

Go to the borderland:  
how did young travelers engage in nation-state building during the  
borderland expedition after the imperial period?

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## Abstract

When the Qing dynasty was overthrown, the primary problem facing the Republican government was how to inherit an imperial legacy but shed its essence on the geographic basis of the Qing dynasty, especially considering the unfamiliar borderland in the west part of China. At this time, a group of Western-educated young travelers delved into these regions in an attempt to contribute their own imagination and suggestions for a novel nation-state. In contrast to the understanding of travel as leisure or lifestyle, the travelers had strong political ambitions. In order to gear ethnic integration up and construct a solid nation of *Zhonghuaminzu*, they familiarized the borderland, where it used to be an exotic terrain, and strongly promoted the merits of ethnic minorities, shaping them as modern citizens with a progressive image. Meanwhile, from the practical end, they investigated in detail the local resources and weaknesses, then proposed solutions for state-building. Why did travel become a political engagement and how did the travelers engage in the construction of the nation and the state? How does the borderland occupied by the ethnic minorities fit into a unified historical narrative? In this process, how did nation-building go hand in hand with state-building and the modernization blueprint? By making use of the travelogues and diaries of the borderland expeditions during the Republic of China, this paper argues that *Zhonghuaminzu* has been shaped in pragmatic ways from economic community to political community in accordance with state-building, and the sentiment of nationalism in a world in turmoil accelerated the completion of this process. Also, the portrayal of border travel is a more popular form of communication. Facilitated by print capitalism, it has witnessed a new kind of political engagement of the young elites during the transition from empire to nation-state.

**Keywords:** nation, state, borderland, ethnic minorities

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## Introduction

Before the Opium War, Chinese civilization had been developed relatively independently and exported outward with its superiority. In particular, the strength and territorial expansion of the Qing dynasty hit the peak by vassalizing peripheral monarchs through tribute and canonization. Although the Qing court was dominated by the Manchu, which is an ethnic-minority group, it continued to develop the Chinese lineage of inherited world views about “tianxia” (天下), the very concept which is considered to be consistently associated with China’s myth, glories, cultural achievements, and territorial conquests. Therefore, the Qing court acknowledged with no equality in countries outside the vassal states and considered itself as the world per se, not a part of it.<sup>1</sup> During the crisis of the last nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, every Chinese individual's perception of the country has gradually changed from “tianxia” to an evolving discussion regarding internal weakness and foreign domination.

Some young elites believed the root of this crisis came from the monarchy, especially for the revolutionaries led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, and they posited that a perfect democratic government could emerge if the monarchy was overthrown, and crashing Manchu rule was the necessary first step to China's revival. To achieve this goal, the revolutionaries adopted a Han-oriented nationalistic approach to mobilize the people and spur their anti-Manchu sentiments. This revolutionary propaganda was done by the means of trying to recall the historical policies and acts of ethnic oppression practiced by the Qing rulers, and they even declared the revolutionary goal of establishing a mono-ethnic Han Chinese state in China, in

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<sup>1</sup> Haijian Mao, *Tian chao de beng kui: Ya pian zhan zheng zai yan jiu* = *The collapse of the heavenly dynasty* (Beijing: Sheng huoDu shuXin zhi san lian shu dian, 2014), 10–15.



order to promote the formation of national consciousness among the Han Chinese and to spur hatred for the rulers from a racial perspective.

However, this mono-Han Chinese nationalism seems not to be a sustainable solution. The first reason lies in the inheritance of the territory from the previous Empire. During the imperial era, the ethnic group was a political-territorial concept rather than a purely ethnic one, which was directly related to the legitimacy of the regime's continuity from the ruling system of the Qing dynasty. Under the Manchus conquest, Mongolia, Tibet, and the Muslim areas of Xinjiang were incorporated into the empire. Except for Han Chinese, the four ethnic minorities occupy a large number of borderlands, although the population is much smaller than the Han. Therefore, during the transition from empire to nation-state, Sun had to figure out the solution to consolidate the fledgling regime based on the vast land from breaking apart. Otherwise, it would lead to the fragmentation of the Republic of China into several nation-states or even hostile nation-states, and that would deteriorate the territory directly to the threat of imperialist powers.

