and tries to show that this dissociated region did do some good works on developing the local society and what they did should be regarded as one part of the modern state building. Here, this thesis employs the idea of “local state building”.

This idea is inspired by Elizabeth Remick\textsuperscript{16}. In her book, *Building Local States: China during the Republican and Post-Mao Eras*, state can be divided into many parts. From a functional viewpoint, a state has different departments, such as ministries, bureaus, committees, and so on. Territorially, there are different localities, like

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\text{\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, p. 205.}\]
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\text{\textsuperscript{16} Elizabeth J. Remick, *Building Local States: China During the Republican and Post-Mao Eras* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004).}\]
provinces, municipalities, and counties, in a state. To the central government, all these parts—departments and localities—have specific independence, and they are “more or less controlled by the center, depending on the circumstances.”

In the ideal top-down power structure, localities are the weak “outer”, and are put under the firm control of the center and molded by the central policies and ideology. However, the situation in the Republican period was startlingly contrary to it. Because of the weakness and inefficiency of the central government, the locality became very active.

The activeness of the locality brought about two kinds of local state building. The first was the “local state” building, which had the goal of building a “local state”, which was independent from the central government. It was a separatist movement. The second was the local “state building”, which meant that when the central government was too weak to develop the local (rural) society, the locality could take action to renovate itself. The goal of local “state building” was not to build a separatist regime, but to finish the work that could not be done by the state. To let the locality take the initiative to stabilize and develop the countryside would be very helpful for national modernization. The best circumstance would be that the central government was open and liberal enough to give the locality the power and freedom to perform the local state building. Conversely, if the state did not want to do it, the locality could try its best to gain autonomy. The local state building has the legitimacy. The locality, especially county, was closer to the people than the central or provincial government was. To develop the rural society, the county should be the vital player. What it did

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17 Ibid, p. 5.
would be much better than the more bureaucratic program proposed by the central and provincial government, because the latter often did not know much about the reality in the countryside. That is why Elizabeth Remick argues “in the short run, local state building reduced central capacity, but it also created the potential basis for a stronger central state in the longer term.”

In modern China, the pursuing of modernity and the development of nationalism gave an impetus to the local state building. In the Republican period, modernism—or the ideal of achieving modernity/modernization—replaced Confucianism as the guiding ideology. The modern Chinese nationalism came into being in this trend. Not only the national elite but also the local elite welcomed political ideas of modernity/modernization and nationalism. The discourse of the local elite was that the national modernization was predicated on the regional modernization; nationalism should be regionalized and answer the question that how to save and develop the local (rural) society. Elizabeth Remick argues that such the discourse was a “borrowed” nationalism. In this thesis, the “reshaped sanminzhuyi”, or the political idea of Peng Yuting, was one case of the “borrowed” nationalism.

In the Republican period, the reformulating of nation-state, nationalism, and modernization was very common. Nevertheless, if we discuss them from the viewpoint of local state building, what the “borrowers”—enlightened local leaders like Li Zongren and Yan Xishan, or capable local elite like Peng Yuting—did was not a bad thing for the state. Yan established a powerful rule in Shanxi and created a

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18 Ibid, p. 257.
19 Ibid, pp. 35-6.
20 Ibid, p. 18.
relatively stable social environment for the economic development. Thomas Rawski asserts that the rapid economic development of Shanxi in the 1950s should be partly attributed to Yan’s work in the 1920s and 1930s. One study on Chen Jitang, one of powerful militarists in Guangdong, shows that he did good works on improving infrastructure and maintaining the social order in this province.

In a smaller local society, like a county, there was also the local state building. In the Republican period, because of its limited capability, the state could not perform well in developing the countryside. The solution was that the work of developing the rural society should be turned over to the locality (county). The goal of this thesis is to show that in Wanxi, when the Guomindang’s provincial government could not give enough and effective help to these poor and chaotic counties, local elites could, by the way of local self-government, accomplished in suppressing bandits, developing local economy, improving rural education, and so forth.

2) This thesis argues that the local self-government of Wanxi was a practice of “developmental regionalism”. “Developmental regionalism” is originally an economic term. It means that in the case of China, the locality should play the pivotal role in the economic development. According to this theory, both central and local governments take economic development as the prime goal. When it comes to economic development, it is the local government, not the central government that is

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the main player in developing local economy. When there is a dispute over the important political or economic matter between the central and local government, they should settle it through discussion and cooperation and try their best to ensure that economic development will not be affected. This thesis extends the idea of “developmental regionalism” into a comprehensive program of how to develop the local society.

The word “developmental” has special meaning in this thesis. It emphasizes on “response”. At the local level, the meaning of “developmental” means that within China, the local elite responds to the instability and poverty in the region they live in. Their response is to promote the regional modernization. In this thesis, it refers in particular to the program of developing the rural society, which was worked out by local elite under the circumstance that the central or provincial government was incapable to stabilize and develop the countryside. Because the goal of such program was not to build a separatist local regime but to provide a solution to rural problems, this thesis calls it “local state building”.

The developmental regionalism involves the power configuration between the center and the locality. It implies that the central government should give more political rights to the locality and allow the locality to select its own way of development. However, in the Nanjing decade, it was difficult for the central authorities to do that because the main work of Guomindang was to strengthen the central government’s power. Therefore, the ruling party was extremely cautious in their promotion of the local self-government. Meanwhile, the countryside was in
crisis. The central government’s attempt to improve the rural society was poor. Many intellectuals and local elites were disappointment with the Guomindang\(^{24}\). To the local population, they felt resentful towards the central government in their effort to extend the state power by the way of bureaucratizing the grass-root administration, which did nothing to improve the countryside, but rather increased greatly the peasant’s burden. The tension between the center and the locality was not alleviated but intensified. Under such circumstances, some radical local elites, such as Peng Yuting and Bie Tingfang in Wanxi, advocated that the locality should strive positively for the autonomy without which the rural reconstruction work could not be done. By organizing the powerful local armed force and political tactics, the local elite of Wanxi successfully drove the Guomindang out of the region and maintained a long period of semi-independence. To some extent, this could be easily despised as “separatist”. Thus, to legitimize its action, Peng Yuting claimed that what was done was based on the mainstream nationalism: Sun Zhongshan’s sanminzhuyi.

3) In this thesis, “nationalism” has twofold meanings. Firstly, it refers to a political idea or an ideology. In the modern time, when China fell into the state of political crisis, some national elite, such as Sun Zhongshan, presented ideas of how to handle the crisis and build a powerful modern state. Subsequently, these ideas were systematized and turned into an official nationalism, such as Sun’s Three People’s Principles. Secondly, as one scholar argues, nationalism is one of responses of a

\(^{24}\) See: Luo Zhitian, Luanshi qianliu: minzu zhuyi yu minguo zhengzhi (Underflow in the Chaotic Time: Nationalism and Politics in the Republican China) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), p. 156.
nation to the political and economic situation in a specific time\textsuperscript{25}. In the context of modern China, the response was the question of how to create a powerful and modernized nation-state. Sun Zhongshan’s \textit{sanminzhuyi} was one of representations to such response and was recognized nationwide. The local elite responded also to the crisis. They argued that the local society was seriously affected by the political, economic and cultural change, and the locality, with the premise of identifying the national unification and the authority of the central government, should act on its own initiative to develop. In this thesis, the local response refers in particular to the local elite’s response to the rural crisis. The theorized representation of such kind of response, such as Peng Yuting’s regionalism, is known as the regional nationalism.

We can regard the regional nationalism as the “reshaping” of the official nationalism. In the case of Wanxi, Peng declared that his regionalism had the same spirit as \textit{sanminzhuyi}. \textit{Sanminzhuyi} - the official nationalism - was the prime principle for how to build a powerful nation-state. Peng’s regionalism, as one type of regional nationalism, was a feasible solution to the problems in a small rural society, like the counties of Wanxi. By the regionalized nationalism, Peng attempted to justify the local self-government of Wanxi.

**Methodology**

The primary sources of this thesis are obtained from the reports and documents edited by the self-government of Zhenping, Neixiang, and Xichuan in the 1930s.

Besides these sources, it also utilized the *Wenshiziliao* (the cultural and historical accounts) edited by the CPPCC of Henan and its branches in the counties of Wanxi. Also, this thesis depended on some memoirs written by people who experienced the local self-government of Wanxi.

In 2005, I conducted three months of fieldwork in Wanxi. During this period, I visited the archives and county records office of the counties of Wanxi, and discussed the history of Wanxi with some local scholars. By utilizing the primary sources and the data from the fieldwork conducted, this thesis attempts to present an accurate narrative and analysis of the local self-government of Wanxi.

**Chapter Overview**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 draws the historical background and sets the context for this study. Chapter 2 discusses how the local elite of Wanxi built the powerful local armed force—*mintuan*, and illustrates how they resisted the penetration of the Guomindang’s provincial government. *Mintuan* played the decisive role in the establishment and development of the local self-government of Wanxi. Therefore, this thesis calls Wanxi *junxian*, or the militarized county. Chapter 3 introduces Peng Yuting’s political idea—the “reshaped sanminzhuyi”. Finally, Chapter 4 presents a panoramic view of Wanxi’s rural reconstruction work.
Chapter 1 – Setting the Context

This thesis attempts to incorporate contributions of past scholarship and present a panoramic study of the local self-government of Wanxi. Its history will be put into the context of the state-societal relations and the rural reconstruction. Before embarking on the discussion of Wanxi, it is helpful for us to have a look at the historical background. From the late Qing to the Nanjing decade, there was a conspicuous trend: while the state was weakening and the local society became increasingly active.

1) Weakening State, Active Locality

Max Weber has argued that the modern state has two distinguishing features – territoriality and violence. A modern state should have the “capability of monopolizing the legitimate use of violence within a given territory.”\(^{26}\) That is to say, the monopoly of military force is the most important guarantee for the existence of a state, and it is also the foundation of the state’s authority. A powerful central government is bound to control all the military resources in the society and employ it as the foundation of its rule. On the contrary, if one central government cannot maintain the monopoly of the military resources, the political order will be in danger and the authority of the state will be likely to face serious challenges. This happened in the mid 19\(^{th}\) century in China. Hence, the weakening of the central government of China could be traced back to this period.

Philip Kuhn argues that the turning point of Chinese history was the Taiping Rebellion. This is because, in this rebellion, the Qing central government lost its control of military power. Before the Taiping Rebellion, the political accommodation of the court and the local elite generated the stability and continuity of Chinese politics, and the state-societal conflicts could be settled at the lowest price. The local elite played an important role in reestablishing the traditional state power. However, this was fundamentally changed in the late Qing period. In the process of putting down the Taiping Rebellion, it was the local elite, but not the state, that became the vital player. With the help of the local elite, the court survived the crisis. During and after the Rebellion, the power of the local elite was expanded at the expense of the central government. The official grass-root administrative organ was replaced gradually by the local militia organizations, like “tuan-lian”, which had multiple—military, political and economic—functions. The local armed force established by those influential local elites was much more powerful than the official army controlled by the imperial government. The military resources that should be monopolized by the state had been usurped by the locality. Consequently, the political and administrative power was gradually dominated by the local elites. These changes became the basic characteristic of the rural society from the late Qing to the early 1920s. Kuhn asserts that what happened in the period of Taiping demonstrates the traditional Chinese society would never again “be reestablished on the old pattern.”27 Subsequently, a new period of Chinese history—“the modern history”—commenced.

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The new history was a history of power struggle between the state and the locality. Any central government of China, even as weak as the declining court of the late Qing, did its best to obtain and monopolize all kinds of power resources and put the locality under its firm control. The local elite, at the same time, spared no effort to extract power resources and demand more autonomy. Their actions embodied two fundamentally different ways of social development. The antithesis, conflicts, and accommodations of the two ways generated the changes and instabilities of modern China. The basic changes that caused by the Taiping Rebellion signified that the traditional political model of “dayitong” (the Grand Unification) had not been adaptable to the changing situation. Under such circumstances, there were two possible paths. One was the possibility of China to retain its authoritarian tradition and form a modernized and highly power-centralized national government. Under the leadership of the central government, China struggled for the accomplishment of modernization. The other path was that China would give up the model of centralization of state power and entrust more autonomy to the locality. It would be a bottom-up way of modernization.

The two models each had its own supporters. From the late Qing, the central government in every historical period, which was the prime representative of the state, stressed the centralization of state power and the central government’s overwhelming superiority to the locality. In the centralist’s eyes, the most urgent task for China was to establish a powerful and centralized government and take it as the vital player in the social development. The locality could enjoy autonomy, but the autonomy must be
given by the central government and its practice must be supervised and regulated by the state. On the contrary, people who advocated for the decentralization of state power demanded a true and full autonomy for the locality. In their arguments, the best way of decentralization in China was to promote the full-fledged local self-government.

By the mid 19th century, especially after the Taiping Rebellion, China was undergoing a period of deep changes and the traditional politics was coming to end. The imperial court’s capability of controlling and administering the local society fell short of its wishes. As a response to the political weaknesses, some influential gentry advocated that the court should release the energy of the local society through the “institutional” change. Feng Guifen was one of such advocators of change. He maintained that either hezhi (the power-centralized model) or fenzhi (the power-decentralized model) could be applied to China. If the model of fenzhi was employed, the traditional institution of xiangguan (head of village or villages) could be reformed and applied to the grass-root social administration. In his plan, xiangguan would be elected by the local residents and be approved by the court. The court would grant the xiangguan an official title and salary. The function of the new xiangguan system was to cooperate with the official grass-root administrative organs.28

When China had more contacts with the West, some eminent intellectuals believed that the Western parliamentary politics could be adopted in China. Chen Qiu, Chen Chi, He Qi, and Hu Liheng argued that a top-down (province to county)

parliament system would be helpful for China to improve its local politics. Zhen Guanying suggested that the court should set up *yishenzhiju* (the legislative bureau formed by local gentry), which would become the administrative center in the grass-root society. In 1895, Huang Zunxian, the Counselor of the Embassy of China in Japan, published the *Ribenguo zhi* (The State of Japan), in which he introduced in detail the local assembly system of Japan established after the Meiji Reformation. The book exerted a great amount of influence over the Chinese intellectuals.

After the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, the crushing defeat of China greatly shocked both the Chinese intellectuals and politicians. Reformists, such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Yan Fu, appealed loudly to the public that if the country could not completely reform its politics, China would face the danger of destruction. Judging from the foreign experiences, they argued that the division of power created powerful states in the West and Japan. For China, it had no other choices but to follow the same way. The reformists raised the flag of local self-government and firmly believed that the local assemblies could improve the efficiency of the local administration. Tan Sitong, a famous reform activist in Hunan Province, argued that the Western style assembly should be replaced by *xuehui* (the Learning Society), which had more Chinese characteristics and was more easily for the local people to

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accustom. Yan Fu, the leading disseminator of the Western knowledge of social science, profoundly pointed out that whether the people had the spirit and capability of self-government would determine the strength and weakness of a country. In 1898, the reformists led *bairiweixin* (the Hundred Days’ Reform) in Beijing and tried to put their political ideas into practice. Unfortunately, the conservatives in the imperial courts ruined the reform very quickly.

The tragic end of the Hundred Days’ Reform enraged the Chinese population who were concerned with the country’s future, and felt more discontent with the dictatorial imperial system. The idea of local self-government developed into a political trend and became the most popular political slogan of the period. In the early days of the twentieth century, books, magazines, and people that propagated the local self-government were emerging in large numbers. Facing these challenges, the Manchu dynasty, though it had stepped into the last days, had to respond. The court admitted that it was incapable to administer effectively the local society, and intended to adopt the Western style of local self-government that advocated by the reformists to strengthen the control over the grass-root society. At the same time, the court hoped that such the kind of local self-government would be placed under the supervision of the imperial court. The solution of the court, which could be described as a *controlled* local self-government, was an answer to the most difficult question that China was

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33 *Yan Fu shiwen xuan* (Essays and Poems of Yan Fu) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1959), p. 78.

facing in the modern period. The question as what Mary Rankin has pointed out was: "How could unity and local self-government be combined?"  

The Qing central government began promoting *xinzheng* (the New Policy), in which the court hoped through the reform of central and local administration, not only the power of the state could be increased, but also the local politics would be improved. Based on the model of Japanese system of local self-government  

36, the Emperor issued the imperial edict of establishing *Ziyiju* (the provincial council) in 1907, the regulations of the self-government of city, town, and sub-county in 1908, and the regulations of the self-government of prefecture and county in 1909. As one scholar says, the nucleus of the imperial plan was “the incorporation of *guanzhi* (official-government) and *zizhi* (self-government)”  

37. For example, in the self-government of prefecture and county, the head of the prefecture and county was the top official of the grass-root government as well as the leader of the local council. As the governmental official, he was appointed by the central government and his duty was to communicate and implement the instructions of the state. As the local leader, he was “elected” by the local people and had the duty of dealing with the local affairs.

It was a model of power configuration, which emphasized that the official

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government and self-government should be incorporated, and the official government would play the leading role. It was approved by not only the Manchu court but also the central governments after the collapse of Qing. The plan was aimed at the way of the controlled local self-government, the energy of the locality could be released and the locality would serve the national goal. The goal of mobilizing the locality by the local self-government was not to give it full autonomy, but to more effectively incorporate the locality into the state political system. However, any central government would find that it having to face a dilemma: if only the central government began promoting the local self-government, the locality would ask for even more autonomy. It was very difficult for the state to satisfy the locality’s desire for autonomy. From the late Qing to the Nanjing decade, which is commonly known as the period of the modern state building in China, how to achieve the controlled local self-government—in which the central authorities could simultaneously mobilize and control the locality—became the key problem of Chinese politics.

Although the efforts of the Manchu court were wrecked by the Revolution of 1911, the policies that it adopted influenced greatly the state-societal relation in the following decades. Some scholars argue that these new policies changed the traditional situation of “strong state, weak society”. Such change resulted in the power of social control to erode from the center, and it implied that the locality could obtain more autonomy. In other words, the central government was continuously

weakening and the power of the locality was constantly increasing. The Revolution of 1911 accelerated this trend. Thus, in China, the modern state building which was characterized by the centralization of power became more and more difficult. Mary Rankin even calls the heritage of the revolution of 1911 one barrier of the modern state building of China⁴⁰.

Since the collapse of Qing, China faced more serious political and economic penetration from the foreign powers. The country was still too weak to change the situation. To add, the illusions aroused by the Revolution were crushed by the miserable reality. How could the country survive? Many people believed that the only feasible way of saving China was to create a powerful, centralized, and efficient central government. The startling discrepancy of the ideal and the reality forced people to admit that maintaining the unification and establishing a powerful central government were much more important for China. This vision was shared among the majority of Chinese people and became a powerful public opinion⁴¹. In that time, politicians that had the capability to form and control the central government believed firmly that, in the era of uncertainty, what China needed was a highly centralized government, which could perform top-down administration and control effectively regional political organizations. Only by the powerful central government, the

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⁴⁰ Mary Backus Rankin, “State and Society in Early Republican Politics, 1912-18”, in Reappraising Republican China, p. 9.
national modernization could be promoted and fulfilled. If China failed in creating such a central government, the uncontrolled increase of the power of the locality would break up the country. However, the reality was embarrassing. From the late Qing, the locality began gaining more and more autonomy. The demise of the monarchy gave the locality more opportunities to seize power. After the Revolution of 1911, the expansion of the locality’s power was undoubtedly conspicuous. In different regions and by different ways, the ambitious local elite did their best to strengthen their own political dominance, and what they did totally changed the traditional central-local power configuration.

Yuan Shikai was the most influential politician in the post-revolution period. According to Ernest Young’s study⁴², Yuan well understood what the China’s problems were and what it needed most in the age of imperialism: to resist the pressures from the foreign powers and to promote the national modernization. Yuan believed that China must establish a powerful and centralized government. However, his practice was not successful. Ernest Young criticizes Yuan Shikai’s idea of centralization for being too narrow—he only paid attention to the extension of the central bureaucratic administration, but neglected the strong regionalism that the powerful local elite cherished. To make things worse, the military way of suppressing the locality threatened the interests of the local elite and provoked their resistance⁴³.

In Shandong, Yuan promoted his plan of local self-government which was similar to

the Manchu’s reform. Yuan hoped that by bureaucratizing the county and sub-county administration, the grass-root society could be incorporated into the central government. Meanwhile, Yuan, by the way of coercion, tried to prevent the local elite of Shandong from seizing the state power. Nevertheless, because of many reasons especially the lack of funds, his plan ended up as a failure.44

The basic reason for Yuan’s failure was that he emphasized on only the top-down control over the locality but had no plan of how to mobilize the locality. Yuan was suspicious and hostile towards the mobilization of the locality, and was afraid that the mobilization would threaten the authority of the central government. In the early 1910s, there were numerous city and town councils in China. In 1914, Yuan issued an order and dismissed all the provincial and sub-provincial councils.45 The action infuriated the local elite. Yuan’s way of building the modern state by resuming the monarchy was incompatible with the public opinions. In the days that the Emperor was just thrown out of the Forbidden City, the resurrected monarchy could do nothing helpful for Yuan’s career, but bring about a shameful failure. In 1916, Yuan Shikai was dethroned and passed away very soon. The death of Yuan marked the beginning of a more disastrous and chaotic time for China.

In the Republican period, the most dangerous challenge before China was the development of the local militarization. In 1912, excluding some frontier provinces, there were twelve dudu—the military provincial governor, who was also in charge of the civil administration—in the seventeenth provinces. The existence and

44 Mary Backus Rankin, “State and Society in Early Republican Politics, 1912-18”, ibid, p. 11.
development of the local armed force helped these local military strongmen to resist Yuan’s effort of creating a powerful central government. In fact, even in the peak days of Yuan, he could only appoint directly the senior officials in a few provinces\textsuperscript{46}, such as Zhili (Hebei), Henan, and Shandong. After Yuan’s regime collapsed, the local militarism developed into the military separatism.

In his classic study, Philip Kuhn demonstrates that the local militarization commenced in the period of the Taiping Rebellion. When the rebellion broke out, the official army of the Qing government could not meet the challenge of the peasant army. The imperial court had to request the locality to organize and train the local troop to fight against the rebels. The central government sent back some senior civil officials their hometown to recruit troop, and required that they should do theirs best to keep these new armies to be loyal to the Emperor. The \textit{xiangjun} (the Army of Hunan Province) organized by Zeng Guofan, an eminent gentry-official of the court, was the paragon of these local troops. In the army, there was a high level of loyalty among the officers and his inferiorities. The soldier was loyal to the commander, who was from the same hometown, but not to the Manchu emperor in the faraway capital city. Because the central government could not finance these armies, it consented tacitly to allow the military leader to tax the locality. Therefore, besides the armed force, these local leaders also controlled the local finance. Depending on the military and economic resources, these strongmen gradually dominated the local civil administration. The force that could check the trend came from a powerful central

government or a powerful state head. However, in China, the Manchu government was too weak to stop the development of the local militarism, and lost it political power in the Revolution of 1911. Although Yuan Shikai was became the most powerful and authoritarian leader of China, he also missed the opportunity of nipping the potential separatist military strongmen in the bud as a result of his wrong strategy. After Yuan passed away, China’s politics entered period of a vast power vacuum, in which any one, which controlled a powerful private army could show ostentatiously in the political stage47.

The change of local elite was indispensable for the development of the local militarization. They promoted each other and accelerated the separation of the locality and the central government. The local elite—in the rural area, the name of gentry was more appropriate—played an important role in the social development of China. During the Qing period, the central government could exercise its power at the county-level administration. If it wanted to go down further, the central government must rely on the local elite. Since the mid 19th century, the imperial court became weaker and the local elite became increasingly active. In the early studies, the gentry were defined as people in the countryside, who had passed a certain level of the civil examination and was entitled48. They were recognized by both the government and the public, and went round between the official grass-root administration and the local

residents.49

It was too narrow to define the elite in the late Qing and Republican period. At that time, the way of becoming elite had been diversified. When the civil examination system was abolished, the scholar honor or the official rank was not the prerequisite of being elite and some scholars employed a broader definition. The so-called “elite” refers to any person or family that had the dominant influence in a given territory50. If one person wanted to be elite, he must extract and maintain the following resources: the “material”, such as land, commercial wealth, and military power; the “personal”, like the leadership in a region; and the “symbolic”, such as honor and social status51. Among them, extracting the military resource was the most effective way of becoming elite. In view of this, the so-called local militarization was tantamount to the militarization of local elite. When the militarized local elite incorporated with the separatist regionalism, the politics of China was seriously changed.

The “regionalism” is not a new word in Chinese politics. In China, there are distinctions among provinces and territories inside one province. People of different regions have their particular personality and way of thinking. Generally speaking, politicians and the local elite from a specific region have strong regional sentiments52. The regional sentiment can develop naturally into regionalism. In this thesis, the regionalism is a neutral political term. It refers to the politicians and the local elite

51 Ibid, p. 11.
who have the concerns—it is based on the regional sentiments—on the interest of the locality. This thesis argues there are two kinds of regionalism. The first One is “the regionalism with political ideal”.

In the Republican period, the regionalism with political ideal argued that because a powerful, fair-minded, and efficient central government could not be created very soon, the national and local modernization was affected seriously. Under such circumstances, the locality could, under the lead of the capable local elite, carry out the works that the state was unable to perform, such as stabilizing the rural society, developing the rural economy and improving the rural education. What the locality did would be helpful for the national modernization. To help the locality to promote these works, the central authorities should approve of the locality’s role in the social development and give the locality the full autonomy.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a “radical” regionalism with a political ideal. It referred to the political idea that if the central government was neither capable to solve the serious social problems in the local society nor it wanted to give the locality the full autonomy, the locality had the right to create the local self-government by its own way. The goal of seizing power from the central or provincial government was not to gain independence from the state, but to create a better circumstance for social works. When these social works were finished, the locality would return to the central government.

The second type of regionalism was the separatist regionalism. It intended to be independent from the central government, and change the locality into an independent
regime. People, who had the idea, took the chaos of China in that time as one perfect opportunity to fulfill their personal ambition. By monopolizing the military resources in one or some regions, they became local “kings”. These ambitious guys acted willfully and regarded the personal interest far superior to the national interest.

The emergence and development of regionalism was a long process. From the second half of the nineteenth century, some people had realized that it might be better for China to follow the decentralization of power and allow the locality to play a more active role in the social development. The regionalism began raising its head in this period. The Revolution of 1911 stimulated the steep rise of regionalism. One of the reasons for the Revolution’s success could be attributed to the individual province. At the critical moment of the Revolution, the province declared the independence and launched the *coup de grâce* to the ailing imperial court. After the Revolution, the provincial establishments hoped that the *status quo* could be maintained. They intended to perform a full-fledged local self-government, so that the local interest would not be undermined by the new central government. In the 1910s and 1920s, there was a heated debate on which political model China should follow—centralization or decentralization. It was difficult for China to determine which way was appropriate. On one hand, the serious foreign and domestic situation required that China establish a powerful and centralized national government as soon as possible. On the other hand, the rise of the locality was an undeniable reality, and the excessive centralization would definitely intensify the central-local tension. Yuan

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Shikai’s radical way of centralizing power provoked the locality’s fierce resistance, and was forced to leave the center of power.

From Yuan’s demise to the establishment of Nanjing central government (1916-1927), military strongmen controlled China’s politics. The Chinese society became extremely chaotic. This period was the time in which the separatist regionalism was most rampant and the central government was the weakest. In those days, the central government was just a toy played by military strongmen. In the chaos, there were seven Presidents or state heads in other name, twenty-four cabinets, five national assemblies, and at least four constitutions or basic laws.54

This period grew out of the trinity of the local militarism, the militarization of the local elite, and the separatist regionalism. The Revolution of 1911 and the anti-Yuan Shikai movement were the catalyst. In Edward McCord’s book55, he examined the emergence of the militarist politics in three stages. In the first stage, the Revolution of 1911 implemented the “ politicization of the military”. It had two meanings: firstly, the intervention of the provincial New Armies guaranteed the Revolution’s success; and secondly, the Revolution justified the use of military means to achieve political goals. In the second stage, the “militarization of Chinese politics” was done in the Second Revolution. Both Yuan and his opponents fulfilled their political aims by employing military methods. The last but the most crucial stage was the Anti-Monarchical War. The war had two serious outcomes. One was that both the

sides greatly increased the number of their troops in the name of the War. The other was that, on the base of military power, these military strongmen tried to build up their political influence. The war justified both the military and political expansion of these military strongmen.

The impact of militarist politics on China was rather negative. Military strongmen believed in the logic of power and the militarism, and took control over territory or territories as the supreme rule of politics. In many cases, what they did drove the Chinese population into hardship and suffering. However, we must be cautious not to apply this criticism to all military strongmen. In Odoric Y. K. Wou’s study on Wu Peifu, one of the leading militarists in the north China, the author concludes that Wu was a man of “rudimentary modern nationalism”. He added that the influence of the traditional Confucianism was so great that Wu had a strong identity of the national unification and, he had some basic ideas of building a modern state.

Another misperception of military strongmen was that they were just rude bellicose men surrounded by the simple-minded and greedy soldiers. In the territory that they controlled, they administered the society using violent means. However, in Gavan McCormack’s book, we noticed that Zhang Zuolin, the sinister, ruthless, lecherous, and opium-addicted bandit chieftain of the Manchuria, had employed some

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civilian officials in his regime. These officials worked out some policies and plans of social development, in which we could even find elements of nationalism and anti-imperialism\textsuperscript{60}. In his book on Long Yun, one of the Yunan military strongmen, J. C. S. Hall argues that the civil bureaucratic system had played an important role in Long’s kingdom. Therefore, Hall criticizes that the traditional understanding of “warlord” was overly biased because it emphasized only on the negative military aspect\textsuperscript{61}.

We cannot simply assert that all the territories controlled by military strongmen were “dark” in China. In his inspiring book, Donald Gillin shows that Yan Xishan, one of the most famous military strongmen of modern China who controlled Shanxi Province, worked out a systematic political, economic, and educational plan, and, even to a certain extent, succeed in developing the local industry\textsuperscript{62}. Gillin even argues that under the circumstance of partial separation, it was still possible for a specific region such as Shanxi to create a better social environment for the economic development\textsuperscript{63}. In Diana Lary’s book of the local leaders of Guangxi, the author points out that the regionalism could possibly bring about stability to the locality. Lary even argues that the iron-blood rule of some military strongmen, who had the long-term plan of social development, could increase the survival opportunity of the

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, pp. 293-4.
locality in the chaotic time. In another more comprehensive book on Guangxi\textsuperscript{64}, Zhu Hongyuan presents to us the vital role that Li Zongrong and Bai Chongxi - the two most eminent militarists of Guangxi - played in the social development of the remote southern province. Zhu contends that it was Li and Bai’s efforts that helped the province to take on a new political and economic look. In short, the two military strongmen’s work contributed greatly to the early modernization of Guangxi.

When regional military strongmen became the “protagonist” of Chinese politics, it marked that the locality was the dominant role in the central-local power configuration. Perhaps, we can regard the period of militarist politics as an era that the regionalism was the most vivid. In this period, the tension between the state and the locality reached the peak. After that, China would either fall into parts, or reestablish a new, powerful, and centralized national government. Ch‘i Hsi-sheng asserts that the deep-rooted consciousness of unification put all kinds of separatist military strongmen into the crisis of legitimacy, and the national crisis in the modern period strengthened the idea\textsuperscript{65}. If the scholar’s words are right, we can induce that there was an establishment of a powerful central government after this period. The universal and unflagging national feeling would justify any effort of creating a centralized government and Jiang Jieshi was quick to grasp the opportunity.

Arthur Waldron points out that the one-year between 1924 and 1925 was the


\textsuperscript{65} Ch‘i Hsi-sheng, \textit{Warlord Politics in China} 壯志凌雲 pp. 190-1.
turning point of Chinese history. It was in the second war between zhi and feng-clique “warlords” that the power of the northern group represented by Wu Peifu and Zhang Zuolin were greatly weakened. After the war, there was no single “warlord” who could be powerful enough to control the whole country. As those military strongmen were more concerned with the regional interest, China was thrown into the abyss of anarchism. This provided opportunity to the southern militarists. Jiang Jieshi, backed by the powerful tycoons of the prosperous provinces of the lower Yangtze River, became the final winner in the cruel competition. In the spring of 1927, he established the Nanjing central government and declared the formal unification of China. After the Great War of the Central Plains (1930), in which the military power of his opponents, Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan were destroyed and Jiang became the leader of China. Jiang checked the separatist tide.

Akin to his predecessors, Jiang faced similar problems: how to create a powerful, stable, and efficient central government? What would he draw on the map of the central-local power configuration? In the new configuration, could the energy of the locality be released, while the interest of the centralized government not was being undermined? The solution of Jiang was, on one hand, to strengthen the control over the locality; on the other hand, to promote a limited or controlled, local self-government to mobilize the locality. Of course, such kind of mobilization should—principally must—be done by the central government.

First of all, Jiang did his best to improve the capability of the central government.

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Hence, improving the central government’s capability is tantamount to improve the state capability. According to John Migdal’s definition, the so-called state capabilities refers to the state head’s capability of mobilizing the people to fulfill the national goals, which include penetrating society, regulating social relationships, extracting resources, and appropriating or using resource in determined ways\textsuperscript{67}. Therefore, Jiang expected the new central government he created able to monopolize all military, political, and cultural resources and put the locality under firm control. The state power would penetrate top-down into most of the grass-root society. Unsurprisingly, it was an authoritarian way of state building, which gave the first priority to the highly centralized power and the tight control over the locality. On the premise of the rigid top-down control, the locality could be granted a limited autonomy. One scholar calls this “the Whampoa-style controlled mobilization”\textsuperscript{68}. Jiang hoped that by this model, Guomindang could maintain the authority of the central government and increase the efficiency of local politics.

Nevertheless, this was not an ideal plan. Scholars in the field of elite study argue that there are two ways of integrating the present central political system and the new social force. The first is that the present central authorities could absorb the new social force by reforming the present political system. The second is violent, in which the new social force topples down the present central political system, and creates a new social space\textsuperscript{69}. The paradigm can be used in discussing the central-local relations in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{69} Wu Guoguang and Zheng Yongnian, \textit{Lun zhongyang difang guanxi}, p. 8.
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the Nanjing decade. In the ten-year, the active regionalists never stopped their appeal for autonomy, to which the central government must respond. Nanjing had two choices. First, it could reform the politics and grant the full autonomy to the locality. As a result, the locality would be mobilized and cooperate with the national government to fulfill the national modernization. Second, the ruling party could increase the degree of centralization and tighten its control over the local society. Correspondingly, the autonomy of the locality would be greatly reduced and Nanjing chose the latter. The similar viewpoint can be found in Lloyd Eastman’s study. He argues that in the Nanjing decade, to the new forces that were from the society, the Guomindang government could either dispel them by political suppression, or incorporate them by expanding the political participation. Jiang Jieshi preferred the suppression. One of the results for his choice was that the spontaneous local self-governments in the rural area were oppressed. It was dangerous for Guomindang to do so because the locality became increasingly discontent with the central authorities. If the Guomindang’s opponent manipulated the discontent, the society would be as Lloyd Eastman calls, a “powder keg”.

In the 1920s and 1930s, although Nanjing declared that it had “unified” China, its capability of controlling the local society was very limited. Tien Hung-mao points out that Nanjing had a “firm control” over Jiangsu and Zhejiang; by the middle of 1930s, the number of provinces that controlled effectively by the party amounted to

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But there were twenty-eight provinces in that time. In other words, by this time, the central government controlled only less than forty-percent territories of China. Even in the “effectively controlled” provinces, the Guomindang’s control may be incomplete. For instance, in Henan, a docile agricultural province in the eyes of the central authorities, we found that at least in the southwestern part of certain counties got out of the control of the Guomindang’s provincial government. James Sheridan’s study argues that in the Nanjing decade, many provinces such as Shanxi, Guangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, and Sichuan, were under the control of powerful regional militarists. The large-or-small-scale wars against the central government broke out time and time again.

Prasenjit Duara’s “state power involution” explains why Guomindang failed in extending its power. He argues that, in the Republican period, the bureaucratic organizations of the state and their power scope were expanding. In the north China plain, these expansions depended on “brokerage”. That is to say that although the state tried its best to extend power, it could not penetrate directly into the countryside. The state had to employ the local elite as the “brokers” to finish the job. As a result, these “brokers” became more and more powerful, and gradually replaced the state as the dominant player in the rural area. “In other words, the Republican government had endeavored to form a centralized administration system. However, the result was a

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topsy-turvy stuff. The government neither integrated the local elite by ideology and material incentives, nor stopped them from grabbing political power and extracting other social resources.”74 The Republican period, in the scholar’s eyes, was a period that “the state authority failed totally and the state political system fell apart.”75

Nevertheless, as one scholar suggests, we do not need to spend too much time and energy in criticizing the weakness and failure of Guomindang, but instead to concentrate our attention on the party’s efforts of strengthening the state power76.

What disturbed the central government of Guomindang was that it lacked the institutional capacity. Thus, Jiang and his central government tried to find an institutional breakthrough, by which they could adjust the central-local relations.

Some scholars criticizes that China in the modern period was not a “state” but still an “empire”77. In their arguments, the difference of “empire” and “modern state” is such that in an empire, there is no distinction between the state’s power and the locality’s power. The control over the local society is predicated on which one is more powerful. On the contrary, in a modern state, the division of power between the center and the locality is clear-cut. The centralized-mode of modern state stresses that top-down control, and the decentralized-model state recognizes that the locality should enjoy the full autonomy. In the modern period, the key focus of Chinese political modernization was to transform the country from an empire to a modern state.

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74 Shen Songqiao 沈松侨, “Difang jingying yu guojia quanli (Local Elite and State Power)”, pp. 374-5.
75 Ibid, p. 374.
77 Wu Guoguang and Zheng Yongnian 吴国光、郑永年, Lun zhongyang difang guanxi (On the Central-local Relation), pp. 31-2.
From the late Qing to the Nanjing decade, every central government followed the centralized model, and attempted to reverse the weakening trend of the state. The Nanjing central government, under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi, endeavored to increase its power by the military, political, and legal means.

In 1930, the number of the troops under Jiang’s direct control was around 400,000 while the number of the major regional militarists’ troops was more than 600,00078. The major regional militarists—Li Zongren, Feng Yuxiang, and Yan Xishan—controlled Zhengzhifenhui (the Branch of the Central Committee of Politics) in Wuhan, Kaifeng, and Taiyuan. In the provinces controlled by these militarists, they maintained a semi-independent status and Nanjing could not interfere in the local affairs. To change the situation, Jiang had to resort to military suppression. In the spring and summer of 1929, after the war with the gui-clique regional militarists and Feng Yuxiang, Jiang forced Li Zongrong and Bai Chongxi to retreat from Hunan and Hubei, and drove back Feng to Shaanxi. The decisive war, or the Great War of the Central Plains, broke out in the May of 1930. Using political tactics, Jiang won the support from Zhang Xueliang, the most powerful regional militarist of Manchuria. When Zhang sent his troops to the north China, Jiang very quickly defeated Feng Yuxiang, Yan Xishan, and the gui-clique militarists. In this war, the military power of Feng was destroyed completely, and Yan and Li Zongren could only keep their power in Shanxi and Guangxi respectively.

Guangdong was one of the bases of anti-Jiang power, and was dominated by the

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78 Xiang Qing 向青, Sanshi niandai zhongguo (China in the 1930s) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996), p. 31.
military strongman Chen Jitang\textsuperscript{79}. Because Guangdong was far away from the political center and was strong economically, Jiang could not launch a direct military attack. In 1936, he bought over Huang Zhigang, the commander of the air force of Guangdong. Huang publicly declared his loyalty to the central government. As such, the military power of Chen Jitang was weakened seriously. With the help of Sun Ke, the eldest son of Sun Zhongshan, Jiang persuaded some senior officials of Chen’s regime to stand on the side of Nanjing. By the July of 1936, Chen was forced to leave Guangdong and his regime collapsed\textsuperscript{80}.

In the early 1930s, some influential civil leaders inside the central government challenged Jiang’s status. Hu Hanmin and Wang Jingwei were two of such leaders that were the opponents of Jiang. Hu felt that the new central government should strictly abide by the political teachings of Sun Zhongshan. He also hoped that the personal power of Jiang could be limited. Jiang was displeased with this, and in 1931, he put Hu under the house arrest. This provoked the opponents’ reaction. Shortly after Hu’s arrest, the opponents formed another “central” government in Guangzhou\textsuperscript{81}. Jiang had to change his strategy. As a compromise, he resigned as the Chairman of the national government and the President of *Xingzhengyuan* (the Executive House). Hu did not go to the office of Nanjing and he passed away in Guangzhou in 1936.

After Hu’s death, there was only one man in the party—Wang Jingwei, one of


\textsuperscript{80} Xiang Qing 向青, *Sanshi niandai zhongguo* (China in the 1930s), pp. 36-7.

the radical disciples of Sun Zhongshan—that could challenge Jiang. At the first look, Jiang and Wang cooperated peacefully in the top echelon of Guomindang and administered the military and executive affairs respectively. Beneath the surface, they were trying to squeeze the other out of political power\textsuperscript{82}. In 1935, Wang was seriously wounded in an assassination attempt. Using the excuse of Wang’s health, Jiang resumed his control over the Executive House. In 1938, Jiang established \textit{Yuanshouzhi} (the party director-general system), which greatly diminished Wang’s power in the nationalist party.

The long-time fight against regional militarists and the endless factional strife seriously undermined the Guomindang’s politics\textsuperscript{83}. Firstly, the whole party and the central government were militarized. The military men dominated the senior posts, and the military affairs had the priority in the distribution of social resources. Secondly, the complex factional strife forced Jiang to rely on client groups that he could firmly control. Under such circumstances, creating an institutionalized and efficient central civil bureaucracy became increasingly difficult. It brought about the poor efficiency and rampant corruptions in the Guomindang’s administration. Lloyd Eastman argues that the “ineffective administration” and corruption might be the most distinctive character of Nanjing\textsuperscript{84}.

A vicious circle happened. The central government was ineffective and unsuccessful in the control over the local society. Jiang thought more that the power was “less” centralized. In spite of reforming the politics, he did what all he could do to

\textsuperscript{82} Xiang Qing 向青, \textit{Sanshi niandai zhongguo} 三十年代中国 (China in the 1930s), pp. 37-9.
\textsuperscript{84} Lloyd E. Eastman, \textit{The Abortive Revolution}, pp. 9, 17.
seize power for himself. Jiang secretly identified that the fascist way of monopolizing power would be an ideal solution to the poor performance of the central government. One scholar even calls the rule of Guomindang the “Confucian Fascism”\textsuperscript{85}. Guomindang’s fascism was combined with Neo-Confucianism and was different from fascism in Germany and Italy. The German-Italy style placed greater emphasis on the mass mobilization while the Guomindang’s type stressed on the personal—Jiang’s—military tutelage. Such deep ideological change seriously affected the development of the central-local relations in the Nanjing decade. Guomindang extended the centralization of power at the expense of the autonomy of the locality. It was epitomized in the Guomindang’s policy of promoting local self-government.

Before the Second Sino-Japanese war, the most important law for regulating central-local relations was \textit{The Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China for the Period of Tutorial Government} (1931). The law explicitly stated that it followed Sun Zhongshan’s idea of \textit{junquan}, or “the balanced-power”, in determining the power of the central and local government. However, as one scholar points out, the Law did not explain what the central power and the power of the locality were. It just pointed out that the locality should be guided by the central government and the right to interpret the law was possessed by the Central Executive Committee of Guomindang. In this case, he argues that the power of the locality was not clearly stated and the ultimate goal of the Law was definitely to strengthen the power

Because of the vagueness of the law, Guomindang was able to tighten control over the locality.

First of all, the central government tried to strengthen the control over the provincial administrative organ. Although Nanjing could not rule the provinces that were controlled by the regional militarists, it was able to put the provincial government in the provinces controlled by Guomindang under its supervision. In the 1920s, the chairman of the provincial government was the top official in a province and was recommended and elected by the local assembly. Usually, the influential local leaders occupied the post. By revising The Organic Law of the Provincial Government (1930), Nanjing took back the right to appoint the chairman. The Law stipulated that the chairman of the provincial government must be directly appointed by the central government. Besides the chairman, the committee members of the provincial government also played important role in the local politics. They had the right to pass resolutions that were directly related with important local affairs. To put them under control, Nanjing ordered these members to discuss the matters that were mandated by the central government. Any resolution that passed by the committee could not be implemented until the central government approved it. Under the chairman, there were functional departments in the provincial government. The candidate of the head of department, as Nanjing provided, must be verified by the Executive House and finally appointed by the central government. The provincial department or bureau must be responsible for and supervised by the relative central

86 Li Guozhong 李国忠, Minguo shiqi zhongyang yu difang guanxi (The Central-local Relation in the Republican Period), p. 169.
87 Xiang Qing 向青, Sanshi niandai zhongguo (China in the 1930s), pp. 55-60.
ministry. The control over the departments and bureaus by the provincial leader was weakened. Therefore, the departmental heads could check the provincial chairman in case he becomes too powerful to be controlled by the central government.

Managing the county-level government was a headache for Guomindang. The reason could partly be attributed to Sun Zhongshan. In modern states, one way of central-local power configuration is centralization, in which the central government firmly controls the political power and the locality is granted with very few autonomous rights. The other is decentralization, in which except the powers that must be possessed by the central government such as national defense and diplomacy, the locality also enjoys a full autonomy. However, for Sun Zhongshan, neither was suitable for China. The centralized model could easily fall into authoritarianism, and the decentralized one was not useful in maintaining national unification. Therefore, he proposed the model of “balanced-power”. In this model, neither the central government nor the locality was the subject of political power. The power was configured on the base of duties and responsibilities such that the center and the locality. In other words, the balanced model was a solution to how to distribute the power of handling concrete matters between the central government and the locality.

As Sun pointed out:

When it comes to the distribution of power, we should consider more seriously what the nature of the power that will be distributed was, but not which one, the center or the locality, should be given more power. The power that is better for the central government to have should be given to it. Equally, the locality should have the due power.88

The national-level matter, such as the national defense and foreign affairs, should be handled by the state (the central government). For the matter of social development, such as economy, education, and culture, a national plan was necessary and it was better for the locality to deal with them, because the concrete circumstances varied from place to place. The ideal of Sun was that, by the balanced model the new revolutionary government, could have been more flexibility and avoided both the rigidity of the centralized model and the separation of the decentralized model.

In Sun’s balanced model, the full-fledged county-level self-government was sine qua non to the new Chinese politics. In his The Nation-building Program of the National Government, when xunzhen shiqi (the tutorial period) began, the key task of the revolutionary party was to promote the county self-government, in which the people would enjoy the four direct political rights: suffrage; recall; initiative; and referendum. The self-governance of the county advocated by Sun was a solution that incorporated the ruling party, government and the people. One scholar argues that the modern state comes from the process of narrowing down the distance between the government and the people, or the expanding of the people’s participation in politics.\(^{89}\)

Sun proposed that the ruling party should provide trainings for the people and increase their capabilities of participating in politics. The central government would grant full autonomy to the county-level society in which the people would perform their political power. In his county of self-government, it was completely

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self-governing and its autonomous power should not be interfered by the superior government.\(^{90}\)

In the August of 1928, Jiang Jieshi declared the beginning of the tutorial period. However, Jiang could not follow Sun’s idea of local self-government because he held that the national father’s plan gave too much power to the locality. As such, the authority of the central government would be weakened. In the Nanjing decade, *The Organic Law of County* (1928) was the prime law of adjusting the county administration. In the Law, Guomindang flaunted that it would follow strictly the teachings of Sun and promote the county self-government in the tutorial period.

As we know, to promote the self-government of county, the county must first of all, be the subject of power and enjoy full autonomy. Unfortunately, the Law did not clearly stipulate the autonomous status and power of county. According to the Law:

> There is only one government in every county, and the county government is under the supervision of the provincial government. The county government has the right to handle the executive affairs and supervise the local self-government affairs.\(^{91}\)

One scholar points out that because the right that county “enjoyed”—the right to supervise the affairs of local self-government was not the “power of autonomy”—the county was not the true subject of the local self-government.\(^{92}\) Besides it, the executive rights of county were given and supervised by the provincial government.

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Hence, we can draw a conclusion that in the Nanjing decade, the county administration was not an autonomous organ that represented the people of the grass-root society, but just a dependent organ that was responsible for the superior government. As such, Nanjing totally deviated from the spirit of Sun Zhongshan’s local self-government.

Under the system, the county magistrate who should be originally elected by the local people, must be selected and appointed by the superior government. According to The Regulations of Appointing the County Magistrate (1934), the Department of Civil Affairs of the provincial government had the duty of choosing the magistrate candidates. The chairman of the provincial government presented the candidates to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for examination. If the candidate passed the examination, he would be officially appointed as the magistrate by the provincial government. In this way, the central government firmly retained the right to choose, appoint, and check on the local officials.

In the county government headed by the magistrate, there were four *ke* (section) in charge of the affairs of public security, education, and finance. By the 1920s and 1930s, besides the *ke* system, there was *ju* (bureau). Usually, in an individual county, there were four *ju*—the public security, finance, construction, and education bureau. The *ju* was more autonomous because its head was influential gentry in the county. The head of *ke* was appointed by the provincial government. Hence, this could be regarded as a result of Guomindang’s efforts in bureaucratizing the grass-root administration. The coexistence of *ke* and *ju* in one county was not good for
improving the efficiency of local politics and hence should be reformed. The first step would be to incorporate the office of ke and ju. Before the reform, the office of ju located outside the county government. To facilitate the magistrate in coordinating the matters of ke and ju and to reduce the number of excessive personnel, Nanjing required that ju must work in the county government. The second step was taken in 1937 when the central government passed a law which stipulated that all public security, finance, education, and construction ju in county should be rescinded and all the affairs of ju were handled to the ke of the county government.

The reform was significant to the modernization of Chinese politics. In a mature modern state, every level of its administration has to be bureaucratized. Otherwise, it would be difficult for the state to perform the large-scale social administration. From this view of point, the Guomindang’s efforts in bureaucratizing the grass-root administration were beyond rapprochement. However, these efforts did have negative influence. The more rigid the Guomindang’s control over the county government was, less autonomous the county became.

To some extent, promoting the local self-government and strengthening the control over the local society appeared to be a zero-sum game. In the Nanjing decade, the efforts to centralize regardless of where they happened—in the central, the provincial, or the county government—directly or indirectly damaged the autonomy of the locality. The promise of promoting the full-fledged local self-government was just a promise. One scholar of the 1930s, who studied the local self-government in China, asked: “Why after so many years of efforts put in promoting the local
self-government, nothing much was achieved?” This was because “the people had no real opportunity to perform it”93. Another scholar of the same period, who wrote a book on the county administration of China, tactfully criticized the local self-government of China for having deviated from the true autonomous spirit and degenerated into either the “official government” manipulated by the state or the “gentry government” controlled by the ambitious local elite94.

In the central-local relations, excessive stress on either the center or the locality exerted negative influence on the country. If the locality claims too much, and the regional sentiments are manipulated by the people that had political ambition, a separatist tide will surged. If the center emphasizes too much on its own interest, the energy and enthusiasm of the locality will seriously be choked. Consequently, the attempts to develop the local society, especially the rural society, will become increasingly difficult. Regardless of how powerful a central government is, its capability is not limitless. China has a vast rural territory and the hundreds of millions of peasants. Therefore, no matter how hard it works, it is impossible for the state to attend to everything. To the country, what is the proportion of the central-local power configuration appropriate to achieve a win-win situation for the state and the locality? From the late Qing, to Guomindang and even in present day communist government of China, none of them could offer a satisfactory answer.

2) The rural north China: banditry and social militarization, the case of Henan

Since the late Qing, the decline of the central government accelerated the weakening of the mechanism of social control, and the rural area was caught in disorder. The traditional authority was overthrown in the 1911 revolution led by Sun Zhongshan and the new authority was not established soon enough after the demise of the imperial court. Yuan Shikai did not succeed in creating a new political authority, and a period of militarist politics followed. The regional militarists exerted very negative influences on the rural society. In the chaos, the banditry’s power developed conspicuously.

In the north China, besides the weakening social control mechanism, the natural disasters, man-made calamities, the pressure of population, the declining of traditional rural economy and the deep transformation of the rural social structure stimulated the development of banditry. From the late Qing to the 1911 Revolution, there were serious natural disasters in almost every year in Zhili (Hebei), Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, and Shaanxi. In the Republican period, the floods and droughts still persistently disturbed these provinces. The war among the regional militarists was the most devastating man-made calamity. From the mid 19th century to the Nanjing decade, the ever-increasing population exerted tremendous demographic pressure on the farmland. In many rural areas, peasants could not maintain their subsistence by only the land. Many peasants had to give up crop planting and try to find other ways of

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making a living. In the meantime, the traditional small handicraft industry in the
countryside was impinged seriously by the new economy, and a lot of craftsmen lost
their job. These desperate peasants and craftsmen constituted a special social
class—younmin, or the rural vagabonds. In the past, the traditional clan organizations
could provide these wandering people with some basic help. But in the Republican
period, these organizations became irrelevant as a result of modern politics, education,
and culture, and lost their relief capabilities⁹⁶. As a result, some destitute peasants had
to join the bandit organization for survival. The regional militarists helped the
development of banditry. Those military strongmen, especially the smaller ones, had a
short political lifespan. When they lost a major battle, their troops would be dispersed
and many of these disbanded soldiers turned to banditry.

As early as the 1850s, the gentry in the north China began to organize the local
armed force to fight against the Taiping and Nian rebels. In the Republican period, the
rampant banditry provided stimulus to the development of local militarization. For
instance, in the case of Henan during the late Qing, it was renowned for its rampant
banditry. By the 1920s, there were three bandit-ridden zones in the province—the
western, south western, and eastern Henan. Usually, the bandits were active in the
outer areas. The bandit could even turn the key cities such as Kaifeng and Luoyang
upside down⁹⁷. In Phil Billingsley’s study, the number of the bandits in Henan in the
1920s was more than 100,000⁹⁸. It was ranked the first in China. As such, he calls

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 984.
Henan a “Bandit World”99.

The main reason behind the banditization of Henan was the chaos caused by the regional militarists. In the 1910s and 1920s, large-and-small-scale wars among them had never ceased. These wars destroyed the political orders and brought about numerous serious social problems. Henan, because of its unique geographical position, became a place contested by the big regional militarists. In the 1920s, there were more than ten major wars and countless small military conflicts in the province. As a result, Henan became a giant military camp. According to the statistics, it had 23,000 troops in 1912100. In 1920, the number increased to 56,550. By 1924, the troops stationed in Henan soared abruptly to 200,000. In 1926, just along the Beijing-Hankou railway, there were 300,000 troops. If the troops in the northern part of Henan were added in, in the mid 1920s, the total number of soldiers in the poor rural province was at least 400,000.

These troops belonged to different regional militarist. There were endless open strife and veiled struggles among them. In that time, more than eighty-percent of the provincial finance was used to finance the military101. The politics of the province was ruined. In just one year, between 1926 and 1927, there were seven governors appointed by military strongmen in Henan. One of them stayed in the post for only one month102. The Nanjing central government could not improve the situation. On

99 Ibid, pp. 64-5.
100 Shen Songqiao 沈松侨, “Difang jingying yu guojia quanli 地方自治与国家权力 (Local Elite and State Power)”, p. 380.
101 Phil Billingsley, Bandits in Republican China, p. 64.
the contrary, the tangled war of Jiang Jieshi, Feng Yuxiang, and Yan Xishan in 1930 brought more calamites to the poor province. The main battlefield was in Henan. To meet the needs of the war, militarist that controlled the province greatly increased the amount of taxes, and the local economy was driven to the verge of collapse. In some places, the desperate peasants had to join the bandits to make a living. In addition, the small and big bandit gangs also recruited the disbanded soldiers of those defeated militarists.

The continuous worsening situation of the public security was an impetus to the local militarization of Henan. In the province, the local militarization commenced from the period of the Taiping Rebellion. In 1854, the northern expedition army of Taiping invaded Henan. To resist the powerful peasant army, the government had to request the prefectures and counties to build strongholds and organize the local armed force. For instance, in Sui County, a small county in the eastern Henan, there were more than fifty strongholds were built in this year. After the Taiping Rebellion, the government became weaker and could not check both the banditry and the local militarization. In the Republican period, the power of the banditry reached their peak. Correspondingly, the local militarization of Henan was speeded up. In his study of the Xinyang County, which is located in the southern Henan, Shen Songqiao points out that by 1934, there were 571 strongholds. Among them, more than four hundreds strongholds were built after the collapse of Qing. Even in the 1930s, the county built two hundred and fifty strongholds. In other words, more than forty-percent of the

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103 Shen Songqiao 沈松侨, “Difang jingying yu guojia quanli 地方精英与国家权力” (Local Elite and State Power), p. 378.
strongholds were built in the Nanjing decade\textsuperscript{104}. Shen regards these strongholds as the decline of the central authorities and the rise of the power of the local elite\textsuperscript{105}.

Militia was the marrow of the local armed force. The history of militia could be traced back to the ancient time and was not something new to China. However, in the modern period when the state power began to decline, the militia organized by the local elite took on a new meaning. One scholar points out that this marked the devolution of power from the weakened state to the local elite\textsuperscript{106}. That is to say, in the modern time, besides the traditional function of maintaining the social order in the locality, the militia became a tool for seizing political power from the state. In the Nanjing decade, this trend was not changed greatly. One study argues that in the ten years (1927-1937), the widespread existence of militia “indicated a basic weakness in the nationalist government’s relationship to local elites and a clue to its ultimate failure to achieve broader state-building objectives.”\textsuperscript{107} To the local elite, recruiting militia had become an important means of gaining and maintaining their political dominance in the grass-root society. The local self-government of Wanxi was a good example. Zhang Xin points out that in the southwestern Henan, controlling the militia laid the solid foundation of creating the local self-government, and helped the local elite to resist successfully the Guomindang’s provincial government’s effort of resuming the state power in this region\textsuperscript{108}.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, p. 386.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 387.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
In the name of promoting the local self-government and by the way of organizing the local armed force, the local elite could shake off the state’s control. It was one of the ways to expand the gentry-power. In the Nanjing decade, one of the important aspects of the central government’s work of state building was to restrain the gentry from extending their power. However, Guomindang was not successful in doing so. Philip Huang mentions that in the rural north China, the power structure was a triangle, in which there was the complex relationship between state, local elites, and village. Although the Guomindang’s central government tried its best to control the countryside and improve the tax-collection by bureaucratizing the village-level administration, the outcome was but a “power vacuum” in the rural area. Also, because the state was too weak to penetrate the countryside, the countryside became the place dominated by “local bullies and evil gentry”. Nevertheless, this thesis does not agree with Huang’s argument. It is not true that all local elites that controlled the political power in the rural area were either “bullies” or “evil gentry”. Rather, some of them were capable and respectable local leaders. For example, in Wanxi, the local elite did their best to stabilize and develop the local society, and what they did greatly benefited the ordinary peasants in this region.

It leads us to think about a more profound question: how is it possible to stabilize and develop the countryside? Because of a lot of reasons, from the late Qing to the Nanjing decade, the efforts to create a powerful central government failed in

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China. One of the worst results of the failure was that the state could not give the
countryside prompt, sufficient and effective help. Hence, the importance of the
countryside to the country went without saying. Agriculture was the “soul” of the
national economy of China\textsuperscript{111}, and the stability and prosperity of the countryside was
indispensable for the long period of peace and order of the country.

Guomindang did put in efforts in rehabilitating the rural area. There were
sixty-two administrative organs in the central government of Nanjing responsible for
rural rehabilitation. However, the achievement of these organs was very limited.
Lloyd Eastman argues that the party’s poor performance in the rehabilitation was a
result of a number of factors: first, most of the plans and program proposed by
Guomindang lost the contact with the rural reality; second, the central government
was short of funds to implement its rural program; third, the money that was allocated
to the rural program was often wasted in planning and executive affairs\textsuperscript{112}. This left
Nanjing in an embarrassing situation. Because of the bureaucratization of the local
administration, the government instead of benefiting the peasants, caused more pain
and suffering to them in the countryside. The basic reason behind Guomindang’s
failure in the rural rehabilitation could be attributed to fact that the top echelon of the
party paid less attention to the rural problems\textsuperscript{113}. In the party’s plan of national
modernization, the countryside had been regarded as a secondary concern. To some
extent, the rural area was a victim of the urban modernization. The scenario was

\textsuperscript{111} Lloyd E. Eastman, \textit{The Abortive Revolution}, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, pp. 220-6.
indeed tragic. In one of his books, James Sheridan mentioned that:

Under Chiang’s government, there were two Chinas: one was the modern, semi-westernized cities of the eastern coastal provinces, inhabited by an urban elite of Westernized intellectuals, businessman, merchants, professionals, and officials who had little contact with life in the countryside; the other was rural China, unchanged in its poverty, ignorance, and hardship, the helpless prey of local officials, warlords, and the conservative local gentry.\(^{114}\)

However, although the official efforts of rehabilitating the countryside was not successful, the intellectuals who concerned themselves with the fate of China and believed firmly that a rehabilitated countryside was the foundation of the national modernization, decided to act on their own to bring about a new life to the countryside.

3) The Rural Reconstruction Movement

Between the 1920s and 1930s, the rural reconstruction experiments developed into a social movement. Statistics have shown that prior to 1937, there were more than six hundred rural reconstruction organizations and more than one thousand rural reconstruction experiments in China\(^{115}\). The background of the participants was very complex. In the movement, there were intellectuals, government officials, local elites and even enlightened regional militarists. The reason why the rural reconstruction attracted so many people and became a national-scale movement was because the countryside fell into deep crisis in the period. One scholar of the 1930s argued that the deep rural crisis was caused by the imperialist economic and political invasion, the

\(^{114}\) James Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, p. 23.

continuous war of regional militarists, bandits, corruptions, and serious natural disasters.\textsuperscript{116} Liang Shuming, the leading theory-builder of the RRM, divided the destructive force into three groups\textsuperscript{117}. The first one was “political”—wars, bandits. The second was “economic”—the economic domination of the foreign powers. The last one was “cultural”—the fundamental changes in traditional thoughts, rites, and social customs in the rural area.

The RRM was a response to the rural crisis and had a great diversity in form and content. An observer of the 1930s pointed out that these rural reconstruction experiments could be categorized roughly into two types—the official and the private\textsuperscript{118}. The official ones were the experiments that planned, organized, and implemented by the government. The private experiments, as the observer mentioned in his paper, were conducted by four kinds of social groups each having different goals. Firstly, the experiments carried out by the social and educational organizations wanted to provide the rural residents some practical services. Secondly, the universities, colleges, rural normal schools, and agricultural schools that participated in the movement, often conducted surveys and research work to collect data that were useful in developing the countryside. Thirdly, the government and semi-government banks expressed their interest in improving the rural finance and co-operative organs. Lastly, the experiments led by the local elite emphasized on the importance of local


\textsuperscript{117} Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, 	extit{Xiangcun jianshe lilun 乡村建設理論} (The Theory of Rural Reconstruction), in 	extit{Liang Shuming quanji 梁漱溟全集} (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming) (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe 山東人民出版社, 1989), vol. 2, p. 418.

\textsuperscript{118} Leonard S. Hsu, “Rural Reconstruction in China”, \textit{Pacific Affairs}, vol. 10, No. 3. (Sep., 1937), pp. 252-3.
self-government and followed the will of the local people. The observer made special reference to the local self-government of Wanxi in particular, and commended it as the “most notable example”\(^\text{119}\). Cheng Fang had a different categorization\(^\text{120}\). In his book, experiments such as the Ding County experiment led by Yang Yangchu (James Yen) and Huang Yanpei in Xugongqiao of Jiangsu Province were regarded as “organization-centered” because they were carried out by the National Association of the Mass Education Movement (MEM) and the National Association of Vocational Education of China (NAVEC). Also, some experiments were seen as “school-centered”. For example, Tao Xingzhi’s Xiaozhuang experiment and Liang Shuming’s Zouping experiment were headed by the rural normal school and the village school respectively. Finally, the author regarded some experiments, such as those carried out in Lanxi and Jiangning County, as “government-centered” because these experiments were planned by the central government and focused on the county administration reform.

The “government-centered” rural reconstruction experiment had close connections with the County Administration Construction (CAC). We can also see it as the official edition of the RRM. Nonetheless, it did not emphasize on developing the countryside but rather on reforming the county administration to strengthen the party’s control over the local society. In fact, it was one of the central government’s responses to the urban political problems but not to the rural issues.

In the 1930s, the Communist Party of China (CPC) changed the strategy and

\(^{119}\) Ibid, p. 253.

focused its work in the rural area. By creating the revolution base and launching the Agrarian Revolution, CPC won the support from peasants in its controlled regions. Next, the party began to extend its power on the territories that they administered.