The second factor relates to other ethnic minorities receiving relatively limited assimilation from the Han culture during the Qing Dynasty, and the revolutionaries had difficulty in gaining support from the minority elite since it was impossible to overlook the diversity within the imperial paradigm and impose homogeneity of the great Han without careful consideration. From the perspective of cultural tradition, some have addressed the role of the non-phonetic script, which allows educated elites from different regions to share in a common literary and philosophic tradition. This unified written language was used in China, even though dialects were widely spoken, the classical texts were used to develop an examination system that became the primary route to official positions as early as the Sui

dynasty. This educational system increasingly gravitated toward the classical texts, histories, and commentaries of the same, producing a remarkably unified process of cultural and political socialization over the entire empire on which the success of imperially administered examinations was thought to be a sign of elite status. Indeed, this education system was passed down for a thousand years, and accomplished Han assimilation to a certain extent, nevertheless, it failed to enable the perfect transformation from the empire into a nation-state. Taking into account that the frontier minorities were administered by specialized agencies after being incorporated into the Qing Empire, their population was not involved in the educational regularization. Hence during the Manchu-dominated period, despite the literati inheritance of culture not being cut off, even strengthened by the confinement of ideas, the ethnic minorities were excluded in this process. That is to say, because of the ethnic collaboration, many ethnic minorities, especially the Mongols (Meng), Muslims (Hui), and Tibetan (Zang), prioritized their ethnicity over Chinese cultural influences.

A similar case can be seen in Russia, the other great continuous empire of this century also collapsed after the Great War, but was able to reorganize as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, keeping its periphery ethnicities together in what some have characterized as an “affirmative action empire”. As decolonization was regarded to be inevitable, the Bolshevik radical solution towards taking charge and ensuring that the former Russian empire's geographical integrity was preserved.<sup>2</sup> The Han Chinese elite, facing the same challenge as the Russians, on the one hand, needed to call on ethnic minorities to unite and build a new state, and on the other hand, they were confronted with the demand, as Woodrow Wilson put, of the right of nations to self-determination, following the awakening of their national

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<sup>2</sup> Terry Dean Martin and others, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

consciousness. In the course of this fierce debate on nation-building, the Bolshevik supported Lenin and retained a qualified right of national self-determination, formulating the “Affirmative Action Empire”, namely, “a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting what was called the “forms” of nationhood”.<sup>3</sup>

However, in the contrast to the Bolsheviks, the Han Chinese elite, who had a dominant cultural position and were deeply influenced by the concept of “grand unification”, attempted to formulate a more sophisticated ideological line to reconnect ethnic minorities and Han Chinese as a whole as well as granting some fictitious and nominal national will. Therefore, as soon as the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, Sun's nationalist ideology underwent great changes from the “Expulsion of Manchus”(quzhudalu, 驱逐鞑虏) to enthusiastically advocating the “Five Races Under One Union”(wuzugonghe, 五族共和). The social acceptance of the “Five Races Under One Union” of Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Tibetan indicates that the leaders of the Republic of China have realized the succession between the Republic of China and the boundaries of the Qing Dynasty.<sup>4</sup> On New Year's Day 1912, in his inaugural speech as provisional president of the Republic of China, his words were, “The five major ethnic groups should work together to carry out the country and make China the first civilized country in the world... I hope that the five races will be close to each other and act like brothers so that we can contribute to the nation-state together”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Sun realized that the demand for the exclusion of the Manchus and the quest for a mono-Han nation was unrealistic and thus opted for a more practical way to recognize the

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<sup>3</sup> Martin and others, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ke Wang, *Zhongguo, Cong “Tian Xia” Dao Min Zu Guo Jia*, Zeng ding chu ban (Taipei Shi: Zheng da chu ban she, 2017), 221.

<sup>5</sup> Mingxuan Shang, *Sun zhong shan quan ji. Di liu juan, Di liu juan*, (Beijing: Ren min chu ban she, 2015), 53. Here, the five nations are Manchu, Han, Hui, Tibetan, Mongolian, which means 4 ethnic minority groups and Han majority should be bound together to form a common national identity.

ethnic equivalence for advancing the construction of a new state. This new ideal was often expressed as “the five races as one family” (wuzuyijia, 五族一家), reflected in the new five-bar national flag of the republic, with one color for each of the major ethnic groups.