Nanjing felt the challenge. Jiang Jieshi knew that if he lost the support of peasants, it would be very difficult for the party to maintain its rule in China. In 1932, he said that:

Agriculture is the foundation of China. To increase the national wealth, we must count first on the peasants. The nation’s fate is entrusted with the countryside. Our country’s peace and prosperity is predicated on the stability of the countryside and the happiness of peasants.¹²¹

Therefore, while Nanjing intensifying the military suppression on the communist base, it also tried to offset the communist party’s influence in the rural area. One of the measures was the County Administration Construction (CAC).

In the Second National Conference of the Internal Affairs (1932), the central committee of Guomindang initiated a program to promote the experimental county of CAC. According to the program, the goal of CAC was to improve the people’s living and develop the local society. The method to promote the CAC was “four in one”—the incorporation of political tutelage, education, economy, and defense—and had two stages. In the first stage, or the period of reestablishing administration, the main task was to consolidate the officials in the county government. In the second stage, or the period of construction, the new county government would work hard on improving agriculture, developing local traffic, and universalizing the primary

¹²¹ See: Liu Haiyan 刘海燕, “Sanshi niandai guomin zhengfu tuixing xianzheng jianshe yuanyin tanxi” “30年代国民政府推行县政建设原因探析” (The Reason of Promoting County Administration Construction in the 1930s), in Minguo dangan 民国档案 (Republican Archives) (Nanjing: 2001), no. 1, p. 78.
education\textsuperscript{122}. By the August of 1933, there were twenty experimental counties in China\textsuperscript{123}. Jiangning, a county that was very close to the capital city, was the first experimental county of promoting CAC.

As soon as Jiangning was selected as the first experimental county of CAC, the provincial government of Jiangsu passed “The Organic Rule of Jiangning Experimental County” (1933). It stipulated that the committee of county administration was the highest legislative body. It had 9-13 members and its duty was to work out the plan of county administration reform. Under the committee was the county magistrate. In name, the provincial government of Jiangsu administered the county. In reality, it was directly controlled by the central government. Mei Siping, the county magistrate, was the head of department from the Department of Political Science in the Central School of Politics. Not surprising, the President of the prestigious Central School of Politics, which was regarded as the cradle of Guomindang’s senior cadres, was none other than Jiang Jieshi. Thus, most of the section heads of the county government were also from the school. As such, Jiangning was a political experimental field created by the central government thus enabling the county to obtain some privileges that other counties could not imagine\textsuperscript{124}.

The experiment of Jiangning was totally different with other rural reconstruction experiments. One scholar points out that Jiangning experiment was

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 77.
\textsuperscript{123} Zheng Dahua 郑大华, 《民国乡村建设运动》 (The Rural Reconstruction Movement in the Republican Period), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, pp. 120-1.
unique in three aspects\textsuperscript{125}. Firstly, it had political privileges. In the government of Jiangning, many senior members came from the central government and were influential figures in the party. In the eyes of the provincial government, Jiangning was not an inferior county but a prestigious political enclave of the central government. The plan and program proposed by Jiangning would not be interfered by the government. Secondly, Jiangning was given economic privileges. The county was exempted from paying land taxes to the provincial government. Lastly, the county had privileges in the allocation of personnel. The staffs assigned to the experimental county government were selected by the central government from the pool of outstanding teachers and graduates from the Central School of Politics. The magistrate of Jiangning, Mei Siping, was a famous professor in politics. In Lanxi of Zhenjiang Province, another similar experimental county, the magistrate Hu Ciwei was a renowned jurist. When compared with their counterparts in those ordinary counties, the quality of these professor-officials was certainly more superior.

The Jiangning model was the party’s experiment in administering directly the countryside. Its ultimate goal was not reconstruction but rather to strengthen the political control. Guy Alitto points out that Guomindang was “looking for a method by which they could both mobilize and control the local rural communities”\textsuperscript{126}. Indeed, the central government’s “rural work was rooted in a faith in official force;

\textsuperscript{125} Li Weizhong 李伟中, “Ershi shiji sanshi niandai de dizheng gaige shiyan yu zhongguo xiangcun shehui de zhuaxing” 20\textsuperscript{世纪} 30\textsuperscript{年代的地政改革实验与中国乡村社会的转型——以江宁、兰溪实验为基本分析样本} (The Transformation of the Countryside and the Land Administration Reform in 1930s: Cases of Jiangning and Lanxi), \textit{Shehui kexue yanjiu 社会科学研究} (The Journal of Social Science Studies) (Chengdu: 2004), no. 6, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{126} Guy S. Alitto, \textit{The Last Confucian}, p. 237.
its aim was to extend political power down into the villages”\textsuperscript{127}. Philip Kuhn also made similar criticisms and he argues that the “Nanking-administered experiments, it could be said, had such heavy bureaucratic input that they were unable to generate more than a pallid local response.”\textsuperscript{128}

In the 1930s, it was the prominent educators and intellectuals, such as James Yen, Huang Yanpei, Tao Xingzhi, and Liang Shuming, who carried out the most reputable rural reconstruction experiments. These experiments often arise from certain abstract academic or cultural theories. To some extent, they were utopian in nature. Among them, the most notable ones were: mass education theory of James Yen; the rural education program of Tao Xingzhi; and the cultural rehabilitation plan of Liang Shuming.

James Yen received his education in America. After his studies, he returned to China and promoted the mass education movement (MEM). By his excellent work on urban MEM, Yen won a great reputation in China. While his career was prospering, he realized that China was a rural China and regarded the countryside as the true foundation of the nation. During his time, China was undergoing a series of profound political, economic, and cultural transformation. In this process, the countryside fell in a state of deep crisis. In order to save China, the countryside must first be saved. The rural reconstruction undertook the immense task of rehabilitating the countryside. With the ambition of saving the countryside by the method of mass education, Yen left city and came to Ding County of Hebei Province. He said:

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, p. 271.
There are thousands of problems in the countryside. But, among them, there are four basic problems. I use four words to describe them—illiteracy, poverty, disease, and civic inertia.”

“Illiteracy” was a major problem in the countryside. As such, the illiteracy rate was very much higher than in the urban area. Most of peasants knew nothing beyond what happened in their small village. “Poverty” was another serious problem faced in the countryside. For many of them, even the life of subsistence was a luxury dream. The poor health status of peasants was another serious concern. Because of the lack in quality public medical system in the countryside, the death rates were much higher than in the cities. “Civic inertia” was one characteristic of the peasant mentality. The peasants were indifferent to the public affairs and the collective life.

The reason behind these problems was because education could not be universalized in China in general and in the rural area in particular. Therefore, peasants had little opportunities to go to school. In order to solve the rural problem, the government must begin by universalizing education. In Yen’s plan, the method was an integrated program of education, livelihood, public health, and civic consciousness.

The goal of the “education” program was to eliminate the illiteracy and teach the peasants basic knowledge and could be divided into two parts. In the first part, Yen would help peasants to master 1,000 or so words and cultivate their interest in reading. The second part was “art education”, in which the peasants would learn some basic knowledge in painting, music, and drama. Yen and his team thought that

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drama was the most popular form of entertainment in the countryside, and it could be used as a tool for spreading knowledge. He hoped that after his “art education”, the peasants would have a more positive attitude towards life. In the “livelihood education”, peasants should be taught some modern agricultural knowledge and technology. As Yen proposed, the key of the work was to send the people, who had studied the modern agriculture, to the countryside. In his public health program, Yen emphasized that the public medical policy should be reformed in which the medical resources - hospitals and doctors - should be redistributed. The countryside should have a basic public medical system, which could provide the rural residents with affordable medical care. Besides that, the peasants should also be inculcated with basic medical knowledge and good living habits. To change the “civic inertia”, Yen promoted the “citizen education”. Firstly, the peasants would be taught the esprit de corps. Yen hoped that the peasants would understand that the individual is a member of the social group, and only unity and cooperation could help them to achieve their goal. Secondly, the peasants would learn how to improve their morality, increase their ability to judge, and cultivate a sense of righteousness. Lastly, the peasant should be taught the national consciousness, or the love for the country and the nation. To achieve that, Yen asked his colleagues to tell stories of great figures and events in Chinese history to the peasants, using easily reading textbooks with pictures.

To promote his plan, Yen built a “super fleet” in Ding County. There were seventeen members in the leading body of his team. Sixteen of them studied in
America and one was educated in France. Among them, there were six PhD graduates – three from Harvard, two from Cornell, and one from Iowa\textsuperscript{131}. The team also had some master’s graduates from Princeton and Columbia University. The cost of employing these foreign-educated PhD and master’s graduates was startlingly high. Li Jinghan, who obtained his master’s degree from Columbia University and was in charge of the social survey section of the experiment, complained that his “poor” salary—one hundred and fifty silver dollars a month– was “barely enough for the daily life.” However, the salary for doing the same work in Zouping County, where Liang Shuming did his experiment, was only fifteen dollar\textsuperscript{132}!

Nevertheless, monetary issue was not a problem for Yen. Educated in Columbia and Princeton, and converted to Christianity in his young days, Yen’s educational and religious background was a major advantage to him in raising money in America. From 1928 to 1929, Yen toured the big cities of America and gave sensational speeches, in which he called on American corporations and individuals to make donation in support for the MEM in China. Yen successfully raised half-million USD in his fund raising campaigns\textsuperscript{133}. In 1935, the Association of MEM was given another one million dollar by the Rockefeller Foundation\textsuperscript{134}.

Could the Ding County model, which was dependent solely on the foreign financial aid, be universal? In 1932, the League of Nations issued a report that

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{131} p. 467.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Guy S. Alitto, \textit{The Last Confucian}, p. 240.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 325-8.
\end{itemize}
criticized Yen’s experiment. The report points out that the cost of the experiment in Ding County was too high to be universalized in China. Ding County was just a special case and if similar works were to be promoted in other counties, they would definitely be doomed to failure\textsuperscript{135}. As early as in 1929, Liang Shuming commented that the Achilles’ heel of Yen’s work was that it could not mobilize the countryside to find solution to the rural problems\textsuperscript{136}. He also noticed that the same problem in Huang Yanpei’s experiment in Xugongqiao of Jiangsu Province, on which he had made a positive comment. Liang ironically pointed out that:

[In Xugongqiao] the personnel employed come from the outside, and their salary is paid by the outsider. All the money of building the offices, roads, and schools are donated or raised outside the countryside. At the first look, there is no difficulty of reconstructing the countryside. In fact, it is false. They do not settle the problems, but escape from them.\textsuperscript{137}

Liang concluded that it was impossible for China to free the countryside from the crisis using Yen and Huang’s model\textsuperscript{138}.

Moreover, the MEM led by James Yen was \textit{anti-Chinese}. In this thesis, “anti-Chinese” is not a political but cultural term. It refers to the basic idea of Yen’s rural reconstruction and practice for being a non-Chinese solution but an American social delusion. Guy Alitto points out: Yen was basically hostile to the traditional Chinese culture and uncritically worshipped the Western culture. Yen thought that by using the Western spirit, technology and aid, he could create a new countryside for China\textsuperscript{139}. His idea was called the \textit{Ting-hisen-ism}. In the 1930s, a critic argued that

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, 330.
\textsuperscript{136} Liang Shuming 北游所见纪略, \textit{Bei you suojian jilue} (A Trip to the North China), in \textit{Liang Shuming quanji} (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 4, p. 884.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p. 877.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, p. 884.
\textsuperscript{139} Guy S. Alitto, \textit{The Last Confucian}, p.240.
“the Ting-hsien-ism was based on the abstract idea of human being.”

In 1985, Yen wrote in the preface of one book that the goal of rural reconstruction was to achieve “the liberation of human spirit.” In other words, the ultimate aim of his rural reconstruction work had no connection with Chinese countryside and the peasants. It was an abstract freedom which could be applied to all human beings. Before the freedom, the distinction of personal identity—peasant, worker, intellectual, or official—had no significance. Charles Hayford contends that the idea of Yen was “a sinification of liberalism”. As such, it was seen as American liberalism that put on a Chinese cloak, and embodied in the MEM. Hayford argues that the career of Yen, “with its explicitly liberal and democratic allegiance, shows how Americans hoped to change China.”

Finally, he asks an interesting question: “Was Yen ‘made in America’?” The answer found in his book is a “yes”.

Like James Yen, Tao Xingzhi also received his education in America, and then returned back to China to promote his rural education reform. He thought that the rural education was the decisive work of developing the countryside. Tao vividly mentioned that:

The rural education determines the fate of the three hundreds and forty millions people! If it is successful, it can raise the peasants unto the

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140 Qian Jiaju and Li Zixiang, Zhongguo xiangcun jianshe pipan, Shanghai: Xinzhi shudian, 1936, p. 25.
141 James B. Mayfield, Go to the People: Releasing the Rural Poor Through The People's School System, West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1986, “Preface by Dr. Y. C. James Yen.”
143 Ibid, “Introduction”.
144 Ibid.
Heaven! If it is a failure, it will drop the peasants into the Hell!\textsuperscript{145}

However, in Tao’s time, the (rural) education:

[W]alks in a completely wrong way! It teaches people to leave the countryside and swarm into cities; it teaches people to enjoy rice but not to labor in the field; it teaches people to put on clothes but not to cultivate the cotton; it teaches people to live in the house but not to plant the tree. It teaches people to admire the luxury urban life and look down upon the agricultural labor.\textsuperscript{146}

In other words, the (rural) education had divorced totally from the reality of the countryside and could not meet the basic need of peasants\textsuperscript{147}. Therefore, to save the countryside, one must fundamentally the transform rural education. As Tao pointed out, first of all, we should basically change our understanding of education. The prime principle of education was “life”. If it was correct, the prime principle of the rural education was correspondingly the rural life. That is to say, the new rural education would be integrated with the rural life, and it could teach peasants “self-reliance, self-government, and self-defense” and “has the power to transmute the countryside into a land of happiness”\textsuperscript{148}. How then was it possible to develop such kind of rural education? The key to do so was to train a larger number of quality teachers, who were educated in the new rural normal school, and then resend back to the countryside.

Tao’s rural normal school was a brand-new kind of normal school, which was startlingly different with its counterparts in the cities. It was “the center for the

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, p. 653.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid, p. 654.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, p. 653.
transformation of the countryside”. The students that were educated in these new schools had three features - “the talent of the peasant, the mind of science, and the enthusiasm of remolding the society”. The “talent of the peasant” was that the students knew all aspects of the rural life and could live well on their own in the countryside. The “mind of science” referred to the modern agricultural science and technology that these students studied in the normal school. The “enthusiasm of remolding the society” was that these students had the grand ideal of eliminating poverty and illiteracy in the rural area. To promote his program, Tao worked out an ambitious plan:

Our new mission is to recruit one million comrades, set up one million rural schools, and change one million villages! Earnestly and sincerely, we invite all compatriots to join us! …We resolve to bring a new life to every village, and finally to create a totally new life to the Republic of China!

The words of Tao were exciting. However, the rural society was like a giant and complex machine. Education was just one part of it. The rural education could solve some problems in the countryside, but it was not a panacea. Nevertheless, Tao was a respectable idealist in his time. He gave up the professorship of a prestigious university, and left the comfortable big city. Then, he went to the poor countryside and struggled for his dream.

Although he was one of the best friends of James Yen, Liang Shuming was the antithesis of Yen. Yen was a devoted worshipper of the Western culture, but Liang was the strongest admirer of the traditional Chinese culture. Liang was from a declining noble family of Beijing. In his young days, Liang was obsessed with

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150 Ibid, p. 653.
151 Ibid, pp. 654-5.
Buddhism and almost became a modern recluse. After an unimaginable “sudden enlightenment”, he returned from the Buddhism. By his outstanding Buddhist studies, he got a teaching position in Peking University, and became one of the most prestigious scholars in the 1920s. As a great thinker, the head of Liang was filled with profound philosophies. He created the most delicate cultural conservatism in the world\textsuperscript{152}. To Liang, the rural reconstruction was the completion of his sudden enlightenment, and it was one practice of his great theory of rehabilitating the Chinese culture.

Liang’s \textit{culture} was holistic, and it referred to the distinctive spirit, manner, and way of life of a nation. In his theory, the so-called culture was the “attitude”—or \textit{yiyu} (the will)—towards life\textsuperscript{153}. There were three kinds of culture in the world\textsuperscript{154}. The first one was the Western culture, in which people tried to change the reality to meet their wills. The second type was the Chinese culture, which emphasized that people should accommodate the personal will and the reality to achieve a spiritual balance. The last one was the transcendent Indian culture, which gave up all the worldly wills and was after the immortal spiritual emancipation. Liang stratified the three cultures. The Western culture was the lowest and Chinese culture was at the intermediate level. Indian culture was the highest one. Guy Alitto says that, the stratification of Liang “depicts the three stages of the evolvement of

\textsuperscript{152} See: Guy S. Alitto, \textit{Shiji fanwei nei de fan xian daihua sichao} (The Worldwide Anti-modernization Thoughts) (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1999).

\textsuperscript{153} Liang Shuming , \textit{Dong xi wenhua ji qi zhexue} (The Culture and Philosophy of East and West), in \textit{Liang Shuming quanji} (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 1, p. 352.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, p. 383.
the mankind civilization—from the simple modernization, or the Western style of modernization, then to the humanization (of China), and finally, to the spiritualization (of India).”155

According to Liang’s words, the normal evolvement of the world civilization had three stages. Firstly, by the Western aggressive attitude of life, people tried to achieve the material modernization. Then, by the Chinese accommodating attitude, people began correcting the malpractice of Western modernization and endeavored to turn the world into a more humane and harmonious heaven. In the last stage, the transcendent way of life of the Indian culture will help people to achieve the complete humanity and the true spiritual liberation.

Liang had the linear view of history. In his mind, the world civilization should evolve step by step. However, China did not follow the way. Without finishing the first stage—modernization, because of the genius of culture, Confucius, China arrived directly at the second stage. Thus, Liang called Chinese culture “a baby prematurely delivered”156. The good result of the prematurity of Chinese culture was that it became culturally superior to the West. The bad consequence of the prematurity was the stagnancy of the Chinese society in the past two thousands years, in which there was no fundamental change in economy and politics. In the ancient time, because there was no great threat from foreign powers, such the stagnancy did not bring disasters to China. But, when history came to the modern

156 Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, Dong xi wenhua ji qi zhexue 东西文化及其哲学 (The Culture and Philosophy of East and West), in Liang Shuming quanji 梁漱溟全集 (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 1, p. 526.
time, and the door of China was opened forcefully by the gunboat of Western powers, the country was put into the danger of collapsing.

The most dangerous thing was that the countryside fell in the deep crisis. It happened in two aspects. On one hand, the economic and political invasion of the imperialist states generated the poverty and instability in the countryside. One the other hand, the attitude of Chinese towards the traditional culture changed fundamentally. The latter was the most devastating for China. In the process of contacting with the Western powers, Chinese became more and more admiring to the Western culture, and began questioning the superiority of Chinese culture to the West. As a result, China promoted the Western-style modernization. However, in Liang’s critical eyes, what China did—the urban-centered modernization—was just a poor imitation. It neglected the basic reality that China was a rural country, and brought more damages to the countryside. Liang criticized fiercely such the lopsided model of modernization.

Liang points out that there were two main roots of Chinese culture. One was the concrete, or the countryside itself. The other was the intangible—laodaoli (the traditional hows and whys in the countryside). In Liang’s implication, these laodaoli was the true Chinese culture, and he believed firmly that the culture was preserved in the countryside. In a metaphysical context, the Chinese culture, as Liang argued, was none other than the countryside that preserved the traditional culture.

159 Ibid, p. 613.
Nonetheless, in his days, due to the external and internal crisis, the countryside, or the main root of Chinese culture, was being undermined. Liang did not think the urban-centered modernization could save the countryside and its culture. He hoped that people could understand that it was the countryside and its culture that was the lifeblood of the nation, and they were in danger\textsuperscript{160}. Anyone who wanted to save China must, first of all, find the way of saving the countryside.

How then can one save the countryside? Liang argued that neither the capitalist way—the European style of democracy, nor the socialist way—the model of revolution invented by the Russian communist party, could do the work. The “democracy” road, which stressed on the separation and check of power, was incompatible with the Chinese culture and could not be applied to the majority of the people\textsuperscript{161}. The “revolution” road could not be initiated in China, because there was no the class distinction, an indispensable foundation of the socialist revolution\textsuperscript{162}. There was only one possible way of saving the countryside—the rural reconstruction. For Liang, it was cultural. Here, “cultural” meant that the goal of rural reconstruction was to create a new culture in the countryside. “New” had twofold meaning. First, it was to rehabilitate the traditional Chinese culture, which was despised and neglected in the modern period. Second, the rural reconstruction would borrow something useful from the Western culture and add them into the Chinese culture. In a nutshell, the rural

\textsuperscript{160} Liang Shuming \(\text{梁漱溟}\), \textit{Xiangcun jianshe lilun} \(\text{乡村建设理论}\) (The Theory of Rural Reconstruction), in \textit{Liang Shuming quanji} \(\text{梁漱溟全集}\) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 2, p. 489.

\textsuperscript{161} Liang Shuming \(\text{梁漱溟}\), \textit{Women zhengzhi shang de diyi ge butong de lu} \(\text{我们在政治上的第一个不通的路}\) (The First Impasse in Politics) in \textit{Liang Shuming quanji} \(\text{梁漱溟全集}\) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 5, pp. 147-73.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid, pp. 270-3.
reconstruction was the work of promoting the modernization within the framework of the traditional Chinese culture. The nucleus of the work was to establish new social organization—the reformed village school—in the rural area. Liang transformed the village school, which was could be found everywhere in the north China, into a place in which the peasants could learn both the traditional culture and the modern knowledge. Besides this education function, the village school would play the role of administering the grass-root rural society. Liang believed that, by his program, the countryside would be rehabilitated and became the solid foundation of the national modernization.

Both the totally westernized mass education plan of James Yen and Liang Shuming’s proposal of rehabilitating the traditional Chinese culture were utopian. In the history of modern China, there was no any individual or organization that could remold the country by a model of wholesale Westernization, regardless of how it looked “perfect”. Likewise, in an integrating world, it was impossible for anyone to fulfill the modernization by the way of resuming the so-called “pure” traditional Chinese culture. It is not surprising for us to see Liang’s failure in Zouping County of Shandong Province. To the failure, Liang blamed himself that his program was far from the reality of the countryside, and local residents were lukewarm to it. He pointed out that “we are too ignorant to understand their (peasants’) sufferings and feelings.”163 Finally, the rural reconstruction movement became an empty slogan.

Liang admitted the failure and mentioned that “we brag that we will mobilize the

countryside. However, the result is that the peasants prefer the inaction to action.”\textsuperscript{164}

One Western critic argues that the fundamental reason behind his failure is that there was no compatibility between Liang’s rehabilitation of the traditional Chinese culture and the Western modernization\textsuperscript{165}.

It is easy for us to have an impression that the rural reconstruction experiments promoted by scholars, like James Yen, Tao Xingzhi, Liang Shuming, and other less known figures, had no political dimension. However, this thesis argues that these utopian rural reconstruction works were political and influenced also the central-local relation in the Republican period. Guy Alitto points out that there was “natural antagonism between centralized control and the real goal of rural reconstruction”\textsuperscript{166}. That is to say, to mobilize the rural area could threaten the rule of Guomindang. We can regard the RRM as an embodiment of the tension of state and society. The private rural reconstruction experiment itself was a satire on the authority of the central government.

With the biting sarcasm, Liang Shuming argued that “the (central) government is the inertest and the most unprogressive”\textsuperscript{167}. In addition, he said that the ruling party, Guomindang, had finished its task in Chinese history\textsuperscript{168}. When it came to how to stabilize and develop the countryside, which was one of the most important topics of the Republic, Guomindang accomplished nothing. Liang totally lost his confidence in

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid, pp. 573.
\textsuperscript{166} Guy S. Alitto, The Last Confucian, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{167} Liang Shuming 梁漱溟, Xiangcun jianshe lilun 乡村建设理论 (The Theory of Rural Reconstruction), in Liang Shuming quanji 梁漱溟全集 (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming), vol. 2, p. 573.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, p. 579.
the central authorities:

In China, it is ridiculous to expect the state (the central government) to do something (for the countryside). However, if we let the locality to handle the rural problems, it will be reasonable and fruitful.\textsuperscript{169}

Liang implied that, under the present circumstances that the state was incapable and inefficient, the countryside could act itself to settle its problems. And, the action should be put under the guide of the virtuous intellectuals. What Liang implied was a competition with the state for the power to reconstruct the countryside.

In Tao Xingzhi’s Xiaozhuang experiment in Jiangsu Province, we can also find the same implication. Philip Kuhn argues that Tao tried to reform the rural society by the rural normal school, which was the “agent of control and manipulation in the countryside”\textsuperscript{170}. Also, Tao hoped that the whole country would be reorganized by his way.

Both Liang and James Yen did not welcome the central government’s involvement in the rural reconstruction movement\textsuperscript{171}. Liang had contended that one of the difficulties of promoting the rural reconstruction was that many experiments could not be separated from the government\textsuperscript{172}. If the work depended on the government, it would be manipulated and changed into a tool of extending the state power. “If we cannot change the situation, the rural reconstruction will be bureaucratized. When this really happens, how can we reform the rural society?”\textsuperscript{173}
One scholar argues that the unofficial rural reconstruction experiment was an “ambitious” alternative to the more bureaucratic government-sponsored modernization, and its influence on the central-local relation was that it could increase the power of the locality.\textsuperscript{174} For example in Liang’s experiment, the village school was not only an educational and cultural organization, but also an autonomous administrative organ of the grass-root society. In his program, the village school was “voluntary, independent, and indigenous”, while at the same time it was “modern, progressive, and socially responsible”.\textsuperscript{175} These characteristics were similar with those of the civil society in the urban area. Hence, this thesis calls Liang’s plan of rural reconstruction was an effort of creating a rural civil society. Conversely, as another scholar points out, the “vitality” of the central government could be weakened in this process.\textsuperscript{176}

Moreover, as Guy Alitto argues that the rural reconstruction experiment could not avoid the issue of local self-government, and it implies that the state should create the relative political organizations to increase the people’s participation in the politics of the county and sub-county society.\textsuperscript{177} The majority of the unofficial experiments did not want the Guomindang government’s interference, and hoped that they could be more autonomous in promoting their program. But, in the government’s eyes, it was a potential threat to the legitimacy and authority of the central government, and

\textsuperscript{177} See Guy S. Alitto, “Rural Reconstruction during the Nanking Decade”, p. 213.
the ruling party would definitely not sit back and watch without action. On one hand, the central government promoted its own rural reconstruction program, like the “top-down style” experiment in Jiangning and Lanxi. On the other hand, Nanjing tried to limit and guide the private experiments and prevented them from grabbing the political power. To some “radical” cases, the central government oppressed them at the necessary time. For example in 1930, the Xiaozhuang Rural Normal School was closed by the central government, and the President, Tao Xingzhi, was put on the wanted list. Tao went into exile in Japan, and his school was not reopened until 1932. Hu Hanmin, one of the leaders of the national government, mentioned that the government had to close the School because it colluded with the opposition faction and “disturbed” the social order. In fact, the true reason was that Tao’s experiment was so close to the capital city, and what he did would undermine the authority of the central government. Guomindang’s response to the private rural reconstruction experiments showed that the party had turned out more conservative. When it came to the rural reform, the government preferred the “technological” to the “institutional” reform.

This thesis hopes that above brief discussion on the central-local relation, banditry, local militarization, and RRM in the 1930s will be helpful for our understanding of the significance of the local self-government of Wanxi to the history.
of the state-society relation and the Rural Reconstruction Movement.
Chapter 2 – “Militarized County”:
The Local Self-government of Wanxi, 1930-1940

As we know, if one competitive local political system expects to gain a full autonomy, it must have enough power resources, especially the military resource. As one county political system, the work of local state building of Wanxi depended on the military resource it extracted. In the 1920s, the rampant banditry gave the local elite a wonderful excuse to organize the local armed force in Wanxi. On the base of mintuan, or the people’s militia, the elite established the self-government and established firm social control over the region.

1) Wanxi in the 1920s

Wanxi was a poor, backward, and bandit-ridden region. The chaos caused by the collapse of Qing exacerbated the situation. Wanxi was an important passage of the trade of opium, mountain products, painting, and oil, and the annual tax on these goods was estimated around one million dollars. The military strongmen were very avaricious for the money. To monopolize the wealth, those strongmen appointed the magistrate in each of the counties of Wanxi and forced them to collect the tax for his troops. From 1926 to 1930, the number of the county magistrates is shown in the table:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Zhenping</th>
<th>Neixiang</th>
<th>Xichuan</th>
<th>Deng</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Numbers of county magistrate of Wanxi in the 1920s

In this time, the county government of Wanxi was just a tool of collecting money for those military strongmen. They had neither capability nor intention to administer and develop the region. Under the circumstances, the problem of banditry turned out more and more serious. In the 1920s, the region became one of the bandit centers of Henan Province.184

For example in Zhenping, before 1926, there were thirty-two bandit gangs, and the total number of bandits was 3,700. After 1926, the number of gangs decreased to nine, but the number of bandits increased to more than 10,000.185 It showed that the bandit in the region had developed from the scattered and small-scale team to the big and well-organized bandit gang. In the September of 1929, the bandits invaded the county capital of Zhenping. They burned more than 9,000 houses and kidnapped a great number of innocent people. The direct economic lost of the county was more

than three million dollars\textsuperscript{186}. The ordinary peasants were the most miserable victims. They had neither gun to defend home, nor the money to buy safety. There was a folk ballad in Zhenping, in which it said “If you don’t want to die, please lead your family and run through the mountains all night!”

Meanwhile, the militarist’s troop was another headache for Wanxi. To expand their troop, some militarists even recruited bandits. Sometimes, the troops even colluded with the bandits and shared the booty. The worst case was that those troops directly robbed the villages. In the August of 1930, one troop passed by Deng County. When the residents refused the troop’s excessive demand, the troop launched a cruel attack, in which more than three thousands people were brutally killed and countless valuable things were robbed\textsuperscript{187}. One official of the self-government of Zhenping called such the kind of troop the out-and-out \textit{feijun} (bandit-style army)\textsuperscript{188}.

The bandits and bandit-style armies seriously disturbed the rural life, and the social order of Wanxi was destroyed. In that time, the county and provincial government could not free the region from the chaos. One author of the county gazetteer of Neixiang points out that “there is no time that can be more chaotic (than the present)!”\textsuperscript{189} Under such circumstances, Wanxi must organize a powerful local armed force to resume the social order as soon as possible. “The continuing political instability and the growing banditry of this period led to a steady increase in the

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{188} Li Tengxian \textsuperscript{176} 李腾仙, Peng Yuting yu Zhenping zizhi \textsuperscript{206} 彭禹廷与镇平自治 (Peng Yuting and the Self-government of Zhenping), p. 28.
\textsuperscript{189} Neixiang xianzhi \textsuperscript{233} 内乡县志 (The Gazetteer of Neixiang County) (Neixiang: 1932).
number and size of such forces (militia). In Wanxi, Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang, Chen Shunde, and Ning Xigu worked hard on organizing and training mintuan, or the people’s militia.

Peng Yuting was born in 1893 in Zhenping County. His father had taught in a Confucian-style private school, and run a small shop of traditional Chinese medicines. When the imperial Civil Service Examination system was abolished in 1905, Peng went to Kaifeng for his middle school education. Then, he was admitted to a university in Beijing, but he did not finish his study. In 1919, he was recommended to the general Feng Yuxiang and became a senior officer of the Northwest Army. Feng had a good impression on Peng and wrote two poems for him. By the mid 1920s, as Shen Songqiao said, Peng had become a “national elite”.

1927 was the turning point of Peng’s life. In the fall, his mother passed away. When Peng got the news, he went back home in a hurry. Nevertheless, on his way home, some bandits stopped Peng for a long time. And, when he finally arrived, his brothers told Peng that their mother had already been buried. Peng was badly upset by the incident, and decided to use the most traditional Chinese way—“warm the tomb for one hundred days”, or—of keeping vigil to express his remorse. In those days,
through the conversation with his relatives and friends, Peng knew how cruel the bandits were. They bound a man’s legs in different tree branches and used the elastic force of the branches to tear his body apart. They then took off the clothes of the young girls, tied two little bells on their nipples, and forced them to make noodles for them, which was called having “bell noodles”. The lawlessness shocked Peng, and he realized that the most serious problem in his hometown was banditry. Saving the innocent people from the hands of these vicious bandits would be both a contribution to his hometown and the best repayment to his beloved mother. As such, Peng resigned his job in the army and began suppressing bandits in Zhenping.

Peng was appointed the head of the South District of Zhenping. In an announcement, he told the people that he was going to promote the local self-government and self-defense; every village should organize the ganzidui (the cudgel patrol team of club); any people who colluded with the banditry or gave them shelter would be severely punished. Peng collected thirty guns and chose some young and robust peasants to form the 1st team of mintuan, and invited an experienced martial art master to train them. Although the number of the new militia was small, it had a powerful fighting capability. Soon after the establishment of mintuan, it killed three notorious bandit chieftains and beat a big bandit gang. To expand his troop, Peng issued an order, in which he demanded that people who had 15 mu farmlands should donate one gun, 30 mu two guns, and reasoned out the rest by analogy. In 1928, Peng established the 2nd and 3rd team. Then, he reorganized the troop, and set up the

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headquarters of the mintuan of Zhenping. The new troop had four detachments and an independent artillery squadron. The total number of the troop was more than 2,000\(^{196}\). By then, Zhenping mintuan had developed into a powerful local armed force.

Bie Tingfang was born in Neixiang County in 1883. He had studied in the Confucian-style private school for ten years. After class, he liked reading *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*. The trickeries and the greenwood spirit in the two novels greatly influenced him. When his parents passed away, he left the school and began practicing the martial art and shooting. Then he was invited as the head of Tiger stronghold\(^ {197}\), which was build by a landlord to fight against the banditry. In 1912, he routed one bandit gang and captured alive the bandit chieftain. After the battle, he became a famous people in Neixiang. From then on, he took the Tiger stronghold as the base and began expanding his private troop. In the mid 1920s, Yuan Xu, the county magistrate of Neixiang, and other officials of the county government were mad at Bie’s activities. Bie mercilessly assassinated Yuan and other senior members of the county government\(^ {198}\). After the purge, Bie dominated the political stage of Neixiang and became a powerful military strongman in Wanxi. In 1925, the number of his troop had exceeded two thousands\(^ {199}\). In 1927, Bie set up two headquarters of mintuan in Neixiang. By 1929, the mintuan of Neixiang had nine


\(^{197}\) "laohuzhai" was a militarized stockade, which became the first base of Bie’s private army.


\(^{199}\) Shen Songqiao (ed.), "Difang jingying yu guojia quanli" (Local Elite and State Power)", p.396.
regiments and the number of its soldiers was more than 20,000.

Chen Shunde was born in 1891 and from a noble family of Nanyang. In 1920, he was appointed the president of the normal school of Xichuan. In this period, Xichuan faced the serious problem of banditry as well as other counties did. In the August of 1920, more than one thousand bandits invaded the county and kidnapped two hundreds people. One of Chen’s younger brothers was also kidnapped. After the incident, Chen went back Xichuan and began recruiting mintuan. In 1923, Chen was appointed the director of public fund bureau and concurrently the head of self-defense corps of Xichuan. In 1926, by the help of a senior officer of the Northwest Army, He became the county magistrate. By 1930, his troop had more than four thousands soldiers.

Ning Xigu\textsuperscript{200} came from Deng County and was born in 1905. He had studied in the Whampoa Military Academy and participated in the two North Expeditions in the 1920s. After the war, he returned to his hometown and witnessed the cruelty and rampancy of the banditry. He heard that Peng Yuting was training mintuan in Zhenping. Then, Ning visited Peng and became one of his senior assistants. In 1929, there was a drought in Deng, and the bandits intensified their robbery. The residents of Deng invited Ning to organize mintuan and fight against the bandits. Ning was elected as the commander of the mintuan of Deng. He beat a ferocious bandit gang and executed some gentry that had colluded with the bandits. Before his death, there were ten regiments and four guerrilla attachments in his troop.

\textsuperscript{200} Ning was assassinated by the Guomindang’s provincial government in 1930. After his death, the autonomous work of Deng County winded up.
2) *Mintuan or the people’s militia*

Facing the growing banditry in the region, Peng realized that it was better for the counties of Wanxi to be united and take unanimous action. Bie, Chen, and Ning agreed with the idea. In the September of 1930, they convened the Joint-defense Conference of Wanxi in Yangji town of Neixiang. The *mintuan* of the four counties was incorporated and reorganized. The Office of Joint-Defense was set up in Neixiang, and Bie Tingfang was elected as the chief commander. In the new incorporated *mintuan* of Wanxi, there were four detachments. The 1st Detachment was the troops of Neixiang and had twelve regiments. The 2nd Detachment was commanded by Ning Xigu and had regiments thirteen through sixteen. The commander of the 3rd Detachment was Chen Shunde, who was in charge of regiments seventeen through twenty-two. Regiments twenty three through twenty-five regiments formed the 4th detachment and were led by Peng Yuting. The total number of the local armed force was around 50,000.201

**Organization and equipment of mintuan**

*Mintuan* imitated the compulsory military service system of Switzerland. Peng pointed out that:

> In the present world, the best military system is the Swiss compulsory service. If *mintuan* can follow the way, it will meet the principle of ‘increasing the strength (of the army) and reducing the burden (of the people).’202

The organization of the standing *mintuan* was same as the official army. The

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soldier was recruited from the volunteers. The difference was that all the members of the standing mintuan must participate in the agricultural work. The member of the reserve mintuan was from the village residents. To a great extent, the member of mintuan was both a soldier and peasant. The service system “was different with other regions. People at the right age were organized by squad and platoon, and were given guns and bullets. In every month, there were several training sessions. If there were emergency, they would be put together promptly. In the peaceful time, they stayed home and labored in the farmland.”

Because the system would not disturb their daily life, the peasants of Wanxi were willing to join mintuan.

In Zhenping, there were around two thousands standing soldiers. They were selected from the able-bodied men of villages. The standing mintuan was stratified into regiment, battalion, and platoon. The training of mintuan has two parts. The first part was for the military officers. All officers must take both xueke—the political and theoretical course, and shuke—the physical and technological training. The second part was for the ordinary soldiers, in which, besides the regular physical training, there were some basic vocational courses.

After four-month compulsory service in the standing mintuan, all able-bodied men (age of 18-30) would automatically become the reserve force. They were reorganized into team in every village. At the first day of each month, the head of team would call together all reserve forces and lead them to the battalion quarter, where the

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203 Henan wenshi ziliao (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Henan Province) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1988), no. 25, p. 9.
officer checked their attendance and distributed the basic allowance. Then, they would clean and maintain the weapons. In the middle of every month, the reserve force would be put together again and take some drills. Every three months, there would be an assessment for the reserve force. The plan of Peng Yuting was that, after seven sessions of training, all able-bodied men of Zhenping would be reorganized and trained.

The organization of Zhenping mintuan was complete. If there were 100 able-bodied men in one village, they would be reorganized into one team, named as “X Team of Zhenping mintuan”. Each team had one head and one deputy-head. One team could have 1-3 sub-teams. All team heads, deputy-heads, and sub-team heads must take military and political training. All of them had a salary paid by the self-government of Zhenping. Besides the military duties, the team head and deputy-head should teach physical exercise or other courses in the village school.

Like Zhenping, Neixiang had the standing and reserve mintuan. The standing troop was never dismissed and stationed in every important passage and checkpoint of Neixiang. The headquarters paid all the cost of the standing troop. The reserve troop was in the nine wards, and its member was the able-bodied man with gun. The reserve force had no salary, but the member would be given allowance in the training session. Under Bie’s rule, the mintuan of Neixiang was continuously expanding. In 1929, Bie had nine regiments, twelve standing battalions and twelve

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205 Ibid.
reinforced companies directly attached to the headquarters. In 1933, Bie decided to enlarge his troop by the way of “reorganizing militia by gun”\textsuperscript{208}. If there were ten guns in a village, one squad would be organized, and every three squads formed one platoon; every three platoons formed one company, and every three companies were reorganized into one battalion. If there were two battalions in one ward, they would form one regiment. From 1934, Bie began organizing the military force “without gun”. It included the cudgel patrol team, semi-military teams of peddler, the training teams of able-bodied man, the patrolling team of able-bodied man, and the order-maintaining team.

In the mid 1920s, there were four teams of mintuan in Xichuan. In 1928, Chen Shunde expanded them into nine battalions. In the next year, Chen set up the headquarters of mintuan, which had the military tribunal, the section of supplies, and the secretarial office. In 1935, Chen reorganized his troops and divided them into six regiments. The standing troop had two regiments, and the reserve force had four regiments.

The able-bodied man was another major component of the local armed force of Xichuan. In 1936, there were 75,000—the thirty-percent of the adult population of Xichuan—able-bodied men in the county. Chen divided them into two groups—“group with gun” and “group without gun”\textsuperscript{209}. The group with gun was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{208} Bie Tingfang 别廷芳, Difang zizhi 地方自治 (The Local Self-government) (Neixiang: 1940), pp. 21-3.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Zhao Qingjie and Jin Yingwu (ed.) 赵庆杰、金英武, “Xichuan xian ‘sanzi’ banfa tiyao 淅川县‘三自’办法提要 (The Key Works of the self-government of Xichuan County)”, in Xichuan xian wenshi ziliao 淅川县文史资料 (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xichuan County) (Xichuan: Xichuan xian zhengxie 淅川县政协, 1989), pp. 8-10.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
organized according to gun, just as Bie did in Neixiang. Under the system, in every three jia, if there were ten to fifteen guns, one squad was formed; in every two bao, if there were more than thirty guns, there would be one platoon; in every joint-bao, if there were one hundred or so guns, one company would be established. All these able-bodied men must take three months military training. The group without gun was organized in every village, and took the training in the slack season.

The quality weapon was one of the guarantees of the fighting capability of mintuan. To improve the military equipments of their troops, the leaders of Wanxi enthusiastically established arsenals. In the winter of 1930, Peng Yuting raised 110,000 dollars from landlords and local businessmen to building an arsenal in Zhenping. In order to keep the secrecy, the arsenal had the name of “The Ironware Factory of Zhenping”. Peng employed an experienced weapon technician from Luoyang, and bought some advanced equipments made in Germany. The factory could manufacture rifle, pistol, machine gun, hand grenade, and so forth. Chen Shunde set up the arsenal of Xichuan in 1928.

Bie Tingfang did his utmost to improve the equipment of mintuan. From 1927, he built small arsenals in some towns of Neixiang. In 1930, he invested more than three millions silver dollars to extend the Houzhai arsenal. Bie purchased advanced equipments and high-quality steels from Shanghai, Wuhan, and Nanjing, and hired some engineers as the product supervisor. The arsenal had more than four hundred workers. It could manufacture rifle, heavy and light machine gun, 150mm cannon,

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82mm mortar, and other relatively advanced weapons. Bie put the arsenal under the
strict military-style administration. He issued an order that anyone without the
permission of the headquarters could not enter the factory. Moreover, he dispatched
a special battalion to protect the arsenal. By 1940, it manufactured twenty thousands
rifles, one thousand and five hundreds heavy machine guns, five thousands light
machine gun, four 150mm cannons, one hundred and fifty-six mortars, and more
than one hundred thousands shells. In 1933, Bie set up an additional grenade
manufacturer in Neixiang.

The training of mintuan

In the early days of the Republican period, there were some militia
organizations\(^{211}\), such as the “Crop-watching Society” and the “Defending Corps”,
in Wanxi. These militias had a nickname “juzi (station)”. Their duties were to keep
public order, check households, and collect tax. However, because of the political
disorder, some powerful families controlled them and transformed them into a
personal tool of exploiting and oppressing the rural residents. These poorly trained
and organized old militias were of little use in Wanxi\(^{212}\). Generally speaking, the old
militia had no explicit political goal, and was in poor discipline and incomplete
organization. To settle these problems, Peng Yuting worked out a rigorous program

\(^{211}\) The structure of militia organization in Henan was very complex. It included indigenous group,
such as the Red Spears sectarians, and semi-governmental military organization, such as the “People’s
Self-Defense Corps”. Red Spear Society was the most widespread militia organization in Henan. One
scholar points out that Wanxi’s mintuan might have some connections with Red Spear sectarians.
However, as far as to my knowledge, there is no evidence of direct linkages between them. One
possibility is that when leaders of Wanxi were organizing mintuan, they absorbed some members of
former Red Spear sectarians. For detailed information of Red Spear Society, see Odoric Y. K. Wou’s
1994).

\(^{212}\) Xu Youli 徐有礼, *Sanshi niandai Wanxi xiangcun jianshe moshi yanjiu* (A Study on the Rural
of training. He hoped that after the training, the militia would take on a totally new look.

In the *Outline of Training*, the training of political idea was put on the top. It emphasized that:

(By the political idea training) the soldiers of *mintuan* will understand the current situation of China, and what the danger that the country is facing. Moreover, they will know that the local self-government is an indispensable way of saving the nation. And, to promote the local self-government, the work should start from the county. In the work, the self-defense and the self-government cannot be separated.\(^{213}\)

Such the training was helpful for these peasant soldiers to improve their political consciousness. They would understand what the significance of their activity was: *mintuan* was one of the best methods of self-defense; self-defense was the foundation of local self-government; and the ultimate goal of local self-government was to save the country.

The second part of training was the basic vocational education. Peng required that there should be one elementary vocational training center in every company of *mintuan*. The third part was about morality. The goal of the morality training was to change every member of *mintuan* into both a “good soldier” and “good citizen”. The fourth one was the vitality training, in which the *mintuan* solider was taught a positive attitude towards life. The fifth was the discipline training, in which every soldier was told that the strict discipline was the lifeblood of *mintuan*. The ceremony and propriety training was indispensable for a quality troop. In the training, the officer would learn how to treat his subordinates fairly, and the soldier would be

\(^{213}\) Li Tengxian 李腾仙, *Peng Yuting yu Zhenping zizhi* 彭禹廷与镇平自治 (Peng Yuting and the Self-government of Zhenping), p. 239.
taught how to respect their officers properly. Besides them, there were physical, technological, hygienic, and military skill trainings\textsuperscript{214}.

To help the training, Peng composed a famous “Training Song” and demanded every soldier of mintuan recite and sing it every day\textsuperscript{215}. In the song, first of all, Peng told the mintuan soldier that a man should not be out for money and power, but take the lofty ideal of saving the country and hometown as the life goal. Peng hoped that his troop could show a distinctive mentality. Therefore, he wrote in the song that every soldier should have the spirit of fight and sacrifice. In the old militias, there were many ruffians, who were the lackey of powerful families and were regarded as the black sheep in the countryside. Peng said that the lyrics of the song declared that mintuan, the new militia, would strictly obey the disciplines and was maintained in good order, and the troop would behave like the legendary yuejiajun\textsuperscript{216}. Because the members of mintuan were not professional soldier, Peng encouraged them to learn knowledge and vocational skills. Lack of the sense of responsibility was common in the old militias. Thus, Peng demanded that his troop should have the strong sense of obligation and take fighting against the banditry and safeguarding the hometown as a sacred charge. Lastly, Peng hoped that every soldier understand well the significance of promoting self-defense and local self-government in Wanxi.

Mintuan played an extremely important role in the local self-government of Wanxi. To prevent the soldiers from being arrogant and overbearing, Peng issued ten

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid, p. 239-41.
\textsuperscript{215} Zhenping zizhi gaikuang (A Survey of the Local Self-government of Zhenping), pp. 56-7.
\textsuperscript{216} Yuejiajun refers to the extremely-well-disciplined troop led by the General Yue Fei in Song dynasty.
prohibitions: no soldier was allowed to be cruel, ruthless, and officiousness; soldier could not do anything to cheat and extort; soldier could not be impolite and arrogant to the residents; without the permission of the resident, soldier could not enter into the private house; smoking, wining, gambling, and whoring were strictly forbidden in the troop, and so forth. Any soldier that violated any of these prohibitions would be severely punished and be removed from the troop.

Compared with Peng, who emphasized on the political training of mintuan, Bie Tingfang paid more attention to the military training. As early as in 1927, he set up a training school for his troop. In 1932, Bie established the training centre of officer and appointed Bie Guangdian, one of his nephews and a graduate of the Military Academy of Baoding, as the director. The center organized three training sessions, and each session lasted six months. There were five hundred and fourteen officers, who were from the mintuan of Neixiang, Zhenping, Deng, and other counties of Wanxi, took the sessions. The courses provided by the center included the regulations of infantry drill, the battlefield service, and the skills of night fighting, digging trenches, and shooting. In the first session, the trainee was the company commander and platoon leader. In the second session, all the platoon leaders were required to attend the course. In the third one, squad leaders were selected to take the training. These trainees became the backbone of Wanxi mintuan.

Suppressing banditry

The prime goal of organizing mintuan was to suppress the rampant bandits in

\footnote{Ibid, pp. 154-5}
Wanxi. Peng Yuting began the work as soon as he returned to Zhenping. Bie Tingfang had the most powerful local armed force in the region and played the decisive role in suppressing the bandits. Compared with Zhenping and Neixiang, the banditry in Xichuan was less serious. By Chen Shunde’s efforts, the social order of Xichuan had been restored in 1930\textsuperscript{218}. Here, this thesis briefly describes the two major battles commanded by Peng and Bie.

In the February of 1931, Cui Erdan, one of the most ferocious bandit chieftains of Nanyang, led more than four thousands bandits to invade Zhenping. Peng ordered the 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 25\textsuperscript{th} regiment to hit out, and commanded himself the 24\textsuperscript{th} regiment to attack the bandits. Bie Tingfang sent his elite troop to the front. The battle was in deadlock. At the day of Chinese New Year, while it was snowing, Peng launched the final attack. After a hand-to-hand combat, more than one thousand enemies were eliminated\textsuperscript{219}.

In the winter of 1932, Wang Tai, another major bandit chieftain of Nanyang, reorganized the defeated bandits and expanded his gang into thousands. Peng kept an eye on Wang Tai and ordered his troop to increase patrolling in case of any emergency. In the next February, Wang Tai began attacking Zhenping. Bie Tingfang dispatched his troop to support Peng. The mintuan of Zhenping and Neixiang bravely resisted the bandits. Peng told his soldiers that there was only one choice—“fight to death”. Scared by the mintuan’s fierce resistance, the bandits began retreating. Peng ordered

\textsuperscript{218} Xichuan xianzhi (The General Records of Xichuan County) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1990), p. 412.

\textsuperscript{219} Zhenping xian defang zizhi shimo (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 24.
the 23rd, 24th, and 25th regiment hit out immediately. While Wang Tai and his troops were crossing a river, Peng and Bie ordered their troop to attack the most vulnerable part of the bandit gang. More than one thousand bandits were captured or annihilated. Peng did not stop the attack and chased Wang into Hubei province. Peng and Bie won the decisive battle in suppressing the banditry220.

The local people recognized the efforts of Peng and Bie. When Peng's troop passed Heilongji, a small bandit-ridden town, “all the residents turned out, and anyone who saw Peng Yuting was regarded as the happiest person that day.”221 After the battle against Wang Tai, Bie’s mintuan returned to Neixiang. On their way home, the residents set table and foods in front of the door to welcome these brave soldiers. Spontaneously, the peasants held memorial ceremonies for the soldiers who sacrificed in the battle.

Bie was the leading figure in suppressing the banditry. The troop he controlled had the most advanced weapons and the strongest fighting capability in Nanyang. Not only in Neixiang, but also in Zhenping, Deng, and other counties of Wanxi, his troop fought against the bandits. When the banditry in Wanxi was put down, Bie participated in the battles in the eastern Nanyang. After 1934, the banditry, which disturbed Nanyang for decades, was mopped up. In the process, Bie was rewarded many times by the provincial government.

After their reorganization and systematic training, and especially after the test of battles against the bandits, Wanxi mintuan developed into a powerful armed force that

221 Li Tengxian 李腾仙, Peng Yuting yu Zhenping zizhi 彭禹廷与镇平自治 (Peng Yuting and the Self-government of Zhenping), p. 68.
no one could look down upon. In the May of 1934, Liu Zhi, the chairman of the Guomindang’s provincial government of Henan and a veteran general, inspected Wanxi. On the both side of the Zhenping-Neixiang highway, there was a soldier every fifty meters. The soldiers’ discipline, appearance, and bearing impressed Liu, and he realized that the mintuan of Wanxi was not an ordinary militia.

*Mintuan* was extremely important for the local self-government of Wanxi. Bie said: “In Wanxi, the soldier should never put down his gun, and the gun should never ‘leave’ the region. Everybody is soldier and should do his best to protect the hometown. And, the local armed force should not be administered by the (Guomindang’s) government.” The powerful *mintuan* marked that the local elite of Wanxi had extracted the military resources of social power in the region. The extraction of the military resource laid the solid foundation of creating the local self-government. Peng pointed out that “there is the mintuan, there is the local self-government” and “*Mintuan* is the driving power of the self-government of Zhenping.” It was *mintuan* that guaranteed the local elite of Wanxi could promote the local self-government and resist the provincial government’s penetration.

To Wanxi, it had to take the military organization as the premise of promoting the local self-government, because the situation of banditry was so serious. People in the 1930s could understand this. Zhuang Zexuan, a scholar of local self-government in the 1930s, argued that Peng Yuting’s goal of organizing *mintuan* and promoting the
local self-government was to suppress the bandits as soon as possible. Cheng Fang, who studied the county administration in the 1930s, pointed out that the basic reason of promoting this defense-centered local self-government was the social instability. Leonard Hsu, a delegate of the central government to the Nations League, defended Wanxi that what Peng did met the need and will of the local people.

It must be noted that the defense-centered local self-government had a shortcoming: the local politics was militarized. That is to say, when it came to the social administration, the methods employed by such the local self-government were usually oversimplified and crude. The true power center of the counties of Wanxi was the headquarters of mintuan. For example in Neixiang, the headquarters in Xixiakou town, in which Bie Tingfang set up his office, firmly controlled the military, political, financial, and personnel power. The local residents joked that the headquarters looked like the imperial court. Bie divided the county into nine wards, seventy-two joint-bao, three hundreds and twenty bao, and more than three thousands jia, and demanded that every bao and jia must take military training. Therefore, the militarized bao-jia system replaced the grass-root civil administration. In other words, Bie achieved the politicization of the military means, which brought about the tight social control and indiscriminate execution in Neixiang. In the 1930s, Bie was

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224 Zhuang Zexuan, Xiangcun jianshe and xiangcun jiaoyu (Rural Reconstruction and Rural Education) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1939), pp. 45-6.
227 Zhang Hexuan, “Wo suo zhidaod de Bie Tingfang” (Some Stories about Bie Tingfang), in Xixia wenshi Ziliao (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xixia County) (Xixia: CPPCC of Xixia County, 1990).
renowned for his draconian laws. Even Peng Yuting was affected by the militarization of politics. Li Zongren said in his Memoir that Peng “executed people like flies”\textsuperscript{229}.

The similar case that mintuan played the dominant role in the grass-root social administration could be found in Guangxi\textsuperscript{230}. Usually, we think that, in the province controlled by two powerful regional militarists, there would be a huge amount of official troops. However, it was different in Guangxi. In the mid 1930s, the number of the official armies of Guangxi was only around 20,000-50,000. The main part of Li Zongrong and Bai Chongxi’s military force was mintuan. A Western observer noticed that Guangxi had the capability to mobilize one million people to join the war, although these people had poor equipment, they were outstanding soldier. The secret of the one million soldiers was mintuan. Guangxi mintuan was organized and administered by the provincial government led by Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi. Bai declared that all the able-bodied men at the age of 18-45 would take the military training and become the quality resource of troop. He called such the way “the army is being incorporated into mintuan”. Li and Bai divided the province into several districts, and set up the headquarters of mintuan in each of them. The district headquarters had the right to administer the county headquarters of mintuan. Under county, there were reserve teams of mintuan in every ward, sub-ward, and village.

The mintuan of Guangxi was not just a military organization. It performed the

\textsuperscript{229} Li Zongren, \textit{Li Zongren huiyilu} 麗正倫回憶錄 (Memoir) (Nanning: CPPCC of Guangxi 广西自治区政协, 1980), vol.2, pp. 800-1.

administrative function in the grass-root society. Li and Bai paid a great attention to balance the military and political function of *mintuan*. Their ultimate aim was to transform *mintuan* into a political-military organ, in which “thirty-percent of its functions are the military, and seventy-percent are the political”. In the training course for the cadre of *mintuan*, we can see the *administrativization* of *mintuan*. In the beginning days of the 1930s, the course focused on the military training. By the mid, the political and administrative course became the main part in the training session. The officer of *mintuan* was not only a military commander but also a civil administrator in the grass-root society. In county and sub-county, the head of *mintuan* was concurrently the director of the administrative organ and the primary school.

Guangxi *mintuan* was a good tool of mobilizing and controlling the grass-root society. When it comes to the social control and mobilization, the military method has the highest efficiency, because it adopts the vertical administrative system. The militarists in Guangxi ingeniously integrated the military organization into the civil administration. By this way, the provincial government of Guangxi maintained the efficiency of mobilizing the society, while at the same time, reduced—to a certain extent—the harm to the civil politics caused by the excessive militarization. In the 1930s, Guangxi was praised as the “model province” in social administration. The achievement of Guangxi should give, at least partly, the credit to *mintuan*. However, the basic spirit of the politics of Guangxi was still military. That is way one scholar calls Guangxi a “militarized province”.

Similarly, *mintuan* exerted a great influence on Wanxi. Philip Kuhn argues that
the self-governments of Wanxi developed from the network of *mintuan*\textsuperscript{231}. Hence, this thesis calls Wanxi the “militarized county”. The militarization was one of keys of understanding Wanxi’s work on rural reconstruction. In the 1930s, Wanxi enjoyed a high reputation in the Rural Reconstruction Movement (RRM). Many advocators of the RRM praised its efficiency, which was a conspicuous lack in the RRM experiments led by intellectuals. One of the reasons of Wanxi’s success was that, by the way of organizing *mintuan* and integrating it into the grass-root administration, the local self-government of Wanxi could mobilize the peasants to participate in the rural reconstruction work. To some extent, Wanxi provided a solution to Liang Shuming’s emotional sigh—“Why we act enthusiastically, but the countryside prefers inaction to action?” What Liang and his counterparts did not find in their experiments was just the effective method of mobilization, like *mintuan*.

3) Autonomy

Promoting the local self-government was a systematic project, which included politics, economy, education, culture, public security, and so forth. Peng declared that:

[Promoting the local self-government] must start with politics. On the base of politics, we can develop education. With the help of politics and education, we can improve rural economy and distribute fairly the social wealth. In the process of economic development, education will be more universal, and politics will be more enlightened. Finally, all social problems will be settled\textsuperscript{232}.

The politics Peng talked here was about how to create the self-government in


Wanxi. The work included two successive stages—“Overthrow the official administration and avoid the gentry-politics”

“Overthrow the official administration”

The self-government of Xichuan was the earliest one in Wanxi. In 1926, after a discussion with Bie Tingfang, Chen set up the Xichuanzizhixiejinweiyuanhui (the Committee of Promoting the Local Self-government in Xichuan). In the next year, he set up the general office of the eight wards of Xichuan, which was the chief administrative organ of the county. After 1930, it was renamed the Committee of Local Self-government of Xichuan. In the same period, there was a Guomindang’s county government in the county. Although the government had a complete set of sections, like civil affairs, judicial affairs, construction, and education, it did not have any power. The Committee led by Chen was the true government. The Committee had the right to appoint the important officials, like the senior officers of mintuan and the head of ward, and it was in charge of collecting taxes. “The so-called Guomindang’s county government of Xichuan was just a mere skeleton.”

In 1930, Bie established Neixiangjianshecujinweiyuanhui (the Reconstruction Committee of Neixiang). The committee sent some instructors to the wards, towns, and villages to help the residents to perform self-government. In fact, the true power center of Neixiang was the mintuan headquarters commanded by Bie himself. The reconstruction committee was just attached to the headquarters. The headquarters determined important affairs of the county, such as the farmland survey and

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233 Ibid.
235 Ibid, p. 413.
reconnoitering, tax collection, finance, road building, and improving agriculture.

Following is the structure of the self-government of Neixiang:

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SM1: Structure map of the local self-government of Neixiang
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The Financial Office was in charge of the revenue and expenditure of the self-government, tax collection, and the administration of grains; the Mediation Committee was a kind of Xisonghui (dropping lawsuit society), which was the “supreme court” of Neixiang; the duty of the Reconstruction Committee was to put all the policies and resolutions into practice. All directors and heads of these committees and offices were selected and appointed by the headquarters of mintuan.

In the 1930s, there was the Guomindang’s county government in Neixiang, but it was just in name. Every morning, the county magistrate appointed by the provincial government could not enter the county government from the main entrance, but from the side door. Then, because mintuan had “borrowed” his office, the magistrate had to find an empty office to work. From 1927 to 1940, there were eighteen GMD appointed county magistrates in Neixiang. All of them found that they could not coexist with Bie Tingfang, because Bie demanded that the magistrate must report everything, important or insignificant, to the headquarters.

In the October of 1930, Peng set up the general office of the ten wards of Neixiang, and through the mediation of the local magistrates of Neixiang, Peng established a number of Mintuan organizations, which were the most powerful and influential organizations in Neixiang. These organizations were under the leadership of the headquarters of Mintuan and secretly supported by Peng. Moreover, these organizations were also responsible for maintaining the stability and order of Neixiang. Peng also provided financial support to these organizations, which enabled them to carry out various activities and maintain their operations.

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Zhenping\textsuperscript{237}. The duty of the office was to be “in charge of all affairs of the self-government of Zhenping including self-defense, dropping lawsuits, education, reconstruction, and so on.” The office consisted of three departments: the executive office; Committee of Self-government; and the general society of dropping lawsuits. The executive office consisted of four sections - general affairs, social survey, financial affairs, and propaganda. The Committee of Self-government was to discuss important affairs of the self-government and pass relative resolutions. The committee was composed of the ten ward heads and all section heads of the self-government. Finally, the general society of dropping lawsuits had five prime mediators\textsuperscript{238}.

With the development of the local self-government, Peng found that many works of the general office and the committee were overlapping. In 1931, Peng set up the “Committee of the Local Self-government of Zhenping County (CLS)”\textsuperscript{239}. CLS was the legislative body and the highest administrative organ in the county, and there were twenty-five members in the Committee. Its responsibilities included:

Verify the budget of each section of the self-government; resolve all the policies and regulations of the self-government; review the proposals and suggestions submitted by the sections, wards and the people; recommend and appoint the head and deputy-head of the general office and the section head, etc.\textsuperscript{240}

The general office of the self-government became an executive organ of the Committee. In 1932, the Committee passed an organic regulation and elaborated the duty of each section\textsuperscript{241}. The duty of the section of general affairs was to “keep and sort

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{237} Zhenping zizhi gaikuang (A Survey of the Local Self-government of Zhenping), p. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{238} Ibid, pp. 2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{239} Ibid, pp. 4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
out all official documents, and do the accounting and auditing work”. The section of finance was in charge of “working out the budget of the self-government and administering the public fund”. The work of the section of social survey included “doing the farmland survey, reconnoitering, and conducting census”. The function of the reconstruction section was to “build road, carry out afforestation, build and maintain the irrigation work, and improve agriculture”\(^{242}\).

In 1933, just before Peng passed away, two more administrative organs were added into the Committee. The section of militia was to handle some basic affairs of *mintuan*. The function of the new mediation committee was to deal with some civil legal cases in the countryside. By this time, the independent self-government of Zhenping totally replaced the Guomindang’s official administration in the county. Following is the structure of the self-government of Zhenping:

![Structure map of the local self-government of Zhenping](image)

**SM2: Structure map of the local self-government of Zhenping**

\(^{242}\) Ibid, pp. 5-7.
When Xichuan, Neixiang, and Zhenping established the semi-independent self-government respectively, the Guomindang’s administration was forced to leave the region. In the 1930s, although the Guomindang’s government was kept in the counties of Wanxi, it had been an empty shell.

These new self-governments had good cooperation in many works. The office of the Joint-defense of Wanxi was the highest administrative organ of military affairs in the region. Bie Tingfang was elected as the chief coordinator, and became the military leader of Wanxi. In the Rural Normal School of Wanxi, there was a board that was composed of the leader and senior members of the self-government of each county of Wanxi. To a great extent, the normal school was the political center of the region, in which the influential figures of Wanxi discussed the important matters of the local self-government. Peng Yuting was elected as the President of the board, and his political idea was taken as the guiding theory. Peng became the spiritual leader in Wanxi. Therefore, in an outsider’s eyes, Wanxi looked like an incorporated government. An observer even called Wanxi the “Federated Self-government Union of Chengping, Ssichuan and Neihsiang”243.

Every county had its own characteristics. Chen Shunde had a mild attitude towards Guomindang, and there was no serious conflict between the self-government of Xichuan and the Guomindang’s provincial government. In the late 1930s, Chen even cooperated with Guomindang to administer the local affairs. On the contrary, Peng Yuting firmly believed that Guomindang had no capability to develop the local

society. He took a firm stand and executed the county magistrate appointed by the provincial government. When it came to the social administration, Peng was relatively civil and tried to establish a complete set of grass-root administrative system. Bie Tingfang was a hundred-percent military strongman, and his rule in Neixiang was characterized by the tight social control and the draconian laws. However, his attitude towards Guomindang was much more tactful than Peng. If only the provincial government did not interfere in the local affairs of Neixiang, he would do his utmost to avoid the direct conflict with the ruling party.

“Avoid the gentry-politics”

Peng, Bie, and Chen were not the old-style gentry, but belonged to the group of new local elite in the Republican period. One scholar argues that the new local elite refer to one “who was a native of one place, and had been a GMD appointed grass-root official. In the place, they were influential figure and their reputation and capability were recognized by the local people”. The leaders of Wanxi met the definition. Peng Yuting had been appointed the head of the Southern Ward of Zhenping County. Bie Tingfang used to be the head of the civil corps of the Second

244 The slogan might be confusing. Without any doubt, Peng himself was influential local gentry. Why did he advocate “avoid gentry-politics”? His purpose was to prevent the local self-government to be manipulated by some established lineages. In one of the primary sources, Peng and his colleagues argued that established lineages did many evil things to Wanxi, including: 1) excessively taxing the local residents; 2) practicing usury; 3) forced labor; 4) colluding with bandits and corrupt officials; 5) hiring thugs to oppress villagers; 6) monopolizing the grass-root administrative position; 7) making illegal interest from civil/criminal suits, and so forth. Detailed information can be found in Peng Yuting yu Zhenping zizhi (Peng Yuting and the Self-government of Zhenping), pp. 42-53. That is why Peng tried his best to reshuffle the grass-root administration and replace established lineages by new officials chosen by the local self-government of Zhenping County. Some established lineages were extremely unhappy with Peng. This was one of the reasons why Peng was murdered by one of the gentries of Zhenping.

Western Ward of Neixiang County. Chen Shunde had held the post of county magistrate of Xichuan. In the eyes of Zhenping people, Peng was an outstanding filial son and the hero of suppressing banditry. In Neixiang, Bie was an awesome military strongman, and was regarded as the unmatchable leader of resisting banditry. For the people of Xichuan, Chen was a noble, well-educated, and public-spirited man. Compared with the traditional local gentry, they had the modern nationalist idea. They were well-read in the situation of the world and the country, and concerned themselves with the fate of the nation. They held that the traditional way of administration had not been suitable for the rural area because it was easily controlled by powerful families and degenerated into a tool of oppressing the peasants. Therefore, they hoped that they could replace it with a modern grass-root social administrative system. Peng’s work was relatively successful.

When the local self-government commenced, Peng reorganized Zhenping into ten wards. Under the ward, there were 171 villages and 19 towns\textsuperscript{246}. In 1931, the Committee of Self-government resolved that there should be one head, one deputy-head, and one secretary and concurrently accountant in every village; depending on the size, an administrative village could have 1-3 policemen; every village should set up a society of dropping lawsuit, and it was directed by the deputy-head of the village.

In the past, the wealthy and powerful families occupied the post of village head. They handled the village affairs at will, and the account of the village finance was a

\textsuperscript{246} Zhenping zizhi gaikuang 《镇平自治概况》 (A Survey of the Local Self-government of Zhenping), p. 8.
mess. In the countryside, there were many land and property disputes. But the ordinary peasants were usually illiterate and ignorant of the legal procedure. Thus, with the excuse of helping the peasants to deal with the lawsuit, the powerful families colluded with the village police and the judge of the county court and asked excessive money and goods from the poor residents. In the eyes of these powerful families, the peasant was just an insignificant pawn in their hands and could be pushed around as they pleased.

Peng tried his best to change the situation. After the self-government appointed the full-time accountant in each village, the village finance became more and more transparent and standardized. Under the strict accounting system, it was extremely difficult for any member of the village administration to embezzle the public funds. The new village policeman was totally different with the old one. The Committee of Self-government strictly trained these new village policemen, and warned them not to collude with powerful families. Otherwise, they would face a severe punishment. The setup of the society of dropping lawsuit was very significant for the countryside. By the way of mediation, the members of the society tried to settle the dispute between the villagers, and persuaded them from going to the court. They told the peasants that going to the court would cost much more time and money and would be easily cheated by the pettifoggers.

While the grass-root political organization was reorganizing, Peng conducted a general election in Zhenping, in which the people would elect all heads of village and town. Peng mentioned that “the village and town are the cornerstone of the local
self-government, and the head of village and town will play a critical role in the local politics.247 Peng spent much time and energy in this election and demanded that the head and deputy-head of the general office and other senior officials of the self-government must come to the villages in person and help the villagers to participate in the election. In the villages and towns, those officials encouraged the capable and moral peasant to join the election and serve the self-government. At the same time, they kept watch on powerful families and prevented them from doing anything to sabotage the election. After two months’ effort, one hundred and ninety new heads of village and town were elected. Peng felt very satisfied with the result. The next step was to elect the head of ward. According to the regulation248, the Committee of Self-government would nominate three candidates and the people had the right to choose one of them as the ward head.

The self-government promulgated *The Organic Rules of Ward* and stipulated that the general office was the highest administrative organ in a ward and it was directed by the ward head; the ward head had the right to choose one deputy-head.249 Under the general office, there were the executive, reconstruction, and education section, which had the duty to do the concrete work. The committee of mediation was attached to the general office. At the end of every month, the ward general office must submitted a report the Committee of Self-government, in which there was a detailed record of all affairs the office dealt with in the month. The Committee would check

and evaluate the report.

Peng Yuting placed his hope on the two hundreds new heads of ward, village, and town. They must rapidly and effectively put into practice all the policies, plans, and program proposed by the self-government. Otherwise, the grand ideal of the local self-government would turn out a mere scrap of paper. To make sure that they would be competent in their post, Peng worked out the training program for these new grass-root officials. Every month, the heads of village and town would be put together and take training course twice. The Committee would check their performance at any time, and anyone that was found disqualified for their job would be immediately replaced.

The training course included: sanminzhuyi; the general knowledge of local self-government, rural political organizations, and militia; the method of social survey; the forms and formulas of official document, and so on. At the beginning of each training session, every official must make a declaration:

I, with honesty, swear here: from now on, I will do my best to get rid of all bad habits and to be a moral, decent, and qualified citizen. Abiding by the teachings of the late Prime Minister Sun Zhongshan, I will, with my heart and soul, serve the career of promoting the local self-government. … I will do my utmost to create an open, fair, and enlightened politics, and to bring the happy life to every people.²⁵⁰

Peng also wrote a manual, in which there were nineteen regulations that the grass-root officials must abide by²⁵¹.

The strict nineteen regulations, training, and supervision from the Committee generated a great binding force on the grass-root officials, and prevented them from

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 3.
²⁵¹ Zhenping xian defang zizhi shimo (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 32-4.
being degenerated into the black sheep in the countryside. To the members of the wealthy and powerful families, if they were moral and would like to serve the locality, they could join the self-government. To those immoral and vicious guys, the self-government and mintuan mercilessly cracked them down.

4) The relationship of Wanxi and the Guomindang’s provincial government

It was impossible for a ruling party to give up willingly the control over the locality. For example in Zhenping, Guomindang did endeavor to extend its power into the remote county. In 1926, there was a party headquarters of Guomindang in Zhenping. However, it did not begin working. In 1929, the provincial headquarters of Guomindang in Henan sent two people, who had been trained in Kaifeng, to reestablish the party organization of Zhenping. The party headquarters was resumed. Nevertheless, because there were communists inside the headquarters, it was disbanded on the next year.

After the Great War of the Central Plains, the political situation of Henan changed greatly. In the October of 1930, Liu Zhi, one the closest follower of Jiang Jieshi, was appointed the chairman of the Guomindang’s provincial government of Henan. Liu was a veteran general. When he was an instructor of the Whampoa Military Academy, he had a good relationship with Jiang, who was the President of the prestigious Academy. The Great War of the Central Plains broke out in 1930, and

Jiang appointed Liu the chief commander of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Army Group\textsuperscript{253}. After the war, to reward his outstanding performance, the central government selected Liu as the new chairman of Henan.

Liu followed strictly Jiang’s teaching—“Rule by the Party”—and tried his best to refine the party organizations in the province\textsuperscript{254}. He reestablished the Guiding Committee of the Party Affairs of Henan Province, and took up himself the post of standing committee. The Committee enlisted a great number of influential figures of Henan. Liu strengthened the party organization at the provincial level, and at the same time, he worked hard to expand the municipal and county level party organization. By the way of heart-to-heart conversation, he increased the cohesion of the grass-root party organization; by the way of re-registration, he recruited many new members for Guomindang. He required all the party organizations should clear up the estrangement and cooperate sincerely to improve the efficiency of the local administration. Moreover, he selected some young and capable members of the party to joint the ward-head training program, by which he hoped that the party could penetrate into the grass-root society of Henan.

Besides the party reorganization, another important work done by Liu was to consolidate the county-level administration. The key of the work was to reshuffle the officials of the county government, and appoint the capable and loyal people the county magistrate. On one hand, these new magistrates would improve the local

\textsuperscript{253} Liu Zhi, \textit{Wo de huiyi} (Memoir) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1982), p. 84.

politics; on the other hand, they would not hinder the provincial government’s efforts of extending the state power. Before the reform, Liu accused that many local officials of Henan were “opportunistic. And they collude with the warlords or the evil gentry and local bullies”\textsuperscript{255}. Such the kind of local official was a great harm to the local politics. To change the situation, from 1931, Liu set up the Training Center of Local Officials in Kaifeng. The center had two parts. One was for the county magistrate and the candidate of county magistrate; the other was for the section head of county government. Meanwhile, he revised the regulation of appointing county magistrate and required the Department of Civil Affairs of the provincial government make a monthly inspection tour to every county\textsuperscript{256}. In 1932, Liu conducted a registration of county magistrate candidate, by which he hoped the provincial government could find more capable candidates\textsuperscript{257}. In 1934, the provincial government passed the Bulletin of Promoting the County Administration, in which there were detailed instructions on how to perform the administration\textsuperscript{258}.

Liu Zhi did not spend much energy in promoting the local self-government. In 1932, the Headquarters of Suppressing (Communist) Banditry of Hubei, Henan and Anhui, which headed directly by Jiang Jieshi, issued an order that stopped all the local self-government and began reorganizing the \textit{bao-jia} system\textsuperscript{259}. Liu started the work immediately when he got the order. Then, the key work of the county administration

\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid, pp. 8-10.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid, pp. 35-41.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid, p. 12.
of Henan turned out reorganizing and upgrading the bao-jia system. By the October of 1933, the provincial government of Henan finished the job. The goal of reorganizing the bao-jia system was to control and mobilize more effectively the grass-root society.

To check the tide of local militarization, Liu worked hard to reorganizing the local armed force. The provincial government declared that:

In the province, there are so many local armed forces. Most of them are controlled and manipulated by the local bullies and evil gentry. They are a method of self-defense in name, but a great harm to the local society in reality.

Liu Zhi offered a solution:

All the standing local armed forces are incorporated into the team of maintaining public security, and all the reserve armed force into the sub-team. The province is divided into six districts. In each district, the provincial government appoints one commander to administer these teams and sub-teams.

In those days, it was a regular practice for the people of Henan to buy and store some guns for self-defense. In his Memoir, Liu estimated that there were around 800,000 private guns in the province. Liu thought that these private weapons were an impetus for establishing the local armed force. Therefore, he demanded the county governments confiscate and destroy these private weapons as soon as possible.

When he was appointed the chairman of Henan Province, Liu Zhi was only

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260 Ran Mianhui and Li Huiyu, Minguo shiqi baojia zhidu yanjiu (Study on the Bao-jia System in the Republican Period) (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2005), p. 81.
262 Ibid.
thirty-nine-year old. A young and successful general, he had grand political ideal. He wrote:

I ascend a height and enjoy a distant view. Before me, there is a long road. I understand the central government places a great career on me. I resolve to accomplish the task and never let the Party down.\textsuperscript{265}

As a loyal and devoted disciple of Jiang Jieshi, he knew well that the most important work was to secure that the state power could penetrate into the grass-root society of Henan. His political idea determined the unavoidable conflict of Wanxi and the provincial authorities. In Liu’s eyes, what Wanxi did was totally illegal. In a report to the central government, he wrote:

In name, the local self-government of Zhenping, Neixiang, and Xichuan is the self-government by people; in reality, all political power of the self-government is monopolized by one or two evil gentry. All their political organizations are illegal\textsuperscript{266}.

Therefore, among them—the determined chairman, stubborn Peng Yuting, and smart Bie Tingfang, there were vivid, bloody, and comic power shows.

\textbf{The bleeding head}

A guest asked Peng Yuting the following questions:

Guest: Right now, the political power is in the hands of the bureaucrats and warlords. How can you promote the local self-government?

Peng: The work should start from the reorganization of the local government.

Guest: How difficult is it?

Peng [Answered proudly]: When the county magistrate is executed, and the

\textsuperscript{266} Liu Zhi, \textit{Xunshi Xiangcheng, Nanyang, Zhenping, Neixiang, Dengxian deng wu xian xianzheng zhuangkuang ji ying yu xingge zhengli ge shixiang} (The Report of the Supervision tour in Xiangcheng, Nanyang, Zhenping, Neixiang, and Deng County) (1934), \textit{Neizheng gongbao} (The Bulletin of the Ministry of Civil Affairs), vol. 7-39.
bandits are defeated, the morale of the people is boosted greatly. Then, there is no any obstacle [for the local self-government].

In other words, beheading of Kan Baozhen, the GMD appointed county magistrate, marked the end of Guomindang’s power in Zhenping.

Kan Baozhen was the county magistrate of Zhenping. He knew that Peng Yuting was very influential and popular in the county. While Peng was suppressing the bandits, Kan felt that Peng’s activity would threaten his status. And, Kan understood that if Peng promoted successfully the local self-government, he would be a mere figurehead. Therefore, he tried his best to keep the status quo. When he heard that Peng came back from the Academy of Village self-government of Henan, he sent Peng five hundreds silver dollars and hoped that Peng would leave Zhenping as soon as possible. Peng refused determinedly his money. Then, Kan began spreading the rumor that Peng Yuting was a propagandist of communism and would stir up a rebellion in Zhenping. Peng was extremely mad at these rumors.

Liu Zhi had noticed the vigorous development of the local self-government of Wanxi, and felt that it was necessary for him to take some actions to check the centrifugal force. Liu knew that Ning Xigu graduated from the Whampoa Military Academy, where he taught for years. To disintegrate the leading echelon of the local self-government, he appointed Ning the commander of the militias of Deng, Xinye, Nanyang, and Zhenping County. Then, he invited Ning to come to Kaifeng and promised Ning a senior post in the provincial government. Ning discussed the matter with Peng. Peng said that if Ning could get an important post in the capital city, it

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would be very helpful for them to promote the local self-government in Wanxi. After the discussion, Ning decided to accept Liu’s invitation and go to Kaifeng immediately.

The invitation was a carefully calculated plot. Kan Baozhen bought over some gunmen and asked them to ambush in the road by which Ning would pass. In the eastern suburb of Qinyang County, Ning Xigu was assassinated\(^\text{268}\). The news shocked Peng. He realized that it was too naive for him to believe that the provincial government would give Wanxi support. Compromise could only bring about more terrible calamity. There was only one way of promoting the local self-government: overthrowing totally the Guomindang’s official administration in the region. First of all, he must get rid of Kan.

After the assassination, Kan knew that Zhenping was not a safe place for him, and he was transferred to Xinye County. Peng wrote a letter to Kan and said that he had arranged a big farewell banquet for Kan, and hoped that the magistrate would give him a “face” to attend. As soon as Kan arrived at the dining hall, Peng arrested him. To tell the people that he had resolved to overthrow the Guomindang’s administration in Zhenping, Peng decided to execute Kan in public, and pasted up the notice on the wall of every main street. After Kan was beheaded, Peng put the bleeding head before Ning’s tomb and wrote himself an elegiac couplet\(^\text{269}\).

The execution caused a stir in Henan. When Liu Zhi got the news, he flew into a rage. Some people sent an urgent mail to Zhang Zhijiang, who used to be the superior

\(^{268}\) *Zhenping xian defang zizhi shimo* (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 100.

\(^{269}\) Ibid, p. 102.
of Peng in the Northwest Army and now was working in the central government. Zhang came to Kaifeng in person and mediated the matter. Zhang wrote a letter to Peng:

> When a mantis is stalking a cicada, it should be aware of an oriole standing behind. I know you want to promote the local self-government in Wanxi, but you should understand firstly that who has the world of China? Alas! I cannot speak out all my feelings. I do hope you would like to think thrice before you act!²⁷⁰

Three month after the incident of Kan Baozhen, the provincial government sent a representative, Zhao Hailou, to reorganize the party headquarters of Zhenping. Peng told Zhao that he must leave Zhenping immediately. The man had no choice but to put the inscribed board of “Guomindang” on the wall of a middle school, and planed to recruit some members from the teachers. The school objected what he did and threatened to smash the board. The frightened representative fled to the downtown of Nanyang. It was a joke that the party headquarters of Zhenping became a “headquarters-in-exile”²⁷¹.

How long could Guomindang keep its temper under control? Shen Songqiao points out that “facing such the powerful local self-government, which had become ‘an armed state within the state’, the feeling of Guomindang was like a prickles down one’s back, and what the party wanted to do was to eliminate it as soon as possible.”²⁷²

The muddied hands

Bie Tingfang had an unshakable principle - nobody was allowed to poke his nose into Neixiang. Nevertheless, he witnessed the tragic end of Peng Yuting, who

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²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 245.
conflict openly with the provincial government, and the decline of the self-government of Zhenping after Peng’s death. By the way of overtly agreeing but covertly opposing, and by his political tricks and social connections, Bie tried to avoid the direct conflict with Guomindang. There were five confrontations between Bie and Liu Zhi, in which Bie did his best to head off the disaster\(^{273}\).

In 1931, Liu Zhi held that Neixiang had developed into a separatist regime. In the name of inspection, he dispatched a senior military officer with some soldiers to Neixiang, and asked the officer to find an opportunity to get rid of Bie. When the officer reached Neixiang, Bie sent his elite troop to “welcome” the officer. In the meantime, Bie did his best to entertain him. Facing the kindest hospitality and the strong bodyguards surrounded, the officer found no way of starting his plan and had to come back empty-handed.

The humiliated Liu Zhi decided to launch a direct military attack on Neixiang. He discussed the matter with Li Jingzhai, who was from Nanyang and the director of the Department of Civil Affairs of the provincial government. However, Liu did not know that Li was one of the good friends of Bie. During the meeting, Li told Liu that there were three reasons for the provincial government not to attack Neixiang. Firstly, dispatching an official army to invade a remote county was not good for the fame of the troop. Secondly, because Wanxi had a good reputation in RRM, the military attack would be definitely criticized nationwide by the RRM activists. Lastly, even though the provincial government won the battle, the social order of

Wanxi would be seriously damaged, and the restoration work would take a long time.

After the discussion, Liu cancelled his plan.

In 1934, Liu decided to go to Neixiang and persuade Bie to take a post in Kaifeng. Before Liu’s arrival, Bie contacted with Pang Bingxun, the commander of the 40th Army. Pang was from the Northwest Army of Feng Yuxiang, and his relationship with Liu Zhi was not good. Pang promised Bie that he would try his best to protect him. While Liu was inspecting the county, in the name of protecting the chairman, Pang stood side by side with Bie from beginning to end. For the safety of Bie, Pang let Bie sit in his sedan during the inspection. It was difficult for Liu Zhi to take action. If he acted forcefully, Pang Bingxun would be wounded, even be killed, which would cause a great stir between the former Northwest Army and the central government. Liu Zhi had to give up the idea of assassination.

Before Liu Zhi, the performance of Bie was impressive. He stood the roadside and waited respectfully for Liu. As soon as he saw Liu, Bie was crying his heart out and said that he promoted the self-government because he wanted to bring happiness to the people of Neixiang. Unfortunately, some despicable men vilified him, and he hoped chairman Liu would uphold justice for him. Liu was completely lost in the unexpected weeping welcome, and even did not know what he should do but speak a few comforting words. When they crossed a river, the wheel of Liu’s car fell into the mud. Bie took off his shoes and jumped into the cold river. While he saw Bie digging the mud with his bare hands, Liu forced a smile. In Neixiang, what Liu saw were the straight and smooth roads, green hills, and the orderly villages. Finally, he
said the word “satisfying” to Bie and left in a huff.

Liu changed his strategy. After he returned to Kaifeng, he wrote a letter to Bie and invited him to be the commander of the 3rd detachment of the provincial public security troop. It was not difficult for Bie to see what was behind it, and he declined politely the invitation. However, Yang Jiesan, one of the senior assistants of Bie, and Tian Ziyue, the director of the militia of Deng County, were interested in the post. Bie told them it was a trap. They turned a deaf ear to Bie’s words and went to Kaifeng. Then, the two men were arrested and executed. Although Bie lost two capable assistants, he could still live safely in his regime.

The chance came. In the March of 1936, there was an important conference convened by the provincial government. Bie Tingfang came to Kaifeng and was held in custody by Liu Zhi. Bie’s assistants asked some influential figures for help. Meanwhile, Bie sent precious gifts to some senior members of the provincial government. Under the pressure, Liu had to release Bie. What he got was just a guarantee written by Bie, in which Bie “promised” that the militias of Wanxi would be commanded by the provincial government and the counties of Wanxi would pay all the taxes on time. Then, Bie returned to Neixiang. Soon after, Liu Zhi was transferred to another post.

Bie was a sophisticated and matter-of-fact politician. He tried to keep good relationship with the political force outside Guomindang. For example, Bie made friends with many senior officers of the former Northwest Army in exchange for their military and political support. In the 1930s, although Jiang Jieshi controlled the
central government, some figures of Guangxi clique, like Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, still had a great political influence in China. They were friendly with Bie. In 1937, Li Zonghuang, an advocate of local self-government in Guomindang, organized the influential figures of Henan, including Bie Tingfang, to visit Guangxi. Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi met the delegation. During the meeting, when it came to the local self-government, Li and Bai said that “since we learn the local self-government from Wanxi, why you forgo what is close at hand and seek what is far away.”

In 1937, the Sino-Japanese war broke out and the political situation of China changed totally. To help the war, Guomindang thought that the powerful local armed force could be mobilized to fight against the Japanese army. In 1938, Zhu Jiuying, the commissioner of Nanyang, recommended Bie Tingfang to Cheng Qian, the new chairman of the provincial government of Henan. With the help of Zhu and Cheng, Bie had an opportunity to visit Jiang Jieshi. Before he went to Wuhan, where he would meet Jiang, he called on Li Zongren. Li encouraged Bie to meet Jiang and promised that the meeting would be safe. Then, Bie Tingfang played a comedy in Wuhan.

Bie did not put on the formal attire, but wear specially the homemade clothes. The upper was a short and tight hand-woven shirt, and the lower was a baggy ankle-length trousers. His shoes were a pair of black handmade shoes with white stings. Because he tied up the trouser legs, Bie looked like a big round lantern. When he arrived at the President’s residence, it was time for dinner. As soon as Bie saw

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274 Ibid, p. 76.
Jiang Jieshi, he bowed so low that his head almost touched the ground. Then, he raised
his head and asked Jiang: “Did you have soup?” Jiang was confused and asked Zhu
Jiuying, who was standing beside him what these words meant. Zhu told Jiang that
they were the greeting words in the countryside of Nanyang. Jiang and other senior
officials in the meeting room could not help laughing. The tense atmosphere was
alleviated and everybody felt relaxed. Jiang praised the achievement of Wanxi and
awarded Bie a medal\textsuperscript{276}.

5) Guomindang: The final winner

However, no matter how hard the leaders of Wanxi worked, it was impossible
for the region to maintain its semi-independent status for a much longer time. Besides
the existence of the powerful mintuan, there were two reasons of why Wanxi could get
out of the provincial government’s control. Firstly, it was the charisma of the leader. In
Wanxi, Peng was so popular and influential that he could mobilize the mass to fight
against any military attack. Secondly, the geographic position gave Wanxi a natural
protection. As a veteran general, Liu Zhi understood that the cost of invading the hilly
region would be startingly high. Nevertheless, when the charismatic leader passed
away, the cohesion of the mass would decrease sharply. Liu did it by the way of
assassination. And, when the Sino-Japanese war broke out, and the political center of
Henan moved into the southwestern part, the geographic advantage of Wanxi was
losing.

\textsuperscript{276} Chen Zhaoyun 鄭照雲 (ed), \textit{Bie Tingfang difang zizhi jishi 別廷芳地方自治紀實} (An
The death of Peng Yuting

Zhenping, under Peng’s rule, had become an “armed state within the state”. Guomindang even could not establish a party headquarters in the county. Of course the provincial government did not turn a blind eye to the small regime. In 1932, a business man, alias Huang Chuan, came to Zhenping. His goal was not to run a shop but to find a person that hated Peng Yuting. Yang Ruifeng, one gentry of Zhenping, was strongly against Peng’s policy of banning opium and dropping lawsuit. Finally, Yang became Huang’s close friend. Then, they bought over Yang Tianshun, the chief bodyguard of Peng. On a night in March 1933, Yang and other two assassins murdered brutally Peng while he was asleep.

In Zhenping, the death of Peng was like a bolt from the blue. Huang Chuan escaped from Zhenping as soon as his plan was done, and returned to Kaifeng. Yang Ruifeng and Yang Tianshun were arrested and executed in the cruelest way, and other people that had a hand in the plot were shot death. When Liu Zhi got the news, he handled tactfully this matter. On one hand, he issued a wanted circular and demanded that the police investigate the case “at all cost”. On the other hand, he sent a special delegate to attend Peng’s funeral. A rumor was spreading in Zhenping that Peng was murdered because there was fierce clique strife within the self-government.

The funeral was held in the May. Many celebrities expressed their condolences. Liang Zhonghua, the President of the Academy of Rural Reconstruction of Shandong, attend himself the funeral. Sun Ke, Huang Yanpei, and other people sent

277 *Zhenping xian defang zizhi shimo* (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 106.
the elegiac couplets. Feng Yuxiang, who understood well Peng because Peng had worked for many years in his troop, put his couplet on both side of the memorial hall:

You died to achieve virtue and can be regarded as living Buddha for the people! You laid down your life for the just course and become a perfect man of our time!278

The self-government of Wanxi did not escape the fate—when the leader passed away, his politics died. After Peng was murdered, Guomindang resumed gradually its control over the county. “Since the assassination of Peng Yuting, Guomindang became more and more active in Zhenping.”279 In the May of 1934, in his inspection tour to Zhenping, Liu Zhi cancelled forcefully the general office of the self-government of Zhenping, and established the committee of improving local economy. Simultaneously, the mintuan of Zhenping was renamed the team of maintaining public security and was administered directly by the provincial government280. By then, the self-government of Zhenping just existed in name. In 1937, the party headquarters of Guomindang in Zhenping was reestablished, which marked the end of the local self-government of Zhenping281.

Bie Tingfang: the honeymoon and humiliation

After 1937, because the Japanese army invaded the northern and eastern Henan, the capital city was forced to move from Kaifeng to Luoyang. And, for the reason of safety, many important administrative organs of the provincial government,

universities, colleges, and schools moved to Nanyang. Usually, they chose Wanxi, especially Neixiang County, as their destination. Under such circumstances, the local self-government of Wanxi faced a serious challenge. However, before the conflict became open, there was an unexpected “honeymoon”.

When these organs and schools arrived at Wanxi, Bie Tingfang and Chen Shunde did their best to help them: choosing the safe places for them; providing houses and foods for these officials and teachers; and dispatching mintuan to protect them. In the beginning, there was a good relationship between Wanxi and the provincial government. In the fall of 1937, Zhu Jiuying was appointed the commissioner of Nanyang, who was sympathetic with the local self-government of Wanxi. With his help, the provincial government appointed Bie as the commander of the self-defense corps of Nanyang, and was in charge of all local armed forces of the thirteen counties.

In the winter of 1937, Li Zonghuang, an influential activist of local self-government, became the chief coordinator of the party affairs in Henan. He appreciated very much the achievement of Wanxi and was very friendly with Bie. He invited Bie as the special commissioner of the party affairs of Neixiang, Zhenping, and Xichuan. Moreover, Li sent a report to the central government and hoped that the central authorities would like to award Peng and Bie.

The honeymoon period was very short, and the smiling face of Guomindang was just an expedient measure. Bie had a bad relationship with Tang Enbo, a senior military officer of Guomindang, whose troops were stationed in Nanyang. The
morality of Tang’s troop was very poor and it was a headache of the local residents. In Henan, there was a saying: “We have four kinds of disaster—flood, drought, locust, and Tang Enbo.” Bie despised very much Tang and his troop. In 1938, when some soldiers of Tang’s troop were extorting money from the peasants, Bie arrested and punished them. Soon after, because one of Tang’s horses bit the willows planted by the self-government of Neixiang, Bie killed the horses as warning.

In 1939, Wei Lihuang was appointed the commander in chief of the 1st Battle Zone, and concurrently the chairman of the provincial government of Henan. Tang Enbo sent a false report to Wei, in which Bie Tingfang was described as an outlaw and did numerous evil things in Wanxi. And, Wei felt that the existence of the local self-government of Wanxi had threatened the power the provincial government. Meanwhile, the senior officials in the provincial government, who were friendly with Bie, had been transferred to other places. Bie and the provincial government became more and more estranged.

In the February of 1940, Bie received a telegraph from Wei and went to Luoyang to attend an important military conference. When Bie walked into the meeting room, he saw only Wei, Tang, and a few military officers sitting there. Wei and Tang reprimanded severely him and told Bie that: all the mintuan of Nanyang were to be disbanded immediately and were renamed the “national guards”; the GMD appointed county magistrate was the leader of these new “national guards”; and the provincial government had the right to administer and dispatch them. When Bie showed his disagreement, Wei detained him and forced him to write a statement of repentance in
the prison. The humiliation destroyed Bie’s health. When he returned to Neixiang, Bie wrote his will:

People suspect me and fear me, because they do not understand me! In the past twenty years, no matter how hard and dangerous it was, I did my best to promote the local self-government in Wanxi. Although we have achieved something, there are so many works we have not accomplished yet! Alas! I leave the world in sorrow!

In his last days, he realized that, under the circumstances of that time, promoting the local self-government was destined to fail in China. He told his son not to participate in the local affairs any more. And, he hoped that his grandchildren would work hard on their studies and leave the politics forever. In the March of 1940, Bie Tingfang passed away in Neixiang. The death of Bie Tingfang marked the end of the local self-government of Wanxi.

The political success of Wanxi should give the credit to the local armed force—mintuan. By the way of organizing mintuan, the local elite of Wanxi extracted the military resource of social power. Such the extraction guaranteed that the local self-government of Wanxi could maintain its semi-independent status in a given time. To any modern state, the monopoly of the military resource is one of the basic guarantees of its authority. Although, in the Republican period, the locality could grab some military power by its own way, and the central government would, by force of circumstance, keep silent, the state could not tolerate it forever. When it comes to the military resource, there is a natural antagonism between the state and the locality. Between them, there will be no compromise. In ten years, the local self-government

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of Wanxi, depending on the determination, wisdom and smartness of its leaders and the geographical advantage, it could resist the provincial government’s penetration. However, when the political center moved into the region, the perspective of the local self-government became dismal. Nobody could imagine that, in a time that the nation was being threatened by the ferocious Japanese army and the unification was much more important then ever, the provincial government of Henan would tolerate these semi-independent local regimes.

Wanxi must answer the following questions. Firstly, what was the legitimacy of the local self-government? Secondly, how to justify its action of extracting the military resource and grabbing the political power? Peng Yuting proposed a “regionalism”, in which he connected his political idea with sanminzhuyi, and worked painstakingly to justify what he and his comrades did in Wanxi.
Chapter 3 – Ideology of the Local Self-government of Wanxi:

Peng Yuting’s Regionalism

In the competition among political systems, extracting the cultural resource of social power is indispensable. In this thesis, extracting the cultural resource refers that a political system must justify its act of grabbing the military and political power. To do it, the leader of the political system should work out a systematic idea, or an ideology. The ideology building is the key content of extracting the cultural resource of social power. In Wanxi, Peng Yuting argued that the reason of maintaining the powerful local armed force was that the banditry was too rampant and the official administration was too weak to give help; and, the goal of promoting the local self-government was not to build a separatist regime but to develop the local society. Additionally, Peng said that from a long-term point of view the effort of Wanxi would be helpful for the state building.

The political idea of Peng Yuting is threefold: self-defense; self-salvation; and self-prosperity. Peng asked: “What is our idea? The idea was ‘regionalism’ and could be regarded as a combination of self-defense, self-salvation, and self-prosperity.”284

1) The Academy of Village Self-government of Henan

The political idea of Peng could be regarded as a theory of rural reconstruction. In the work of suppressing the banditry, Peng realized that the banditry was just one of

284 Peng Yuting, “dui mintuan guanzhang jianghua 《对民团官长讲话》” (Speech to Officers of mintuan), Peng Yuting jiangyan ji 《彭禹廷讲演集》 (The Speeches of Peng Yuting) (Beijing: Xibei shuju 《西北书局》, 1932), p. 53.
the serious problems that the countryside was suffering. Suppressing the banditry was not the final solution to the instability, poverty, and backwardness. If the countryside could not become stable and prosperous, there would be no powerful and peaceful China. Peng thought over the problem and expected that he could find a feasible program of improving the rural society.

In 1929, Han Fuqu was the chairman of the provincial government of Henan. He invited Peng to work for the provincial government. Peng thought that it was an opportunity to discuss the matter of how to develop the countryside with the provincial leader. In Kaifeng, he told Han that suppressing banditry was not the basic way of settling the rural problem, and he hoped that the chairman would support him to set up an academy, in which the scholars could devote their time in studying the theory and program of rural reconstruction, and the government could train some specialists for the rural reconstruction experiment. Han agreed with Peng’s idea. In 1930, the Academy of Village Self-government of Henan was established in Baiquan, a small town in northern Henan.

Peng was appointed the President. He invited some famous scholars to take the teaching and administrative position of the Academy. Liang Shuming, the most influential figure in the RRM, was invited as the professor. He taught the rural reconstruction theory in the Academy, and wrote the goal and organic rules for the Academy. The Academy had five centers: the rural teacher training center; the village-head training center; the village-police training center; the experimental farm; and the primary school. To extend the influence of the Academy, Peng and Liang
published the *Village Self-government Monthly (Cunzhiyuekan)* in Beijing.

Compared with scholars, Peng knew much more about the reality of countryside and was eager to find a program that could be easily applied to the rural society. Peng held that all courses should be based on the rural reality. He divided the courses into five sections. The first two sections were about the political idea and the spirit of serving the countryside. In the third section, student would learn the knowledge of the rural self-defense. The fourth one focused on the methods of developing the rural economy. The last was the course of local self-government and rural education.

The Academy enrolled two hundred and forty students from Hebei, Henan, Shandong, and Shanxi. The creative and pragmatic atmosphere of the Academy attracted nationwide attention. Many activists of the RRM came here and discussed the theory and program of rural reconstruction. Even some political figures, like Feng Yuxiang and Yan Xishan, visited it. Feng praised the mental outlook of the students, and Yan gave a lecture on the relationship of Three People’s Principles and the village self-government.

In 1930, Feng Yuxiang was defeated in the Great War of Central Plains. Han Fuqu, who used to be loyal to Feng, surrendered to Jiang Jieshi. Then, Han was transferred to Shandong. Without the financial and political support from Han, the Academy was caught in crisis. At this time, Peng was informed that his hometown was again put into disorder by bandits. He left all affairs to the vice president and

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286 *Feng Yuxiang riji* 冯玉祥日记 (The Diary of Feng Yuxiang) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe 江苏古籍出版社), vol. 3, pp. 192-3.
returned to Zhenping. In October, the provincial government of Henan closed the Academy. Although the ending of the Academy was disappointing, Peng had gotten what he need—the systematic theory of the local self-government of Wanxi.

2) Peng Yuting’s regionalism

One official of the self-government of Zhenping said:

As we know, Mr. Peng’s theory comes from the practice. In other words, his idea is different with those imaginary ones that put forward by the theorists, who work behind closed doors.287

Compared with those distinguishing intellectuals in the RRM, Peng had no time, energy, and even interest in cooking up a panacea for the countryside. It was the miserable life of his hometown that forces Peng to think over the rural problems and try his best to find the way of saving the countryside.

The incident of missing the last chance to see his mother stimulated Peng to promote the local self-government and rural reconstruction work in Zhenping. In a speech, he said that “in all my life, nothing can upset me more badly than [the incident]”288 and he added that “I cannot imagine that my hometown has been turned into a world of bandit!”289 Hence, he gave up his senior post and began suppressing the bandits. At this time, he had only a superficial understanding of the rural problem. He believed that when bandits were suppressed, Zhenping would become automatically peaceful and prosperous. As he pointed out: “if we can

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eliminate all the bandits, the pain of our people will disappear immediately!"290

However, in the progress of suppressing banditry, he found that it was not the final solution to the rural problem.

Around 1929, Peng became increasingly “depressed”. He said:

After the two-year-work of suppressing banditry, I feel depressed. Why? Because I realize that it is just an expedient measure. The banditry is just one of the pains that the countryside is suffering. But how much pains are there? After suppressing the bandits, what should we do next? How can we fulfill Sun Zhongshan’s minshengzhuyi (the Principle of the People’s Livelihood) in the countryside? These questions linger in my mind all day and all night. They force me to look for a method of eliminating poverty.291

It was the turning point of his idea. In these words, we can see clearly that his understanding of the rural problem was deepening. By now, he understood that the basic rural problem of was not the banditry but poverty. Therefore, the basic way of saving the countryside was not suppressing banditry but eliminating poverty. Then, he left Zhenping for some while and set up the Academy, where he thought over the rural problem and its solution.

In the Academy, the rural reconstruction idea of Liang Shuming influenced Peng. He agreed with Liang’s argument that the countryside was the base of Chinese society. Peng said:

The majority of Chinese population is peasant. The dominant part of the country’s economy is agriculture. And, both the national culture and the foundation of the people’s livelihood are in the countryside.292

However, the countryside fell in a great crisis in the modern time. Then, how to

save the countryside? Like Liang, Peng held that neither the Western representative
system nor the Russian socialism could apply to China and he mentioned that:

In Europe and America, the representative politics performs well and has no
problem. Nevertheless, when it is applied to China, it does not work and the
representatives become ‘swine’.293

In Peng’s eyes, the representative system established by the Republic of China
was just a farce. The national congress (or the parliament) was off and on, in which
the bribery election was a regular practice. Those representatives or parliament
members, who had poor capability and morality, were just insignificant pawns in the
hands of big “warlords”. The Russian way of communism could not be carried out in
China, either. Peng added that:

The socialist road invented by the Russian communist party is originally for
the happiness of mankind. It is a great ideal. However, when it applies to
China, it turns out totally different!294

Here, Peng meant that in the countryside some vicious guys, in the name of
communism, disturbed greatly peasants as bandits did295. Peng thought that the basic
reason why China could not adopt the socialist road was that there was no the class
base of the socialist revolution, or there was no the clear-cut class distinction in the
countryside. He pointed out that “in the north rural China, there are only a small
number of big landlords. The majority of the population is the small landowner.”296

Zhenping was a case.

One land survey showed that in the 1920s and the 1930s, in the 84,630

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294 Ibid.
households of Zhenping, there were only 92 households that owned more than three-hundred mu farmlands. The percentage was approximately 1.09‰. Peng pointed out that in Zhenping, except a few big landlords, the people’s life was very hard. The hardship was universal. As such, “Zhenping has more than sixty thousands families. There is no one family that is not suffering the hardship.” The sporadic big landlords could not form a class, which could be used as the target of class struggle. Thus, it was impossible for Zhenping to lead a socialist revolution.

Under such circumstances, what should one do to save Zhenping from the crisis? Peng said that one must first of all understand what the crisis was. According to him, there were seven kinds of banditry in Zhenping. 1) Ordinary bandits that gathered together and robbed peasants in the night. 2) The big bandit gang which had thousands members and could destroy the whole village or town in one night. 3) The “official-bandit”, in which he referred to, corrupted local officials. 4) The bandit-style army was the official army that stationed in Nanyang, which had poor discipline and disturbed greatly the countryside. 5) The “militia-bandit” which was the private armed force controlled by powerful families. 6) The “communist bandit” was the communist guerrilla. Lastly, the “foreign banditry” was imperialists that invaded China. Among them, the ordinary bandit, big bandit-gang, official-bandit, and the bandit-style army were the most serious threat to Zhenping.

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297 Ibid., pp. 101-2.
299 Ibid, p. 175.
Facing these bandits, Peng argued that Zhenping should do two works to resist them. Firstly, the county must restore the social order as soon as possible. His method was to organize *mintuan* to fight against bandits and bandit-style army. Secondly, the county must establish the self-government, which would replace the corrupt and incapable local administration and work out a systematic plan of developing the countryside. The two methods interacted and Peng called them the “regionalism”.

One official of the self-government of Zhenping explained:

> Mr. Peng shows us a new road, which can be called ‘self-salvation’, or the ‘regionalism’. We call it ‘self-salvation’, because it is a bottom-up solution, in which the countryside is encouraged to find itself the proper ways to settle the rural problems. We call it ‘regionalism’, because it stresses that such the work should be done by the local people but not by the external force. \(^{301}\)

Here, we can find the difference of Peng Yuting and Liang Shuming. Liang’s plan was made in advance. To Liang, it could be applied everywhere. Liang did his experiment in Zouping. If the experiment was conducted in Zhenping, the plan would be the same one. Nevertheless, Peng did not believe that there could be such a universal rural reconstruction plan. In the 1930s, China had almost two thousands counties. Each county had the different situation and problem. The plan that was suitable for Zouping did not mean it would be applicable for Zhenping, and *vice versa*. To Peng, one county should try its best to find itself the feasible way of social development, but should not expect an outsider, like Liang, to bring the panacea. Peng emphasized greatly that the locality should be independent, creative, and self-determined in dealing with the rural problems.

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One remarkable characteristic of Peng’s regionalism was the *self-salvation*. It had two meanings. Firstly, the countryside should give up totally the “dependent mentality”. Peng criticized that the countryside had four “illnesses”. Among them, the most serious one was the “hemiplegicism” of the peasants (*banshenbusui*, 半身不遂)\(^{302}\). That was to say that they were “dependent on tian (the heaven)”. The peasants were dependent on the natural settings and did not work hard to improve the agriculture. They were also “dependent on the good ruler and the incorruptible officer” and hoped that those wise and virtuous officials would bring happiness to them. Thirdly, they were “dependent on the stationed army” and expected those so-called “official” troops would suppress the bandits and restore the social order for them. Finally, they were “dependent on the local gentry” and believed blindly that these gentry would give them help, but forgot that the “local bullies and evil gentry” would never give up any opportunity of extortion. To cure the “illness”, Peng told the peasants that they could depend on nothing but themselves.

Secondly, the self-salvation meant that, when the vested interests, such as the official local administration, the troops stationed in Nanyang, and the local gentry, were not willing to settle rural problems, the countryside should cut determinedly the connection with them. The job was extremely urgent for Zhenping. In the 1920s, the most serious social problems in the county were the banditry and poverty. Unfortunately, the provincial and county government was incapable of stabilizing and developing Zhenping. Peng said:

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The corrupt local officialdom is one malign tumor in the body of the countryside. The ‘bandit-style army’, which colluded with those corrupt officials and the bandits, is another malign tumor. The government cannot save us. The official army cannot save us, either. If we do not take action to save ourselves, we cannot survive at all.\(^{303}\)

In a conference, Peng loudly appealed that “if we want to save our people, we must mobilize them to perform self-salvation!”\(^ {304}\) His solution was to promote the local self-government. In Peng’s mind, the local self-government meant that the local affairs should be handled solely by the local people.\(^ {305}\) His idea of the local self-government was different with the Guomindang’s idea of promoting the local self-government. In the Republican period, the official local self-government was promoted and supervised by the central or provincial authorities. However, to Peng, the local self-government should be carried out without the government’s involvement.\(^ {306}\) In Zhenping, there was no other way of doing this work. Peng said there were three obstacles—the banditry, corrupt local officials, and the bandit-style army—in promoting the local self-government in the county. To the bandits and bandit-style army, they did not expect a stable Zhenping, because the stability would restrain their extortions and lootings. To the local officials of Zhenping, if they were from the “warlords”, what they could do was just collecting money for their master; if there were outsiders appointed by the superior government, they did not want to work hard to stabilize and develop Zhenping, because their post was transitory.

\(^{303}\) Peng Yuting, “dui disanqi xunlian zhi ganbu renyu ren yu jianghua” (A Speech to 3rd Session of Officers and Cadres), Ibid, pp. 140-1.


\(^{305}\) Peng Yuting, “zai baqu gaotai dui xiwuxiang baoweituan minzhong jianghua” (A Speech to Defence Corps of Western Five Zone of 8th Ward), Ibid, p. 180.

\(^{306}\) Peng Yuting, “zai xianren xiang zhenzhang xunliansuo kaixuedianli shi yanci” (A Welcome Speech in the Opening Ceremony of Training Center of Town and Sub-county Heads), Ibid, p. 42.
Therefore, according to Peng, “self-government will depend on neither the official county administration nor the official army.”\textsuperscript{307} The self-government and mintuan would replace them. He proposed a radical principle for the self-government of Zhenping:

When we promote the local self-government, it will be dangerous to cooperate with the government. The prerequisite for establishing the self-government is toppling down the official administration.\textsuperscript{308}

Additionally, he worked out the “three regardless policies”: “regardless of government; regardless of law; and regardless of the official procedure.”\textsuperscript{309} His policies brought about directly the collapse of the Guomindang’s rule in Zhenping.

Peng’s words sounded like a revolution. In fact, he did regard his local self-government as revolution. Peng added that “in the present situation, the local self-government is the \textit{local} revolution. They are the same thing!”\textsuperscript{310} He further argued that Chinese revolution was carried out at two levels. At the national level, it was the “national revolution”, which endeavored to achieve the national independence. At the local level, it was the “local revolution”, or a small-scale “national revolution”. The goal of the “local revolution” was to achieve stability and prosperity in the local society (esp. the countryside). Peng argued that:

If we want to practice the national revolution in the locality, we must narrow its scope. In other words, we should choose a small portion of the country

\textsuperscript{307} Peng Yuting, “\textit{zai baqu gaotai dui xiwuxiang baoweituan minzhong jianghua} (A Speech to Defence Corps of Western Five Zone of 8th Ward)”, Ibid., p.181.

\textsuperscript{308} Peng Yuting, “\textit{dui xiangcun xiaoxue jiaoshi jiang suoxiao de sanminzhuyi} (A Lecture to Primary School Teachers on Reshaped Three People’s Principles)”, Ibid., pp. 90-1.

\textsuperscript{309} Xu Youli, \textit{Sanshi niandai Wanxi xiangcun jianshe moshi yanjiu} (A Study on the Rrual Reconstruction Mode of Wanxi in the 1930s), p. 35.

\textsuperscript{310} Peng Yuting, “\textit{dui mintuan guanzuo yanjiang defang geming} (A Lecture to Officers of mintuan on Local Revolution)”, \textit{Peng Yuting jiangyan ji} (The Speeches of Peng Yuting), p. 64.
(one county or some counties together) to do works with the spirit of the national revolution. That is why I call it the ‘local revolution’.

Originally, Peng thought that the local revolution would be bloodless such that “the method of the local revolution is ‘non-cooperation’, in which there will be no bloodshed”. Could the peaceful ‘non-cooperation’ stop the bandits and bandit-style army from killing and looting? Could it persuade the official administration to retreat from Zhenping and give the full autonomy to the county? When he beheaded Kan Baozhen, the county magistrate appointed by Guomindang, the peaceful color of his local revolution totally faded away.

Liang Shuming, one of the leaders of the RRM, felt uneasy about Peng’s radical idea. Liang did not oppose the local self-government. In his eyes, the local self-government, local self-salvation and the rural reconstruction were the same thing. They had the same goal: creating a stable and prosperous countryside and laying a solid foundation for the national modernization. Liang pointed out that “in China, the local self-government is a special way of local self-salvation”, and “the RRM is the local self-salvation movement”. Moreover, he argued that because the state power was too weak, the local self-government could not be promoted by the center, but must start from the locality.

Liang did not advocate the open conflict with the government. He said the rural reconstruction should keep at a certain distance with the government. And, if it was

311 Ibid, p. 63
315 Ibid.
possible, activists of the RRM should persuade the government to give their
eperiments help\footnote{Liang Shuming, \textit{Wo men de xiangcun yundong yu xian zhengquan anyu} (Preface to \textit{RRM and the State Power}), ibid, p. 307-8.}. They should tell that ruling party, if it did not help the
countryside to perform the self-salvation, or the rural reconstruction, the countryside
would be ruined\footnote{Ibid 31.}. Liang’s attitude was ambiguous. On one hand, he did not think
there was a quality central government that could save the countryside from the crisis,
and the countryside must depend on itself to settle its problems. On the other hand, he
expected that the central authorities would help the rural reconstruction. The
ambiguity affected his evaluation on Peng Yuting and his experiment in Wanxi.

Peng’s program was based essentially on the reality of Zhenping, and settled
many pressing problems. It received the full support from the local residents. To this,
Liang expressed his admiration and he declared that:

\begin{quote}
The experiment in Zhenping and Neixiang is much better than ours. It is led
by the natives (Mr. Peng Yuting and someone else) and does great work on
suppressing the bandits. They even find ways not to pay the exorbitant taxes
and levies. It is the true self-salvation in the countryside.\footnote{Ibid, p. 574.}
\end{quote}

People thought that Liang would take Zhenping as the model of rural
reconstruction. On the contrary, he denied the universality of the Wanxi model and
pointed out that he does not think that the rural construction should follow the way of
Zhenping.\footnote{Ibid.} Liang knew exactly what happened in Zhenping. He thought what Peng
did could easily be put under the label of separatism. If the rural construction
movement followed such the way, the central authorities would take prompt action to
check the “separatist” tide. Such the intervention would destroy all rural
reconstruction experiments. To Liang, it was an unaffordable risk. In fact, Peng understood also that his radical idea would put the local self-government of Wanxi into trouble. Thus, he tried painstakingly to incorporate his idea with Sun Zhongshan’s Three People’s Principles, and hoped that his effort could justify the practice of Wanxi.

3) Peng’s regionalism and Three People’s Principles (*sanminzhuyi*)

Peng said explicitly his regionalism was a kind of Three People’s Principles. Between them, there was no difference in nature. The difference was just the scope that they were applied to. *Sanminzhuyi* was the guiding principle of the national revolution. It depicted how to overthrow the imperialism and win the national independence and how to change China into a powerful, prosperous, democratic, and civilized republic. The regionalism was the guide of the local revolution. It focused on how to find a feasible way of stabilizing and developing the rural society, and how to help the local people to perform the political rights by the way of local self-government. The local revolution was an extension of the national revolution, and it was an application of *sanminzhuyi* in the local society. To Peng, without the success of the local revolution, the national revolution could not be accomplished. And, if *sanminzhuyi* were not regionalized, it would have no significance to the countryside. Peng believed firmly that only by the combination of *sanminzhuyi* and the reality of the locality, *sanminzhuyi* could be useful for the rural society and he

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320 Peng Yuting, “*dui mintuan guanzhang jianghua* *(A Speech to Officers of *mintuan*)”, *Peng Peng Yuting jiangyan ji* *(The Speeches of Peng Yuting)*, p. 54.
said:

Our country is so big that it is not easy for the national revolution to achieve in a short time. Therefore, we should reduce the scope of the national revolution and remold it to be suitable for a county, like Zhenping. When the local revolution of Zhenping becomes successful, other counties will follow the way.  

Peng argued that there was the consistency of his regionalism and sanminzhuyi, and he told his audience that “Sanminzhuyi emerges as the time demands. It is living, not dead!” He explained that Sun Zhongshan’s Three People’s Principles had both “topicality” and “spatiality”. “Topicality” meant that there would be some changes in the contents of sanminzhuyi in different historic periods. Peng discussed these changes in the three Principles respectively.

In the late Qing, the chief goal of Sun Zhongshan’s nationalism was to overthrow the Manchu dynasty and establish the Republic. After the demise of Qing, China faced the serious threat from the foreign powers and was not a truly independent state. A new element—anti-imperialism—was added into the nationalism. Peng said:

Although the Qing was toppled down by the revolution, the imperialist continued to use the unequal treaties as weapons to oppress our country. Thus, Sun Zhongshan advocated that we should unite all oppressed nations to overthrow the imperialism and achieve the true liberation of our nation.

Sun’s words showed that the content of nationalism was changing with time.

At first, the goal of the principle was to establish the Republic of China. Sun held that with the establishment of the Republic all the political problems of China would be readily settled. Unfortunately, his expectation did not come true:

321 Peng Yuting, “tong xiangcun xiaoxue jiang sanminzhuyi zhi shijianxing yu kongjianxing (A Lecture to Primary School Teachers on “Topicality” and “Spatiality” of Three People’s Principles.)”, Ibid, p. 81.
322 Ibid.
323 Ibid, p. 82.
Although the republic was founded, the Western-style representative system could not be applied to China. Therefore, Sun advocated promoting the direct democracy of the people. It means that the people can have four basic rights: the suffrage, recall, initiative, and referendum. The four direct rights of the people are the new elements that were added into the Principle of Democracy.324

In the last days of Qing, agriculture was dominant in China’s national economy. The aim of the Principle was to equalize the land ownership in China. After the establishment of the Republic, to a certain extent, the capitalist industry and commerce was developed. To avoid the negative results of the “wild capitalism”:

Sun added ‘checking capital’ and ‘industry nationalization’ into his program, lest China followed the old road of Europe and America. It is the evolution of the Principle of the People’s Livelihood.”325

Peng thought that the spatiality of sanminzhuyi was a new idea. As such, “the topicality of sanminzhuyi has been frequently talked by other people” and “its spatiality has never been heard before.”326 To add, “Sanminzhuyi not only keeps change with the time, but also adapts to different settings” and such was the adaptability of ‘spatiality’.”327 However, Sanminzhuyi was not one-size-fit-all. When it came to the local society, its contents must be changed accordingly. Originally, sanminzhuyi was for the national revolution. Peng criticized those people, who used the way of the national revolution to perform local jobs and concluded that they could not find the solution to the rural problems328.

The national revolution and the local revolution were different type of revolution. The social settings in which they happened and the idea and method by

324 Ibid.
325 Ibid, p. 83.
326 Ibid, p. 81.
327 Ibid, p. 84.
328 Ibid.
which they used were totally different. Peng said:

The national revolution will bring about a nationwide social change. However, the local revolution is promoted in county or counties, and it endeavors to settle the concrete rural problem.\(^{329}\)

To anyone who did the work of reforming the local society, he must “reshape the national revolution into the local revolution. The idea and method of the national revolution is *sanminzhuyi*. The reshaped national revolution, or the local revolution, will employ a *reshaped sanminzhuyi*\(^{330}\).*

**The reshaped sanminzhuyi**

How to reshape *sanminzhuyi*? Peng argued that:

The basic unit of Chinese society was the county; and Sun Zhongshan had pointed out that the new Chinese politics should commence from the county-level local self-government. Thus, when people began promoting the local self-government in the countryside, they should reshape *sanminzhuyi* into a *county sanminzhuyi*, which should be suitable for the reality of the county. Because Peng Yuting did the rural reconstruction work in Zhenping, he changed *sanminzhuyi* into the “*sanminzhuyi of Zhenping County*”\(^{331}\).

Because *sanminzhuyi* had three principles—nationalism, democracy, and the people’s livelihood, accordingly, there were the policy of self-defense, self-government, and self-prosperity in Zhenping.

Sun’s nationalism focused on how to achieve the national independence. It would not give direct help to Zhenping\(^{332}\). In Peng’s days, one of the most serious problems in Zhenping was the banditry, which put the county into chaos. To Zhenping, it must find an effective way of restoring the social order as soon as possible. Peng

\(^{329}\) Ibid.
\(^{330}\) Ibid.
\(^{331}\) Peng Yuting, “*dui xiangcun xiaoxue jiaoshi jiang suoxiao de sanminzhuyi*” (A Lecture to Primary School Teachers on Reshaped Three People’s Principles), Ibid, p. 86.
\(^{332}\) Ibid, 87.
Sitting down and bragging the grand ideal of nationalism is not very useful for the county. To help our work, the nationalism of Sun Zhongshan should turn out a county nationalism. What is the nationalism of Zhenping? It is the self-defense.

The method of self-defense was to organize mintuan, by which the county could suppress the rampant bandits.

The nucleus of the people’s democracy of Sun Zhongshan was the county self-government. Peng thought Sun’s words justified his idea of promoting the local self-government in Zhenping and he pointed out that:

Promoting the county-level self-government is one of the teachings of Sun Zhongshan, and is stipulated by the law of the central government. How can we be wrong in doing such the work?"334

In Sun’s idea, the local self-government should be promoted and supervised by the central government. However, in Peng’s plan, the premise of promoting the local self-government was to overthrow the official administration335. Such the radical local self-government, which was characterized by the policy of no official administration, was the people’s democracy of Zhenping.

The principle of people’s livelihood included the equalization of land ownership and “checking capital”. On the contrary, Peng argued that neither of them was suitable for Zhenping. Since there were only a small number of big landlords in the county, it was unnecessary to equalize the land ownership. Also, because Zhenping was a rural county where the industry and commerce were far backward, there was no need to check the capital. To the peasants, what they cared was how to improve the agriculture.

333 Ibid.
334 Ibid, p.90.
335 Ibid, pp. 90-1.
However, in that time, the superior governments could not do such the work. Therefore, Zhenping had to develop rural economy through its own efforts. Therefore, in Zhenping, the principle of the people’s livelihood of was the self-prosperity.

In Peng’s eyes, the three Principles of Sun Zhongshan was the magic weapon of saving China, and his reshaped sanminzhuyi was the unique way of freeing Zhenping from the chaos and poverty. He argued that:

If you want to save China, please come to sanminzhuyi of Sun Zhongshan!
If you want to save Zhenping, what else you can choose except my reshaped sanminzhuyi?336

Peng’s arguments were valid. Shen Songqiao pointed out that Peng, by the idea of the reshaped sanminzhuyi, did an excellent work on justifying the local self-government of Wanxi.337

After Peng’s death, Bie Tingfang became the leader of the local self-government of Wanxi. He followed Peng’s idea and invited some local scholars to compile a pamphlet—The Local Self-government. In his time, the political situation of Henan changed greatly. Jiang Jieshi had defeated his main rivals and tried his best to tighten the control over the local society. The provincial government of Henan, which was ruled by Liu Zhi, a reliable agent of Jiang, was doing its utmost to extend the party’s power down into the grass-root society. Under such circumstances, Bie felt urgent to present more conspicuously the legitimacy of the self-government of Wanxi.

When we open The Local Self-government, we will first read:

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Promoting the local self-government is the teaching of the late Prime Minister Sun Zhongshan, and it cannot be questioned.\textsuperscript{338}

Bie put Sun’s *The Bulletin of State-building of the National Government* (*Jianguodagang*) on the top of the book and wanted to show that the local self-government of Wanxi was an implementation of Sun’s ideal. Closely after the Bulletin, there was the law of promoting the local self-government that promulgated by the central government in 1929. What Bie did was to tell the superior government that the local self-government of Wanxi was legal in both the ideology and the law of Guomindang\textsuperscript{339}. As Peng did, Bie regarded the banditry and poverty as the most serious problems of Wanxi\textsuperscript{340}. He pointed out that the two problems interacted:

The banditry puts the countryside into political chaos, and damages the local economy. Thus, the peasants turn out poorer and poorer. It is called ‘the instability causes poverty’. Because of poverty, some peasants have to join the bandits, which is called ‘the poverty generates instability’.\textsuperscript{341}

Therefore, the purpose of promoting the local self-government was, firstly, to suppress the banditry and restore the social order; secondly, to eliminate poverty. To the local self-government, public security would be the base and economy would be the lifeblood\textsuperscript{342}. In Wanxi, the work of promoting the local self-government had three stages. The first stage was the “self-defense”. The locale people would organize *mintuan* to restore and maintain the social order. And the new self-government would replace the official government to administer the local society. The second stage was the “self-assistance”. The self-government would conduct a thorough survey on land


\textsuperscript{339} Ibid, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{341} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid, p. 47.
and tax, and do all preparing works for the third stage. The last one was the “self-prosperity”. The self-government would work out a systematic plan of developing the local society and tried its best to implement it. Bie believed that if Wanxi could achieve these works, it would be a model that other counties could follow.

4) Reshaping nationalism

One scholar argues that the nation-state and nationalism is a modular, which can be reformulated or reshaped to adopt the local conditions. The regionalism of Peng Yuting was a kind of reshaped nationalism. The reshaping of nationalism is a method of extracting the cultural resource of social power, and its purpose is to justify the activity one political system did or is doing. Every political system is competitive. In the competition, besides the military, political, and economic resource, the culture resource—the legitimacy—is the natural target of the political system.

Any revolution, no matter what level it happens at, must justify its action. The Revolution of 1911 was a national revolution, which was justified by sanminzhuyi. Sanminzhuyi was a kind of the modern Chinese nationalism, and became orthodoxy in the Republican period. It was one of discourses of Chinese modernity, in which the national elite expressed their idea of how to achieve the national modernization. It was the mainstream ideology in the Republican China and exerted a great influence.

343 Ibid, pp. 21-47.
344 Ibid, p. 47.
on Chinese society. When sanminzhuyi was approved of by the majority of Chinese, it marked that the idea of modernization became the nucleus of the Chinese nationalism. In other words, how to achieve modernization was the hot topic. The plan of Sun Zhongshan was to, by the way of revolution, create a powerful centralized nation-state. As Sun expected, in the new Republic, there would be a powerful central government that led by the revolutionary party, and the government would not be autocratic or totalitarian. The new central government would be capable of performing the macro regulation, while at the same time it would give the locality a full autonomy. In the benign interaction of the center and the locality, the state would walk into prosperity and democracy. Nevertheless, in reality, the political discourse of Song Zhongshan was guided to different trajectories.

In the Republican period, the central government headed by Jiang Jieshi transmuted sanminzhuyi into a special type of authoritarianism, or the Confucian Fascism, in which the absolute power was superior to anything else. In the 1930s, the ruling party’s prime work was to monopolize the power, but how to release the energy of the locality to develop the countryside turned out less important. To Jiang, the power of the locality must be given and supervised by the central authorities and any people or activity that violated the rule would be denounced separatist or illegal. It was a distortion of sanminzhuyi. By the state apparatus, the distortion generated the powerful ideological force, which was so pressing that choked the locality’s appeal for autonomy. Under such circumstances, the spontaneous local self-government promoted by the local elite would not only face the political oppression from the
central government, but also have to do its best to justify itself.

Therefore, the local elites were forced to reformulate the orthodox nationalism, or *sanminzhuyi*. They declared that their action was based on the political idea of Sun Zhongshan, especially his idea of the local self-government. The regionalism of Peng Yuting was one kind of the representation. He called the local self-government of Wanxi a local practice of Sun’s national revolution, and his idea of self-defense, self-government, and self-prosperity tallied with Sun’s principle of nationalism, democracy, and the people’s livelihood. Moreover, he connected the local self-government of Wanxi with the rural construction movement, and called it the best way of saving the countryside. As a result, Peng’s effort won the sympathy and support from the local people and the rural construction activists. Thus, to some extent, we should not call the practice of Wanxi a “pirating”, but a reasonable and practical remolding of *sanminzhuyi*.

In the two most sensitive fields—the military and political—Peng’s defense was pallid. Wanxi was a special case. Facing the growing banditry and the incapable local government, organizing *mintuan* and establishing a semi-independent self-government was an appropriate response. However, such way should be transient. To any modern state, the existence of a powerful local armed force will definitely undermine the authority of the state. Promoting the local self-government by the way of maintaining a local armed force and pushing out the state power was not Sun’s idea. Sun supported resolutely the local self-government, and took it as the *sine qua non* of the political modernization of China. However, he would never allow the local
self-government to be used as an excuse of grabbing political power from the state. Also, no matter how the local militarization looked reasonable and necessary in a chaotic time, it would bring about the excessive expansion of the local power and destroy the power balance of the center and the locality. Finally, the state would be put into danger. From this point of view, Peng’s idea was “dangerous”. Liu Zhi, the chairman of the provincial government of Henan, had sharply denounced the local self-government of Wanxi as an “evil force manipulated by the vicious local gentry and must be uprooted”\textsuperscript{346}. In other words, although the reshaped nationalism sounded moving and powerful, it could not give full legitimacy to the relative political activity. That was the basic reason for the failure of the local self-government of Wanxi.

Peng Yuting declared repeatedly that the goal of the local self-government of Wanxi was to let the local people handle the local affairs, and asserted that the work would be helpful for the state building. In this thesis, state building refers mainly to the work of developing the society. Thus, this thesis distinguishes two kinds of state building. The first kind is the central state building, which means that the work should be done by the state, such as the macro control of politics and economy, the long-term strategy of economic development, the national defense, the foreign affairs, and so forth. The second kind is the local state building, which has twofold meanings. On one hand, it refers that the local government should try its utmost to implement the political, economic, cultural, and educational policies and program worked out by the central government. On the other hand, the local government should be given the autonomy to propose the policies and program that meet the local interest. Ideally, these policies and program should not be interfered by the superior government.

In fact, to the state, there are so many policies and program that must be implemented by the locality. For example in the economic and educational program, although a national plan is necessary, it is impossible for the central government to carry out all concrete works. On one hand, the central authorities have neither enough financial resource nor the personnel to perform the work. On the other hand, the locality diversifies greatly in politics, economy, and culture in a big country like China. The central government cannot be omniscient and omnipotent. Only the national policies and program are combined with the local reality, or only they are
regionalized, they can be implemented in the local society.

In the Republican period, especially in the Nanjing decade, the policy-maker of the national government usually did not pay enough attention to the local reality and interest. The capability of the central government was very limited, and could only control effectively a small number of provinces. To the county and sub-county society, the ruling body had neither the interest nor the idea to develop well them. In most cases, the rural policy and program of Nanjing became empty rhetoric. Under such circumstances, the work of developing the rural area could only be done by the locality itself.

The local elite in the countryside knew well the rural reality and what the most feasible plan or program of development was. And, when they did the rural reconstruction work, they would give more considerations to the local interest and the demands of the local people. If these local elites were not to build a separatist regime, their work of stabilizing the social order, improving the local economy, and developing the rural education etc. would be very helpful for the state. What they did was to carry out the social careers that the state could not do itself. Although these works were local, from the long run, they would meet the national interest. Thus, this thesis calls these elites’ work local state building. In this thesis, the local state building refers to the circumstance that the state cannot play well the function of developing the rural society, the locality under the leadership of the virtuous local elite, replace the state as the vital role in the social development of the countryside.

In China, county is an actually important but long neglected political unit. In the
Republican period, there were more than 1,900 counties. These counties faced vis-à-vis the rural population and undertook the extremely important task of implementing the central government’s policy in the grass-root society. To most peasants, their concept of the state was embodied in county, and the image of the provincial and central government was very vague. To China, the county was the platform in which the state and the (rural) society interacted. Developing the countryside was indispensable for the state building and such the work depended on the performance of the county administration. Unfortunately, in the Nanjing decade, the state building was conducted with the emphasis on the state power extension, and the way of bureaucratizing the county and sub-county administration could not stop the worsening situation of the countryside. The rural reconstruction was a natural response to the rural crisis. It emphasized that the unofficial force, or the local force, should play more important role in developing the rural society. Moreover, the local elite like Peng Yuting and Bie Tingfang, combined the rural reconstruction with the county self-government, and did their best to gain the full political autonomy. The autonomy became the prerequisite of their rural reconstruction experiment.

1) Tightening the social control

To promote the rural reconstruction work, there must be good social order in Wanxi. Depending on the powerful mintuan, the counties of Wanxi restored the social order in a short time. To maintain the order, besides mintuan as the prime tool of maintaining the public security, these counties tried many methods. In Neixiang
and Xichuan, the work was carried out with an emphasis on tightening the social control. In a meeting, Chen Shunde told Bie Tingfang:

> We should be like Zeng Guofan, who administered the chaotic society with severe punishments. I call his way ‘showing the heart of Bodhisattva by the way of thunderbolt’.347

These words became the gold rule of social administration in the two counties. Both Bie and Chen believed firmly that, in the rural area, the long stability could only come from the tight social control. Methods they employed were the well-organized bao-jia system, the rigorous “five permits” system, and the draconian laws.

Before Bie’s reform, the bao-jia system in Neixiang was in a mess. The system lost its function of administrating the grass-root society. The heads of bao and jia disturbed greatly the peasants’ life and degenerated into a nuisance in the countryside. When Bie controlled firmly the county, he began reorganizing the lax old bao-jia system348. He trained a large number of officials and appointed them the new head of bao and jia. Under the guide of the headquarters of mintuan, Neixiang conducted a census. Based on the territory and population in every village, every ten households organized one jia, every bao consisted of ten jia, and, every ten bao formed into one joint-bao. After the reorganization, the total population of Neixiang was divided into nine wards, seventy-two joint-bao, three hundreds and twenty bao, and more than three thousands jia. The detailed form of every bao and jia was printed out and the

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headquarters asked every household to paste it on the door for check at any time.

When the *bao-jia* system was reorganized, the headquarters promoted the system of *lianzuō*[^349]. According to the regulation of the system, all people in the same *bao* or *jia* would be punished, if one resident of the *bao* or *jia* committed an offence. Besides its function of maintaining the public security, Bie developed the *bao-jia* system into a surveillance tool. He demanded that in every household, if there was any member that went out to visit the relative or friend, or there was any visiting relative or friend, the owner of the household must report it to the head of *jia*. Otherwise, the household would be fined or punished.

In Xichuan, Chen criticized that the old *bao-jia* system did not work at all. Because of the lack of administration and supervision, most the forms reported by the *jia* and *bao* to the superiors were fabricated and could not stand any check. Usually, the head of *jia* was just a titular official, and he did not know much about the residents in his *jia*. The head of *bao* seldom supervised the work of *jia* head. And to make things worse, the head of *joint-bao* never checked what the head of *bao* did. As a result, the head of ward was blind to what really happened in villages. Under such circumstances, it was impossible for the county government to find outlaws in the countryside. Therefore, Chen said that the *bao-jia* system of Xichuan must be reorganized[^350].

[^349]: *Lianzuō* was a special administrative system in the countryside of China. Under the system, in a village, if there were one people committed an offence, all people that were related or friendly with him would be punished.

The self-government of Xichuan mobilized all teachers of the primary and middle school, senior students, and officials of the county government to participate in the training session of population statistics. After that, they were sent to villages and towns to conduct the census. In the process, the surveyor should write down in details: how many members in every household; what their professions were; the values of family properties; and whether there was ex-serviceman. Anyone who had a bad reputation in the countryside would be put on the list and must be investigated more thoroughly. On the base of the census, Chen promoted the same bao-jia and lianzuo system in Xichuan as Bie did in Neixiang.

Both Bie and Chen thought that one of the reasons of the decline of old bao-jia system was that the status of the head of bao and jia was too low to be respected by local residents. In the past, many heads of bao and jia were hooligans employed by the powerful and wealthy families in the countryside. The villagers despised very much these guys and called them the black sheep. In the new system, the head of bao and jia were chosen from the educated people and most of them had a good reputation in their village. And they were regarded as the important “cadres” of the local self-government\textsuperscript{351}. Chen and Bie demanded that if a senior official of the ward or the county government needed to meet the head of bao or jia, he must send a formal invitation or dispatched his assistant to inform the head; the superior officials were forbidden scolding or beating these grass-root officials. Anyone who violated the regulation would be punished by the self-government.

Besides the bao-jia and lianzuo system, both Neixiang and Xichuan promoted the “five permits” system. It was an invention by Bie Tingfang. He said that Wanxi was a region that three provinces—Henan, Shaanxi, and Hubei—met. Thus, there were a huge number of floating people in the counties of Wanxi. The background of these people was very complex, in which there were bandits, disbanded soldiers of the “warlord” troops, and criminals in exile. To nip the vicious crime in the bud, Bie issued the permit of going out, beggar, peddler, moving out/in, and the border pass.\textsuperscript{352} The headquarters of the mintuan of Neixiang demanded that all permanent residents and the floating population must live with these permits. Chen found that it was an efficient way of controlling the rural society and adopted it in Xichuan.

The “permit of going out”. Any permanent resident of Neixiang, if he needed to go outside his ward or the county, he must fill an application form, in which he reported the head of jia the reason of going out, the destination, the date of departure and return. The head of jia would hand in the form to the head of bao. When the head of bao approved of the application, he would seal the form and issue a permit to the applicant. Only with the permit, the resident could leave his home. Any people, who had no the permit and went out, would be detained by mintuan. Any inn, hotel, or household that took people without the permit in would be fined. If the resident could not return on time, he must asked the owner of the hotel or household he sojourned to apply for an extension from the head of bao in which he was staying. When the resident returned, his permit would be promptly nullified.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid, pp. 20-32.
The “border pass”. If any person outside Neixiang needed to come and stay in the county, he must apply for the pass. In the peaceful time, when he reached the destination, he must ask the owner of the household or the hotel he stayed to apply for the pass. The owner would report the guest’s name, age, profession, hometown, and why he came here, to the head of jia and bao. After careful examination, the head of joint-bao would issue a pass to the person. In the emergent time, as soon as the sojourner entered Neixiang, he must apply for the pass in the checkpoint. Anyone who had no sealed pass would be detained by mintuan.

The “permit of beggar”. Some outlaws pretended to be beggar and watched for their chance in the countryside. Therefore, the headquarters of mintuan issued the permit to administer beggars in Neixiang. If a resident was forced to beg because of poverty, he could apply for a permit. Firstly, he must report his living condition to the head of jia and bao, and in the meantime he must ask a person to be his guarantor. The head of jia and bao would report it to the head of joint-bao. If the head of joint-bao approved of the application, the applicant would get the permit, which had one-month term of validity. When the certificate expired, if he did need to beg for a longer time, he must apply for a new permit. Beggar from other place could apply for the permit. Without it, they would be driven out of Neixiang.

The “permit of peddler”. In that time, some bandits disguised themselves as peddlers and did illegal things in Neixiang. Thus, the headquarters stipulated that any resident, who wanted to run a small business, must apply for the permit. Before application, he must find a person as his guarantor and report his living condition to
the head of bao. Only when he got the permit from the head of joint-bao, he could start his business. The term of validity of the permit was one month. When it expired, he could reapply for it. Peddlers from other place must apply for the permit. Without it, they would not be allowed to enter Neixiang.

The “permit of moving out/in.” If a resident want to move out and live in another village of Neixiang, he must report it to the head of jia and bao that he would move in. They would come to the applicant’s home and check how many members and family properties the household had, and why they wanted to move out. The head of jia and bao would write a detailed report to the head of joint-bao and the ward head. When the head of ward approved of the application, the applicant would get the permit. If the applicant were from a place outside Neixiang, there would be two-month probation. In this period, the head of jia and bao would come to his home at any time and check whether the members of the household were moral, decent, and law-abiding. When he passed the probation, he would be issued the permit. Without the permit, nobody would be allowed to move out or move in Neixiang.

Bie Tingfang was extremely strict in promoting the five permits. One day, he went out to inspect the militias. Because he was in a hurry and forgot bringing his own permit of going out, when he passed a checkpoint, he was stopped by a soldier and was asked to present the permit. He could not do it and was sent to the office of the joint-bao head. The head of joint-bao recognized him and scolded the soldier. However, Bie awarded the soldier with ten silver dollars and told him that “you are
right to do that. Before the law, nobody can be privileged. He then severely reprimanded the head of joint-bao.

Although there were rigorous bao-jia, lianzuo and “five permits” system, Bie Tingfang still felt that it was not safe enough in Wanxi. To some extent, he believed that only the deterrent force of bloodshed could bring about the stability. In Wanxi, there were many stories that Bie executed the people who committed minor offence. Li Zongren mentioned in his Memoir that one of Bie’s sons-in-law was executed because he took some watermelons from the field without paying the owner. Another story was horrible. One official visited Neixiang and wanted to know whether “no one picks up what left by the wayside” was true in this county. He intentionally left thirty silver dollars on the road he was passing. Then, he could not find them. When it was reported to Bie Tingfang, he asked mintuan to thoroughly investigate the matter. Consequently, thirty people were arrested and executed.

The above methods were helpful for stabilizing the social order in Wanxi. Many visitors were impressed by the stability and order of these counties. However, the negative influence of the rigorous social control was obvious. The lianzuo system caused a great psychological pressure on peasants. There was a folk song in Neixiang, it said:

Laboring hard in the day and suffering greatly in the night! I even cannot have a good sleep in my life! I don’t fear there is no enough food or cloth, but I do fear I am implicated involuntarily in an unexpected crime!

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No matter how law-abiding he himself was, he would be definitely be punished, if anyone of his neighbors committed a crime. The “five permits” system greatly impeded the mobility of rural residents and intensified the closeness of this region. And the indiscriminate execution preferred by Bie was absolutely not a good way of administering the society.

In fact, the leaders of the local self-government of Wanxi understood that the true way of achieving a long period of peace and order was to free the peasants from poverty. Instability came from poverty but not prosperity. Therefore, the leaders of Wanxi tried their best to reduce the land tax, improve the agriculture, and develop the local industry. And, at the same time, they work hard on developing the rural education. On the base of economic and educational development, the self-governments of Wanxi abolished the bad customs and habits in the countryside and let Wanxi take a new look.

2) Land survey and tax reduction

Bie said that, if the self-government did not exactly know the situation of land ownership in the countryside, it would be “harmful for both the government and the peasant.” For example, the total number of the land tax of Deng County should be thirty thousands taels of silver. However, the actual number the government collected was only ten thousands. This was because the county government did not know the exact number of farmlands people, especially those wealthy families, owned. Thus, a

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great quantity of the land tax was dodged. Meanwhile, the tax was unfairly apportioned. To the ordinary farmers, although they had just a small piece of land and lived a destitute life, they were forced to pay the land tax as many times as they should pay. In the countryside, it was a regular practice: the big landowners paid much less tax than the poor peasants did. The voice of discontent could be heard everywhere.

The collection of the land tax was bad. For example in Neixiang, in the past, there were sixteen wards. If the number of land tax was sixteen thousands silver dollars, it would be shared equally among the sixteen wards. That was to say, each of them should collect one thousand dollars. To make profits, when the collection began, the head of ward increase the number. As the ward head did, the heads of bao and jia increased the number higher. All of the excessive money would be paid by the ordinary peasants. In the process of collection, the heads of ward, bao, even jia, and the wealthy families tried their best to evade the tax. Without any doubt, these “escaped” taxes would be collected from the peasants. After the collection, those officials reported to the county government because the countryside was too poor to pay enough tax, and they begged the government would reduce or exempt the tax. The money reduced or exempted would be pocketed by them. Chen Shunde denounced these activities and argued that “the families with average income were reduced to poverty, and the destitute peasants were forced to be bandit”\(^{357}\). Therefore, the authorities of the self-government of Zhenping, Neixiang, and Xichuan conducted the

\[^{357}\text{Zhao Qingjie and Jin Yingwu (ed.), "Xichuan xian ‘sanzi’ banfa tiyao (The Key Works of the self-government of Xichuan County)”, in Xichuan xian wenshi ziliao (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xichuan County), p. 16.}\]

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land survey and adjusted the land tax.

The work of Neixiang was the earliest one\textsuperscript{358}. From 1928, the self-government chose two hundreds people to take the course of land survey and tax calculation. Then, they were sent to every ward, town, and village to carry out the survey. In the county, all the farmlands, no matter who owned, must be reregistered, reconnoitered, and reevaluated. After the survey, all the old taxes were promptly abolished. The new tax was strictly based on the number of land one household owned. Anyone, who evaded tax, would be severely punished.

In Neixiang, there was a flourishing land market. Nevertheless, in the past, the purchaser, who colluded with the go-betweens, cheated both the county government and the sellers (usually they were the poor peasants). When they bought the land or house from one poor family, they forced the price down by threats. Then, when they went to the county government to pay the tax, they deliberately played down the true value of the land or house so greatly that they could pay only a small amount of money. There were many disputes came out of these unfair deals, which threatened the stability of Neixiang. Bie Tingfang tried to change it\textsuperscript{359}. In 1929, Bie set up the bureau of land business, which was in charge of all farmland and house business in Neixiang. The bureau sent inspector to every ward and the duty of these inspectors was to supervise the land and house deal and collect the tax. All the transactions must be registered by the ward office. The tax collected was used as the fund of education and military training.

\textsuperscript{358} Bie Tingfang 邓铿, \textit{Difang zizhi 地方自治} (The Local Self-government), pp. 35-41.

\textsuperscript{359} Ibid, p. 41-2.
In Zhenping, before the land survey, there was a census. After the census, the self-government knew that there were 84,634 households and the total population was 384,740. Then, the land survey started. Because land was the most sensitive matter in the countryside, Peng Yuting worked out the outline of the job. In the first stage, the self-government of Zhenping sent the experienced surveyors to the villages and towns, where they put the heads of village and town together and explain what the significance of the work was. Then, the surveyor taught these heads how to fill in the survey form. After the short training session, the village and town heads would repeat these explanations to the residents.

Every household reported the state of land ownership to the surveyor. Then, the land survey team would go to the land and check whether the household’s report was true or false. In the process, the land of the local leader, the section head of the self-government, the ward head, the village and town head, and the wealthy family were to be checked first. After the examination, the survey team pasted the result form on the door of every household.

After the survey, the reconnoitering work commenced. People who conducted the work were chosen from the moral people in the countryside and must be approved by the self-government. In 1932, Peng Yuting organized a training session for these surveyors, in which Peng taught them how to reconnoiter the farmland. The key of the work was to clarify who the true owner was and the quality of each piece of land. Based on the fertility of soil, the land was divided into five classes—“gold”, “silver”,

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“copper”, “iron”, and “tin”. Soon after the reconnoitering work, the self-government adjusted the land tax. More lands a person had higher tax he must pay. And the big landowners were forbidden evading the tax they should pay. To the ordinary peasants, the self-government promoted the “progressively-decreasing taxation”. In other words, less lands one household owned lower tax it paid. If one peasant had less than five mu lands, he would be exempted from the tax.

In Xichuan, the head of jia was first required to report in details how many lands he had and the quality of the land to the self-government. Next, every household followed the head’s way to report their land. The self-government would send surveyor to check these reports on the spot. Every month, the head of bao should report any changes of land ownership to the self-government. The process of collecting land tax was reformed. The government pasted a notice on the wall of village, in which the tax each household should pay was to be clearly written. As a result, the wealthy families and other men of power in the countryside could not evade the tax, and the head of bao or joint-bao found no way to presumptuously increase the amount of land tax.

After these efforts, in the counties of Wanxi, the authorities of the local self-government clearly knew what the true situation of land ownership. And the tax became much fairer than before. To some extent, the burden of the peasants was reduced. However, in Peng’s eyes, reducing the tax was not a positive way of freeing the rural residents from poverty. The best method of eliminating poverty was to

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increase the peasant’s income, which required the self-governments of Wanxi do their best to improve agriculture and develop the local industry.

3) Developing the local economy

A good natural environment will be good for improving agriculture. Although Wanxi was a hilly region, because of the long-time lumbering, there were many barren hills. In the rainy season, after a heavy downpour, the mountain torrents would rush down and joined the river, which could cause a huge flood. Thus, in the counties of Wanxi, afforestation and building river control project became an important work.

Afforestation and building river control project

In Zhenping, Peng Yuting thought the afforestation could not only improve the natural environment but also increase the peasant’s income. He invited some former students of the Academy of Village Self-government of Henan, who studied afforestation, to conduct a forest survey in the county. Then, they worked out an afforestation program: in the northern part, the residents should plant mulberry, and its leaves could be used to raise silk worm; in other places, like riverside, roadside, and deserted field in the villages, peasants could plant any kind of tree. In 1931, Peng set up a tree farm, where he nursed 12 mu saplings and spread two hundreds kilograms oak seeds. Soon after, he nursed another forty mu saplings and planted more than eight thousands trees. The self-government chose some people as the afforestation attaché, whose duty was to protect the trees. By 1932, the total number of trees that Zhenping
planted was more than four millions\textsuperscript{363}. In Xichuan, Chen Shunde led the movement of afforestation. From 1932 to 1934, there were 4,520,000 trees planted in the county\textsuperscript{364}.

In Neixiang, Bie Tingfang’s story of afforestation and love for tree was very famous, and is even widely known today. In the county, the mountain vegetation had been wrecked severely. In the summer, when the mountain torrents joined the river Tuan, there would be a horrible disaster. In 1929, there was a big flood, in which eighty thousands \textit{mu} farmlands were destroyed, and more than ten thousands people lost their life. Because there were too many corpses to be buried, the residents had to dig a huge pit and throw the bodies in. The pit was called “mass grave”. After that, Bie resolved to improve the natural environment of Neixiang\textsuperscript{365}.

In 1929, he went to Chimei County and visited the family of Chen Fengwu and Chen Fengtong, who had studied agriculture in Japan, and invited them to join the self-government. Bie appointed Chen Fengwu the head of reconstruction section. After one-year survey, Chen worked out a systematic plan of how to improve the natural environment in Neixiang. With Chen’s help, Bie organized the society of afforestation. According to the manual of the society:

In the steep hill slope, farming is forbidden because it will cause soil erosion; in the riverside, the residents should plant poplar and willow; in the empty land of

\textsuperscript{363} Zhenping xian difang zizhi shimo \textsuperscript{364} (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County) (Zhenping: Xianzhi bangongshi, 1986), p.47.
\textsuperscript{364} Wang Shifan, \textit{Xichuan xian difang zizhi gongzuo baogao} \textsuperscript{365} (A Report of the Work of the Local Self-government of Xichuan County) (1935), in \textit{Xichuan xian wenshi ziliao} \textsuperscript{366} (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xichuan County), p. 72.
household, the owner can plant white mulberry, elm, Chinese catalpa, and Chinese toon; in the small hills, the peasant can plant tung oil tree, lacquer tree, toothed oak, and medical herbs; in the sandy lands, the residents can plant some fruit trees, such as peach, apple, and plum; in the remote mountain, planting pine and cypress will be better.

To help the people to plant tree, Bie set up two nurseries and provided a huge amount of free saplings.

Bie put together all the senior officials of the county government, the nine ward heads, and the seventy-two joint-bao heads, and asked them to take the course of planting tree, water control, and cultivating farmland. Chen Fengwu was the lecturer, and Bie Tingfang was the supervisor. After class, these trainees must labor themselves in the field. When they finished these courses, they returned to the villages and trained the heads of bao and jia by the same way.

Under Bie’s lead, from 1930, the self-government of Neixiang required every household plant trees in winter and spring. By 1933, the county spread 698,625 kilograms oak seeds, and planted 9,703,000 poplars and willows, 3,530,000 tung oil trees and lacquer trees. All of these trees were owned by the self-government, and nobody was allowed to lumber them without the government’s permit. In every ward and joint-bao, there were persons that were specially assigned to protect the trees.

People in Neixiang said that Bie Tingfang loved trees as he loved his life. He required all trees must be firmly planted. If the sapling could be pulled out easily, not only the planter, but also the head of bao and jia, would be caned. Any person, who wrecked one tree, would be caned first, then plant another one hundred trees as the

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compensation. If one sheep or cattle bit the tree, the owner must kill it promptly. In the winter of 1936, Bie led thirty people to inspect the work of planting tree. In the joint-bao of Dinghe, when Bie saw one tree being pulled out by hand, he pushed down the joint-bao head, and caned him by the walking stick. In 1938, when Tang Enbo, a lieutenant general of Guomindang, passed Neixiang, one of his horses bit one willow, Bie shot the horse death.

While the work of afforestation was in progress, the self-government of Neixiang and Xichuan began building water control projects. In Xichuan, Chen Shunde decided to dig an irrigation channel and build a dam. The irrigation channel was four-kilometer long, ninety-meter wide, and three-meter deep. The new dam was one and half kilometer long, six-meter wide, and five-meter high. Besides them, the self-government dug many ditches to irrigate the farmlands. According to a statistics, in the 1930s, the self-government dug more than forty-kilometer canals and ditches, which could irrigate four hundreds thousands farmlands\textsuperscript{367}.

Because it was a hilly county, Xichuan had only a small number of farmland. Thus, the self-government tried its best to create more farmlands for the peasant\textsuperscript{368}. The self-government chose some suitable hill slopes and transformed them into terraced fields. In the slack season of winter and spring, the government organized peasants to mix sand into the loess slope of hill, and after some time the later would turn into the cultivatable farmland. Moreover, the government instructed the peasants

\textsuperscript{367} Zhao Qingjie 赵庆杰, *Xichuan difang zizhi shiqi de shuili jianshe* 淅川地方自治时期的水利建设 (The Water Control Works of Xichuan in the Period of Local Self-government), in *Xichuan xian wenshi ziliao* 淅川县文史资料 (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xichuan County), pp. 88-91.

\textsuperscript{368} Wang Shifan 王士范, *Xichuan xian difang zizhi sannian jihua gaiyao* 淅川县地方自治三年计划概要 (The Three-year Plan of the Local Self-government of Xichuan County), pp. 53-5.
to choose one deserted delta that was close to their village, and build a dam to circle it. Then, they dug a ditch. In summer, when the flood was coming, it would rush into the circle dam through the ditch. When the flood subsided, it left a layer of mud and the field became a fertile farmland. The self-government distributed these new farmlands to landless peasants and reduced or exempted their tax.

In Wanxi, Neixiang’s work of building water control project was the best. Bie Tingfang called the work of “taming river”\(^{369}\). The way of taming river was to build a giant stone dam, which could force the river to change its course. Outside the dam, there were three or four willow shelterbelts. Bie often went himself to the construction site and inspect the progress. He pushed his walking stick into the dam foundation, and then pulled it out. If there were more mud than lime on the stick, it showed there was inferior stuff in the construction materials. The supervisor of the project would be fined fifty silver dollars, and caned one hundred stokes. Bie even labored himself in the construction site. By 1939, the self-government of Neixiang built sixteen-kilometer stone weir, ninety-seven kilometers stone dam, one hundred and forty-nine kilometers irrigation channel, and created more than thirty thousands \(\text{mu}\) flood farmlands and fifty thousands \(\text{mu}\) terraced fields for the peasants.

The Stone Dragon Dam was the symbol of Bie’s achievement in taming river and creating quality farmland. In 1929, Bie began the work and invited Chen Fengwu as the chief architect. By 1932, the project was completed. The Dam was

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three-hundreds-meter long, three and half meters high, and the bottom was five meters wide, the top two meters wide. Because it looked like a dragon zigzagging forward, the local people called it the “stone dragon”. The main channel was twenty-five kilometers long, which could irrigate more than seven thousands mu farmlands. When the channel passed the Lotus Temple Ridge, a waterfall came into being. Where, Bie built a hydropower plant. In the irrigated area, there were forty pumping stations, which could supply power to arsenals, wineries, and paper mills. The Dam was very magnificent and had multiple functions, which was regarded as the landmark of the self-government of Wanxi. In the opening ceremony, the Commissioner of Nanyang named it the “Dam of the Revered Mr. Bie” and inscribed these words on the Dam.

**Improving agriculture**

In Zhenping, Peng Yuting encouraged the farmers to plant more high-value crops. The soil of Zhenping was suitable for cotton. Thus, the self-government set up the society of promoting cotton to teach the peasants how to plant the high-yield American cotton. The self-government required all primary schools must offer a free cotton-planting course, in which the residents could learn the refined way of planting, applying fertilizer, irrigating, and picking. And, the self-government encouraged the peasants to raise more pigs and chickens to increase their income.

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The government imported some high-quality breeding stocks and distributed them to the farmers. In 1933, the self-government set up the committee of improving agriculture. Its duty was to choose and spread good-quality corps, fertilizers, and livestock. And, the committee spent much time in studies of how to improve the agricultural technology and how to stop crop diseases and insect pests. The committee had branch in every village and town.

In 1935, Chen Shunde set up the crop seed station in every ward of Xichuan, where the peasants could get the high-yield seed of wheat, corn, rice and cotton. In each joint-bao, the self-government offered some basic courses to the residents, in which they could learn how to select seed, plant crops, make fertilizer, raise domestic animals, and prevent insect pests of plant. In 1936, Bie Tingfang founded a model farm in Neixiang. The residents could take the free basic course of modern agricultural technology in the farm. To increase the production of grain crops, the self-government introduced two high-yield seeds of rice from Zhejiang and taught the peasants how to plant them.

**Developing local industry**

Peng mentioned that Zhenping was a remote and backward county, which was far away from the economic center and was not abundant in natural resources. It was impossible for the county to set up the advanced manufacturer. Zhenping had a long tradition of silk-making. The Shifosi town, one of the most prosperous towns in Zhenping, was a famous collecting and distributing center of silk in the north China. Silk-making had been flourishing in Zhenping. The average annual income of silk
maker was hundreds thousands dollars, and the income of some big silk merchants was even more than one million\textsuperscript{371}. However, to make a higher profit, some manufacturers and distributors passed off the defective silk as the high-quality one. Their cheating behavior greatly damaged the reputation of Zhenping silk and many shops in Shanghai and Wuhan were forced to close. Thus, the self-government of Zhenping tried to rehabilitate the declining traditional silk industry.

In 1932, Pang Zao, a businessman from Shanghai, who was running a silk factory in Zhenping, submitted a proposal of improving the silk industry of Zhenping. Peng Yuting showed a great interest in the proposal and convened a special conference to discuss it. After the meeting, the self-government set up the committee of improving silk industry of Zhenping. Peng was elected as the head of the committee and Pang Zao was employed as the chief consultant. The committee issued a strict regulation of silk making and distribution. It required:

\begin{itemize}
\item All the silk manufacturers must use the modern machine, otherwise they cannot get the manufacture permit from the self-government; all the silk products must meet the standard formulated by the self-government; the products that cannot meet the standard are strictly forbade from selling.
\end{itemize}

Under such the strict supervision, Zhenping silk rapidly resumed its original fame and became again a popular product in the market of Shanghai and Wuhan\textsuperscript{372}.

At the same time, the self-government set up some “the people’s factories”, like the cotton-cloth factories and dye-works. These small factories employed the poor peasants. Their products were sold in Zhenping and neighboring counties. Peng hoped that, by this way, the peasant’s income could be increased. In 1931, the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{371} \textit{Zhenping xian difang zizhi shimo} (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 43. \textsuperscript{372} Ibid, p. 44.
\end{flushright}
self-government established the “woman’s workshop of plaited straw” and recruited poor young women in the countryside. Such the workshop was both a factory and a school, in which these women workers would learn the skill of making hats and take the basic course of reading and writing.

From the late 1920s, Bie Tingfang began his work of developing the local industry. In 1929, Bie established the Zhongshan silk factory in Neixiang. The factory had more than sixty workers and could manufacture the mountain silk, jacquard silk, and other silk products. The annual output of the factory was more than ten thousands rolls. Most of these products were sold to Henan, Hubei, Anhui, and Shaanxi. In 1932, Bie set up the Yuda winery, which had fifty-five workshops and its annual output was sixty tons. The products were sold to Shaanxi and Hubei.

Chen Shunde mentioned that “in the economy of Xichuan, industry is the most backward.” After an investigation, the self-government of Xichuan found that the cheap and good-quality cloth was the goods that the peasants purchased the most. Thus, the self-government set up the people’s livelihood factory, which could produce the cotton cloth and other daily necessities. The workers of the factory came from the poorest families in the countryside. Because Xichuan was famous for its peach, plum, apricot, and vegetables, the self-government formed a canned food company. The

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375 Ibid, p. 98.
376 Wang Shifan, Xichuan xian difang zizhi sannian jihua gaiyao (The Three-year Plan of the Local Self-government of Xichuan County), pp. 57-8.
company purchased the fruits and vegetables from the peasants and canned them to sell outside the county.

In the 1930s, the most remarkable achievement of the local industry of Wanxi was the Lotus Temple Ridge Hydropower Plant, which was built by Bie Tingfang in 1933. Before the Plant, there was a small thermal power plant in Neixiang. It had one Siemens 12.5 kW DC generator, which could generate fifteen thousands kWh every year. But the small plant could not meet the demand of the economic development. In 1936, Bie Tingfang invested millions dollars to build a modern hydropower plant in the Lotus Temple Ridge. The general installed capacity of the Plant was 97.5 Kw, and it could generate 360,000 kWh every year. It was the first hydropower plant in the history of Henan. It caused a sensation in the province. On the main entrance of the Plant, there was a couplet:

The blue water gives the industry impetus. And one million lights shine upon peace.

Bie spent so much time and energy in the Plant. An Juchen, the chief engineer of the Plant, was employed by Bie with high salary from Xi’an. The salary was much higher than those of the senior officers of mintuan had. One of them felt unfair and detained An Juchen. When Bie heard the news, he came to the plant immediately. When he saw An being bound, he himself untied the engineer and cleaned dirties on his face. Then, before the crowd, Bie slapped the senior officer and forced him knelt down before the engineer to apologize.\(^{377}\)

Traffic and telecommunication

Before the local self-government, there was no highway and telephone in Zhenping. From 1930, the self-government invested a huge amount of money in building road. By the spring of 1931, there were eleven high-quality roads, and the total length of them was one hundred and twenty-six kilometers. These roads connected Zhenping with Nanyang City, Neixiang, and Deng. Inside Zhenping, every ward, key towns, and important villages had a main road that could reach the downtown directly. A roads network came into being in the county. Besides building roads, Peng set up more than two hundreds kilometers telephone line and built thirteen telephone stations\(^\text{378}\).

Xichuan was surrounded by mountains and was the most closed county in Nanyang. The self-government tried to break the closeness by building roads\(^\text{379}\). In 1935, it built the North road, which was one hundred kilometers long, four meters broad. Then, the self-government planed to build another eighty-five kilometers road, which would connect Xichuan with the road network of Neixiang. To make things convenient for the peasants, the government built the standard road inside every ward. Meanwhile, the self-government set up telephone line around the county.

From 1931, building road became an important work in Neixiang. Bie Tingfang organized a reconnoiter team, and crossed over himself mountain after mountain to design the best route. When the work began, he demanded all officers of \textit{mintuan} and all officials of the county government must participate in. By 1936, a

\(^{378}\) \textit{Zhenping xian difang zizhi shimo} (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), pp. 47-8.

complete road network was built in Neixiang, which connected Neixiang with Zhenping, Deng, Xichuan, and Hubei. The total length was 1,189 kilometers\textsuperscript{380}. To help the peasants’ life, beside the highway, Bie constructed the “bullock cart road” on which the cattle carts could walk. The \textit{bao} and \textit{jia} along these roads were in charge of the maintenance work. After raining, the head of \textit{bao} and \textit{jia} would organize the residents to put sands on the road to prevent it being slippery; and after snow, they would lead the peasants to clean the road. On both side of these roads, there were trees planted in good order.

There had been one telecommunication station in Neixiang. Nevertheless, because it had no fund, there was neither equipment nor staff in the station. In 1930, Bie decided to set up the countywide telephone line. Before his death, there were nine hundreds and ninety-one kilometers telephone line and more than two hundreds telephones in Neixiang\textsuperscript{381}. Theses phones could directly dial to Nanyang, Zhenping, Deng, Xichuan, all \textit{bao} offices, and all checkpoints of \textit{mintuan}.

\textbf{The financial system}

To control the local economy, Bie Tingfang built a semi-independent financial system in Neixiang\textsuperscript{382}. In 1928, the self-government issued its own currency “Neixiang Paper Money”, which had four denominations: one-cent, twenty-cent, one-hundred-cent and five-hundred-cent. In 1932, Bie printed one-dollar paper money in Wuhan, which was of equal value with one silver dollar. This paper money

\textsuperscript{380} Xixia xianzhi 西峡县志 (The General Records of Xixia County) (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe 河南人民出版社, 1990), p. 419.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{382} Xixia xianzhi 西峡县志 (The General Records of Xixia County), pp. 421-2.
could be used in Zhenping, Nanyang, and other counties. In 1935, Bie issued new paper money and the denomination included five-dollar and ten-dollar. Zhenping has its own currency, too.\textsuperscript{383} It had three types: “silver”, “paper” and “copper”. They were circulated in Zhenping. Nevertheless, because these currencies enjoyed a good reputation, in some places of Shaanxi and Hubei, like Xi’an, Shangluo, and Xiangfan, they could be converted. Surprisingly, in Zhenping, the peasants had confidence in the \textit{difangpiao} (the local paper money) rather than \textit{fabi} (the official money issued by the central government).

4) Public welfares

In the countryside, if there were serious natural disasters or man-made calamities, the ordinary peasants’ life would be put into trouble. Usually, they had not enough money to buy the necessary crop seeds, production tools, livestock, and fertilizer. To survive, they had to borrow money under an extremely high interest, from the wealthy landowner or loan sharks. To change the situation, Peng Yuting set up the Peasant Loan Counter and Rural Credit Co-op in 1931\textsuperscript{384}. In the same year, Bie Tingfang established the similar co-op organization in Neixiang\textsuperscript{385}. By them, the self-governments of Wanxi could provide the peasants the necessary money to maintain their life in the year of disaster.

In Zhenping, the social relief work was one of the important tasks of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item [383] \textit{Zhenping xian difang zizhi shimo} (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 45.
\item [384] \textit{Ibid}, pp. 45-6.
\item [385] \textit{Xixia xianzh} (The General Records of Xixia County), p. 422.
\end{footnotes}
self-government\textsuperscript{386}. In 1930, Peng extended the Zhenping Orphanage into a relief station, in which all homeless people, beggars, and orphans could live. The station would teach them some practical skills, like carving bamboo, carpentry, ironwork, construction work, and weaving. After the training, the self-government would give him or her some money to run a small business or recommend them a job. Besides the relief station, in 1931, Peng ordered that there should be at least one public granary in every village and town, which could provide the necessary grains for peasants when there was natural disaster.

In Wanxi, the medical condition of the countryside was extremely poor. The self-governments of Wanxi tried to improve the situation by some practical ways\textsuperscript{387}. In 1933, Bie founded a traditional Chinese medicine school in Neixiang and employed some retired military surgeons and experienced TCM doctors as the teacher. When the students of the school finished their study, they would go to the villages and towns and provide the basic medical service for the rural residents. In 1934, Bie established a hospital. When the peasants came here to see doctor, they need just to pay the registration fee, and all medicines were free. If the patient was hospitalized, except the living fee—twenty cents a day, they do not need to pay the medicine fee. In Xichuan, Chen Shunde thought the TCM hospital was much more suitable for the rural area, because it could provide good medical care with low price. Thus, he set up

\textsuperscript{386} Zhenping zizhi gaikuang (A Survey of the Local Self-government of Zhenping), pp. 110-5.

a TCM hospital in the downtown and clinics in every ward. To prevent the smallpox, Chen asked the residents to get the free vaccination in every spring.

To increase the peasant’s consciousness of hygiene, Bie Tingfang required the village night school offered the course of public hygiene to the residents. Moreover, the self-government taught the peasants that the toilet should be built in a place far from the household, and the members should try their best to keep it clean; everybody should kill flies; the parents should have their children vaccinated (against smallpox) on time, etc. In 1934, Bie built a public bathhouse for the peasants, and urged them to bath on a regular basis. In 1935, he organized the labor service team, in which there was a hygiene sub-team. The duty of the sub-team was to inspect the public and household hygiene in the village, and teach the farmers some basic hygienic knowledge. Besides them, it did a free medical examination for the rural residents. In Xichuan, there were the similar medical teams in the countryside.

5) The development of education

In Zhenping of the 1920s, there were only forty-three primary schools, and most of them were in the downtown. The number of the students that registered in these schools was only 1,200. In other words, there were only three students in every thousand people in Zhenping. Peng realized that if the rural education could not be improved, it would be impossible for the county to achieve a great social development.

He required that, there should be at least one primary school in every ward and big town, and one simple primary school in every village. Besides these primary schools, the self-government of Zhenping set up some senior primary schools and middle schools.

One of the problems of these new schools was that there were not enough quality teachers. Peng tried to solve the problem in multiple ways. He chose some teachers of the old-style private school and educated man in the countryside to participate in some short training sessions, in which they studied modern Chinese, phonetics, and mathematics. After the training, they would be the teacher of the village primary school. In the middle school, Peng set up the “class of normal education”. Students in such the classes were the potential teacher of the primary school. Lastly, the self-government encouraged some outstanding students to apply for the normal school in Kaifeng and other major cities of Henan. The successful applicants would be financed by the self-government. Peng hoped that, after their study, they would return to Zhenping.

The education advocated by Peng was special, which emphasized that the rural education in Zhenping should meet the demand of self-defense, self-government, and self-prosperity. In his words, the rural education should be “three in one”, or an incorporation of “pen, hoe, and gun”. Peng explained that “pen” meant that these educated people could teach other people; “hoe” was that they were not eggheads, but could live well through their own labors; and “gun” referred that these people could
fight against the bandits and the bandit-style army\textsuperscript{389}.

Before the local self-government, there were only sixteen primary schools in Neixiang. When Bie became the leader of the county, he did his best to develop the local education\textsuperscript{390}. In 1931, Bie Tingfang confiscated the land properties of more than one hundred temples and ancestral halls. He sold some of them to raise money for the education fund, and the left ones were used as the school campus. Then, the self-government ordered that there must be at least one senior primary school in every ward, and one primary school in every \textit{bao}. To encourage more children to go to school, the self-government worked out a program such that any child who studied in the public primary and middle school would be exempted from the tuition and miscellaneous fees; student in the primary school did not need to participate in the public works organized by the self-government; and student in the middle school was exempted from the military service.

In Neixiang, teacher was respected very much. At the beginning day of every semester, from Bie Tingfang and other senior officials of the self-government, to the head of \textit{bao} and \textit{jia}, they would hold a feast for the teachers of the primary and middle school in the downtown and the countryside. In the feast, these officials would sincerely express their gratitude to the teachers.

Chen Shunde did good works on developing the rural education in Xichuan. There was at least one senior primary school in every ward, and one primary school in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[390] Luo Zhuoru and Bie Tingfang 罗桌如、别廷芳, \textit{Neixiang xian jianshe gongzuo baogao} 内乡县建设工作报告 (The Report of the Construction Work of Neixiang County), pp. 234-6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
every village. To improve the teacher’s quality, from 1935, the self-government set up the summer school for the teacher of primary school. And, the government organized the committee of textbook, which had the duty of updating and upgrading the textbooks that used in the primary school. To the primary education, Chen Shunde emphasized that teacher should teach children four “keys” of the life—morality, esprit de corps, art, and independent spirit.

In the middle school, there were special classes for the talented students. They were taught with the advanced mathematics, physics, and English, and some of them would be sent to college or university. Students from the poor families could get the financial aid of the self-government. Ordinary students could choose one practical course, like afforestation or raising silkworm. To the children that had the talent in writing, music, or drawing, Chen required the government organize an exam for them. If they passed it, they could take some special courses offered by the self-government.

After their efforts, the rural education of Wanxi was greatly improved. By 1933, in Zhenping, there were four hundreds and forty-seven middle and primary schools, in which there were 23,901 registered students. Compare with 1927, the number of school and student increased twelve times. The percentage of students in the total population was 6%, which were twenty times as many as in 1927. In Neixiang, by 1940, there were more than three hundreds schools and more than thirty thousands students. The work of Xichuan was the most successful. In 1931 and 1937, the Ministry of Education of the central government awarded the county’s work of

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392 Xixia xianzhi 西峡县志 (The General Records of Xixia County), p. 423.
promoting the rural education, and marked it as the A class\textsuperscript{393}.

In the rural area, there were many illiterate adults. They were too busy in the agricultural work to take the full-time course. Therefore, the self-governments of Wanxi tried to offer them some basic courses of reading and writing that would not affect their labor. In Zhenping, Peng Yuting set up many village night schools for the adult peasants. The self-government required that all illiterate adult residents, aged from fifteen to fifty, take the basic course in the night school. To help them, Peng wrote himself the textbook in simple and vivid words\textsuperscript{394}. From 1932, Bie Tingfang led the mass education movement in Neixiang. In 1936, there was one night school in every \textit{bao}. Xichuan set up the “People’s school” in every village\textsuperscript{395}.

In the region, the Rural Normal School of Wanxi played an important role in the local education\textsuperscript{396}. In the joint-defense conference of 1930, the four leaders of Wanxi unanimously agreed to set up the rural normal school in Neixiang. The construction work was completed in 1932. It occupied sixty \textit{mu} lands, and had four hundreds classrooms and an auditorium that could hold eight hundreds people. Outside the campus, there was a twenty-\textit{mu} playground. An independent experimental area was attached to the school. The school was divided into two parts. One was for the full-time students. The other was for the officials of the

\textsuperscript{393} Zhao Qingjie 赵庆杰, \textit{Minguo shiqi Xichuan jiaoyu luekuang} 民国时期淅川教育略况 (The Education of Xichuan County in the Period of Local Self-government), in \textit{Xichuan xian wenshi ziliao} 淅川县文史资料 (Cultural and Historical Accounts of Xichuan County), p. 81.
\textsuperscript{394} Zhenping xian difang zizhi shimo 镇平县地方自治始末 (The Local Self-government of Zhenping County), p. 137.
\textsuperscript{395} Wang Shifan 王士范, \textit{Xichuan xian difang zizhi sannian jihua gaiyao} 淅川县地方自治三年计划概要 (The Three-year Plan of the Local Self-government of Xichuan County), pp. 30-6.
self-governments of Wanxi.

Peng Yuting was elected as the President. After his assassination, Bie Tingfang was in charge of the school. In 1933, it enrolled more than two hundreds students. In 1935, the normal school incorporated three middle schools. In 1937, the number of the students increased to six hundreds. By 1940, it developed into a complete normal school. Before it was closed in 1948, in the school, there were one thousand and two hundreds normal school students, five hundreds advanced normal school students, and five hundreds secondary school students. In the period of the local self-government, it trained more than two thousands officials of the self-governments of Wanxi.

The normal school was not only an education center, but also the political headquarters of the local self-government of Wanxi. Since Bie controlled the school, many important matters of the self-government were discussed in the school’s boardroom. The self-government of Zhenping, Neixiang, and Xichuan demanded that all grass-root officials, like the head of joint-bao, bao, and jia, and teachers of primary school must come to the school and take training sessions. The course included sanminzhuyi, the political idea of Peng Yuting, the local self-government, the rural reconstruction, and so on.

6) Abolishing the bad customs and habits

As other rural areas in the north China, in the 1920s and 1930s, there were many bad customs and habits in Wanxi. Among them, smoking opium, excessive gambling,
and the drowning of female infants were the most serious. When the local self-government started, the leaders did their best to abolish them by the severe methods.

In the early days of the Republic of China, it was habitual for the residents of Wanxi to plant and smoke opium. In some places, when a guest came, the house owner would use the homemade opium paste to treat him. Peng Yuting hated such habit and determined to stop it at all cost. In 1930, Peng ordered to destroy all the opium dens in Zhenping. Then, the self-government investigated every ward, village, and town to find out the opium-smokers. These smokers must come to the ward office in person, where they filled in the form and paid the fine. In the fall, the self-government passed *The Law of Forbidding Opium*, it stipulated:

Anyone who runs opium den, sells opium pipe, roasted opium, and other opium-related things, will be promptly executed as soon as the case is verified; any household that has one member who smokes opium must pay two silver dollars a month, and the fine doubles monthly; anyone who declares he has given up smoking must turn over all opium pipes and relative stuffs to the government. If he is found smoke opium again, he will be executed promptly. Anyone that covers up the smoker or evades the fine will be executed, etc.

Moreover, from the September of 1932, nobody was allowed to plant opium in Zhenping. In Neixiang, Bie issued the order of forbidding opium in 1931.

According to the order:

All the opium smokers must be registered and turn over their opium pipe to the government; if there is any person smoke again, not only the smoker but also the head of *jia*, *bao*, and *joint-bao* he lives in will be severely punished; if the smoker is an official of the self-government, the punishment will be doubled.

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Bie set up a compulsory center of quitting opium, where all smokers were put together and forced to put on special clothes and labor in the construction site\textsuperscript{399}. The local residents called them “the team of opium pipe”. In Xichuan, Chen Shunde followed Bie’s way and promised that the opium and its smoker would disappear by 1936\textsuperscript{400}.

Gambling was a bad habit that lasted thousands years in the countryside of China. From 1932, gambling was forbidden everywhere in Zhenping. Peng Yuting racked his brains to persuade the peasants from gambling. Peng once got a report that some people were gambling while they were watching a local drama. Peng put on casual clothes and went to the village. When the gamblers recognized Peng, they were frightened. Peng did not punish them, but stepped on the stage and gave a speech on the harm of excessive gambling to the personal life and society. Finally, Peng warned them that if they gambled again, they would face the severe punishment. In the slack season, Peng organized the peasants to participate in the drills of mintuan or construction work. Since 1933, one typical scene of the countryside—idling farmers sitting together and gambling—was seldom seen in Zhenping.

In Neixiang, Bie contended that “gambling is the fountainhead of the banditry.” Consequently, he ordered the head of ward, joint-bao, bao, and jia must examine the household one by one to confiscate all the gambling tools, and then


\textsuperscript{400} Wang Shifan 王士范, *Xichuan xian difang zizhi sannian jihua gaiyao* 淅川县地方自治三年计划概要 (The Three-year Plan of the Local Self-government of Xichuan County), p. 60.
burned them in public. After that, any people who gambled inside or outside his home would be fined and sentenced the hard labor in the construction site, and at the same, the head of bao and jia he lived in would be punished. Bie encouraged the residents to report anyone who was gambling to mintuan. When the report was verified, half of the money confiscated would be awarded to the reporter.

After the census, Peng found that the number of the females was seventy thousands less than males⁴⁰¹. The reason was that, affected by the thought of “man is superior to woman”, many peasants drowned the female infant. In 1932, Peng Yuting published a statement, in which he told the peasants how the disproportion of the male and female population would undermine the nation in the long run. The self-government demanded that all heads of village and town keep a close watch on the household that had a female infant. Any household that drowned the female infant would be severely punished by the government.

Besides the work of forbidding opium, gambling and the drowning of female infants, the self-governments of Wanxi tried to abolish some bad habits in the daily life of the peasants. For example in Neixiang, smoking cigarette was also forbidden. In the county, anyone, who sold or smoked cigarette, would be fined. In every joint-bao, there was a special checkpoint, whose duty was to check and confiscate the cigarette that the passenger had. In the Rural Normal School of Wanxi, there were many teachers, who were the chain-smokers. Although Bie Tingfang respected them very much, they must strictly abide by the order of forbidding cigarette. They

had no choice but smoking the water pipe instead. In Xichuan, although the life was poor, the residents were very wasteful in the wedding ceremony and funeral. Chen Shunde set up a special society to promote the industrial and thrifty way of life. The society had branch in every ward and bao.

**Dropping lawsuit**

In Henan, the people of Nanyang were called “fight-cock”. The term referred that they had the bellicose trait and were easily involved in lawsuits. Since the establishment of the Republic of China, although the modern legal system was adopted by the nationalist government, it did not exerted great influence on the countryside. In the rural area, it was the traditional pettifogger but not the modern lawyer who dealt with the lawsuits. To make profits, pettifoggers would collude with the wealthy and powerful families in the countryside, the village and county policemen, and the judges of county courts to cheat and racketeer the ordinary peasants. To make things worse, they deliberately provoked the conflicts between the rural residents from which they could make profits. In his speech, Peng Yuting pointed out that:

Every year, there were at least five thousands lawsuits in our county. The cost of one lawsuit was at least two hundreds chuan (string) coppers. The total cost of these lawsuits would be more than one million! Around you, there are how many ordinary people that are robbed of family fortunes by these bottomless-pit-like lawsuits?402

In 1930, Peng set up the General Society of Dropping Lawsuits, which had the branch in every ward and village or town. If the peasants had the dispute over land,

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house, personal fortune, and something else, they should report it to the society, and the society would handle it by the relative law. The mediator of the society was chosen from the moral and righteous people in the countryside. To supervise their work, the self-government issued some regulations, in which anything that could jeopardize the legal justice, such as drinking, attending feast, and meeting plaintiff or defender alone, was strictly forbidden. Neixiang had the similar organization, which was called the “Committee of Mediation”, and it was put under the direct control of the headquarters of mintuan\textsuperscript{403}. The result of the work was encouraging in Zhenping. In 1931, there were three hundreds and forty-five lawsuits in the county. In 1933, the number sharply decreased to seventy cases. The next year, the number dropped to 31\textsuperscript{404}.

Dropping lawsuit could be regarded as a unique work in the self-government of Wanxi and it had two principles. On one hand, it stressed on the function of the traditional Confucian ethics in dealing with the rural lawsuit. In the publications of the General Society of Dropping Lawsuit of Zhenping, the self-government hoped that people could be more “zhong (honest)”, “shu (altruistic)”, “ren (patient)”, and “rang (tolerant)”. On the other hand, it took the present civil law as the basis. Peng understood well that, law could not be replaced by traditional moral teaching, because the former was clearer and more accurate. Thus, The Civil Law of the Republic of China became the supreme rule in the work of dropping lawsuit\textsuperscript{405}.

Compared with other rural reconstruction experiments, Wanxi did not stress

\textsuperscript{403} Xixia xianzhi 西峡县志 (The General Records of Xixia County), p. 422.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid, pp. 102-3.
only one aspect of the rural reconstruction, but deal with all aspects of the rural development. These local leaders hoped that, through their efforts, the society of Wanxi could be upgraded all-round. To some extent, the work Wanxi did was not just a rural reconstruction, but also a systematic local state building. The reason why Wanxi could promote such a comprehensive reconstruction, which could not be done by other experiments, was because it had the full autonomy. In fact, almost all rural reconstruction experiments wanted the full autonomy to perform their reform. However, to most of them, the political right that given by the central or provincial authorities was not satisfying. To the central government, in the RRM, any (unofficial) experiment that touched the sensitive topic of power was suspicious and dangerous. The full autonomy Wanxi enjoyed was grabbed from the hands of the Guomindang’s provincial government by the military—mintuan—and political—a semi-independent local self-government—method. Such the way guaranteed that, in a given time, the local elites could promote their rural reconstruction program without the interference from the superior government. That was the most significant reason why the local self-government of Wanxi could achieve something in the rural reconstruction.

The model had its limits. Because the autonomy was based on the local armed force, the local politics was, at least partly, militarized. Thus, the leaders of Wanxi particularly emphasized on the social control. For example in Neixiang, mintuan had incorporated the civil administrative organ. The head of the sub-team of mintuan was “trinity”: he was a military officer, the primary school teacher, and the assistant head of bao. Similarly, the 2nd head of the joint-team of mintuan was the director of the
People’s School and the assistant head of joint-bao. The militarized social administration was a good tool of controlling and mobilizing the mass. However, under the tight control, the people turned out inactive. Bie Tingfang admitted that the local self-government achieved only in stabilizing the society but the initiative of the people remained blunted. In other words, although the performance of Wanxi was better than those of the intellectual-led experiments, it did not solve once and for all the problem of inactivity of the peasants in the Rural Reconstruction Movement.

To strengthen the social administration, the method Wanxi employed was too oversimplified and crude. In Zhenping, if there were one member joined the banditry, the total household would be executed. To forbid opium, Peng Yuting indiscriminately executed the smokers. Although these severe methods had the deterrent force, they greatly worsen the feelings of the ordinary peasants. In the period of the local self-government, the society of Wanxi became more closed. The system of bao-jia and “five permits” jeopardized the mobility of the rural residents. The policy of forbidding the sale of foreign goods and products that made in places outside Wanxi was a very backward local economic seclusionism and made the economy of the region less competitive. One of the prime goals of RRM was to break the closeness of the countryside. Unfortunately, what Wanxi did ran in the opposite direction.

The dual nature of the leader of Wanxi damaged the legitimacy of the local self-government. It was conspicuous in Bie Tingfang’s activities. In the period of

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forbidding cigarette, although the ordinary residents would be severely punished if they violate the ban, the senior officers of mintuan and the powerful local elite could be freed from any punishment. To make things worse, Bie secretly encouraged the people to plant opium and sell them to areas outside Wanxi, in which he extracted a huge amount of tax. The number was estimated more than 4,000,000 silver dollars⁴⁰⁸. Xixiakou, where the headquarters of mintuan was located in, was a famous opium trade center. Bie even provided the armed escort for the opium smuggler. Besides smuggling opium, Bie involved himself in trafficking arms⁴⁰⁹. These illegal activities seriously undermined the clean and righteous image of the local self-government of Wanxi.

From the point of local state building, Wanxi was half-and-half in contributions and blunders. In the chaotic time, by its own way, Wanxi did good work on suppressing banditry, developing the local economy, and popularizing the primary education. In other words, the local self-government of Wanxi accomplished the work of developing local society, which could not be done by the central and provincial government in the region. Notwithstanding these merits, the local self-government was limited by its local vision, and some of its policies impeded the regional modernization. In the field of central-local relation, the way of Wanxi—it was marked by the semi-independent and militarized local self-government—was dangerous for the state and could not be legalized by the central authorities. If the state approved of

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the model of Wanxi, the locality would grab more and more power and the central
government would be further weakened. However, in the Republican period, what
China need the most was a powerful and centralized national government.

It seemed that there was no way of settling the problem. If modernization was
indeed the prime goal of the modern state building of China, it should be divided into
two parts. One was the national-level modernization, which should be done by the
central government. The other was the regional-level modernization that should be
promoted by the locality. The two kinds of modernization interacted. To promote the
regional modernization, the central government must give the locality more political
rights. Only by such the way, the energy of the locality could be released. Therefore,
to do that, there must be a reconfiguration of the central-local power. In the process,
the danger to the power of the locality could be over-emphasized. To avoid the danger,
the central government turned out more conservative in the central-local relation. In
the eyes of the locality, the conservativeness of the central authorities was
unreasonable. How to handle the matter? The central government in the Republican
period was not able to provide a satisfying answer.
Conclusion

This thesis examines the history of the local self-government of Wanxi from 1930 to 1940. As it argues in previous chapters, the local self-government of Wanxi was neither generated by a grand social idea nor led by some internationally-esteemed scholars or historical figures. Rather, it was the region’s spontaneous response to the social problems caused by rampant banditry and abject poverty. Local elites, who were dissatisfied with the official administration’s indifference and inability such as Peng Yuting, Bie Tingfang, and Chen Shunde, regarded it as a “self-salvation movement”. The first step of “self-salvation” was to eliminate the bandit gangs as soon as possible, as they were the most ferocious enemies of Wanxi. Their method was to create a powerful new-style militia—mintuan. Under Peng and Bie’s guidance, this new local armed force was put under strict military and political training. In this process, Peng paid great attention to instill the idea of local self-government into the young soldiers. He hoped that every mintuan member understands that joining the mintuan did not mean that they became private soldiers of the local power-holder but rather as active participants in promoting the local self-government. Hence, Peng convinced them that the stabilization and development of Wanxi would ultimately be helpful to the nation’s rehabilitation.

Mintuan was a double-edges sword and exerted great influence on the local self-government of Wanxi. It was both a military and an administrative organ. On one hand, its efficacy of eliminating banditry was prompt. It was the mintuan that
terminate the rampancy of banditry, which lasted for decades in this region. Teams and sub-teams of *mintuan* penetrated every village of Wanxi and played the decisive role in suppressing banditry and maintaining social order. On the other hand, *mintuan* was a great tool of mobilizing rural residents. The head of *mintuan* at each level was not only a military officer but also a civil administrator. Besides his military duties, he was in charge of many civil affairs. In this period, one of the reasons why the local self-government of Wanxi achieved rigid social control could possibly be attributed to the *mintuan*’s dual function.

Nevertheless, the negative influence of *mintuan* was very obvious. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the local politics of Wanxi was “militarized”. The commencement of promoting the local self-government was organizing and training this local armed force, which rendered the local leaders of Wanxi fond of performing social administration by military methods. Although Peng Yuting attempted to establish an institution of grass-root civil administration, which was characterized by direct election, his early death stopped him from preventing the militarization of the local politics. The other two leaders of Wanxi, Bie Tingfang and Chen Shunde, firmly believed that only severe punishments could be employed to control local residents. After Peng’s death, Bie became the dominant figure of the local self-government. Unaccountable stories of his excessive execution showed that local people of Wanxi were very much fearful of Bie’s “iron-blood” policy.

The existence of *mintuan* rendered the leaders of Wanxi capable of remolding local administration in spite of Guomindang’s county governments in this region.
The failure of the provincial government’s effort in resuming the state power could be partially attributed to this powerful local armed force. The provincial government had to give up the idea of military attack but employ political means to check Wanxi. Guomindang’s county-level administration in this region was totally replaced by elite-controlled self-government organs. Consequently, Peng could launch the general election of village and ward head in Zhenping County, and Bie was able to push his militarized social control in Neixiang County.

When it came to the issue of social administration, the leaders of Wanxi had very different ideas. Peng expected a lasting and efficient social administration that would have a cornerstone of civil institution. He proposed that the people of Wanxi could firstly perform election supervised by the self-government committee; next, they could carry out full-fledged self-government. He called this process “from gentry-governance to self-governance”. However, Bie and Peng did not think that such idea would be feasible in this region. After Peng’s assassination in 1933, Bie’s idea of “rule by severe punishment” won the day. From a long-term point of view, rigid social control preferred by Bie and Chen would eventually damage the openness of Wanxi and impede the social mobility of rural residents.

After the fulfillment of creating mintuan and tight social control, the local self-government began to improve the rural society of Wanxi. Its rural reconstruction work embraced land resurvey, reduction of land-tax, developing of local industry, extending primary education, and so forth. Rural residents welcomed the local self-government’s new land tax, which was based on a fair land survey. However,
Peng and Bie did not change the structure of land ownership. What they did was just to limit local power-holder’s behavior of evading tax. To ordinary households, their standard of living was not very much increased, although the tax burden was reduced. In political reforms, the local self-government of Wanxi did not break the traditional mode of elite governance and ordinary peasants were not given more political rights.

Overall, Wanxi had developed into a semi-independent political system, which aggressively extracted local military, political, and fiscal resources. To a large extent, local residents supported this political system and approbated the elites’ effort of improving the countryside. Notwithstanding this, we cannot simply claim that the local self-government of Wanxi had full legitimacy. As a competitive local political system, which had its own armed forces and independent self-government organ, it could not avoid being suspected by the ruling party’s provincial agent. The self-government’s way of decreasing this tension was to openly declare that the idea of promoting local self-government in Wanxi was in conformity with Sun Zhongshan’s sanminzhuyi, the guiding ideology of Guomindang. Peng even proposed a “reshaped sanminzhuyi” to justify the local self-government. His painstakingly-reformulated regionalism sounded very attractive, but failed in persuading the provincial government to change its hostile attitude towards Wanxi. When Bie Tingfang, the most powerful leader of Wanxi, passed away, this region was reincorporated into the political domain of Guomindang’s Henan.

Therefore, how can we interpret the history of Wanxi in the paradigm of
state-society relationship? Here, I cannot agree more with Li Huaiyin’s argument. Li points out that earlier scholarship employed the “paradigm of binary opposition” in dealing with the relationship between state and society. This therefore resulted in two contrasting scenarios: “an autocratic state was penetrating all the way down to” the countryside; in the meanwhile, the autonomous local society was “operating against government control”. If we put Wanxi into such context, we either denounce Wanxi as a “separatist regime” and its leaders as “local bullies and evil gentry” or commended Wanxi’s “radical” policy out of sympathy. As Li suggests, such paradigm could not explain the complexity of state-society relationship in modern China; and, the “either-or” formula could not reveal the “mutual dependence” between state and society. Accordingly, he suggests that we find “an alternative conceptual framework”.

When we think about the history of Wanxi, we do not need to be limited by the paradigm of “the dichotomous opposition between state and society”. It is unnecessary for us to contend whether the local self-government of Wanxi was “anti-governmental” or local elites such as Peng Yuting and Bie Tingfang were “separatists”. That is to say, it would be more beneficial to concern ourselves with a more important issue: whether these local elite’s work of rural reconstruction would ultimately benefit the country’s modernization? Objectively speaking, their work was worthy of praise. They implemented what could not be done by state in the countryside. Even though the top-echelon officials in the provincial and central

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government resented Peng and Bie’s seizure of power from the Guomindang, they had to admit that Wanxi did a good job in improving the rural society. This situation mirrored an awkward reality: the result of the central government’s effort in rehabilitating the countryside was very poor. Moreover, it implied that to find the solution to rural problems, the state had to rely on local initiatives. In other words, the central government should “transfer” some political power to the local society.

This thesis does not very much appreciate Wanxi’s means of promoting local self-government. Although Peng defended himself in his speeches, public execution of the officially-appointed county magistrates and the making of Guomindang’s county government into a mere figurehead could generate nothing but deeper suspicion and hostility. The political “freedom” Wanxi enjoyed was transient and could not be perpetual. Ultimately, the provincial government resumed its rule in this region. When the rule was resumed, the rural rehabilitation work fell in a standstill. Hence, the history of Wanxi might imply that in the configuration of the power between state and society, there should be a “compromise”, by which both the state and the local society can achieve a balance.
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