However, this political and diplomatic rhetoric later was revealed in his speech in 1920, as he put, “Han nationalism was used to undermine the Manchurian rule in the first place...we have always wanted to expand and integrate all the ethnic groups in China to become the Chinese nation”. Meanwhile, Sun also took the United States as an analogy, stating that the term “Five Races Under One Union” was inappropriate at that time, as “there are more than five races (ethnicities) in our country, we should integrate all the people in China into one Chinese nation...such as the United States, originally a combination of many European ethnic groups, but now only into a nation of the United States, as the most honorable nation in the world. Our common mission is to make the Chinese nation civilized, and bring an end to nationalism.”<sup>6</sup> From Sun's selective neglect of the fact that the difference between China and the United States lies in the fact that the Han make up more than 95% of the population, it is evident that the essence of the nation to which he aspires is still Greater Han nationalism, but in the new era, the emphasis is no longer on the race and cultural attributes of the Han, but on the modernity and future of this nation-state. In all the discussions about which ethnic groups should be included in the new Republic of China, few convincing arguments for how the borderland minorities were unified and why they agreed to constitute a single family with the Han. The arguments that dominated the public debate were more pragmatic and instrumental. Two major themes stood out: the border minorities were too weak to protect

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<sup>6</sup> Yat-sen Sun and Yan Huang, *Sun Wen Xuan Ji*, Di 1 ban (Guangzhou Shi: Guangdong ren min chu ban she, 2006), 690–95.

themselves from other powerhouses, so they should be assimilated and modernized under Chinese leadership to build a nation-state together.<sup>7</sup>

This vision of Sun Yat-sen was not a sudden idea but had already been held by some of the Han elite, especially the reformers, first proposed by Liang Qichao. In the post-imperial era, the nation-state paradigm in China carried a tremendous historical legacy and burden given the imperial paradigm of ethnic diversity, it required a novel definition of the unified grand nation with legitimacy as a proper way out rather than solely emulating Japan and the Western methodology. Accordingly, the key thinker of the late imperial period Liang Qichao, who is a devoted enthusiast of nationalism, set a cornerstone on this issue for the future ideological basis decades before the Xinhai revolution. The notion of “zhonghuaminzu” (中华民族), which literally means “Chinese nation” on the premise of recognizing the original differences among historical and cultural groups in China was invented as a political concept to serve the establishment of a unified nation beyond ethnic distinctions. With regard to a nation, despite he admitted that common descent, language, and religion were all conducive to nation formation, the defining feature of a nation, he argued, was “national consciousness.” He observed that in ancient texts, the peoples of southern China had accepted their “barbarian” identity, asserting a cultural difference from the traditional central area around the Yellow River in the north, but over time they had all come to share the same national consciousness, the same would have applied to the frontier minorities of the time.<sup>8</sup> The national consciousness Liang advocated, is the way that the educational system as a means of state-building worked out, as well as other Confucius ideology impacts. Along with this creative

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph W Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 246–47.

<sup>8</sup> Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young, 236.

idea, Liang also argued that a strong modern nation-state required a transformation of emperor-identity to state identity, rather than merely national identity.<sup>9</sup> Hence in the process of nation-building from an ideological level, state-building also has to be carried out simultaneously in accordance with the requirements of modernization. The introduction of this political concept by Liang seems to settle the inherent contradiction of China's transition from empire to nation-state, but the real implementation of this ideology requires social building and engineering, to which both Han and borderland minorities should devote in this process, shaping different ethnicities into one nation.

Another respect that allowed China to shift from empire to nation was the supportive international environment, especially to keep the territory of ROC as it was, considering that the Versailles Conference held no promise of national self-determination endorsed in the lands of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires in Eastern Europe and the Balkans after World War I.<sup>10</sup> But likewise, this constraint on the permission of the international situation has lit the flame of nationalism, which further accelerated the construction of the Chinese nation. From the successive defeats during the late Qing Dynasty to the occupation of Manchuria by the Imperial Japanese, the determination and commitment of the Republican government to resist imperialism and foreign control fueled the further promotion of Chinese nationalism, bringing pragmatism to the forefront of nation-construction and state-building.

Even if one believes that nationalization has a longer historical past, it should still be considered to be a modern phenomenon. It is a common practice to draw a line between pre-modern ethnic identities and contemporary national identities when it comes to the difference

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<sup>9</sup> Yongnian Zheng and Yuliang Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>10</sup> Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, 252.

and relation between ethnicity and nation. There is a great deal of debate on the precise nature of the connection that exists between these two phases, as well as between the ethnic and the national. The so-called primordialists, who followed Anthony Smith's footsteps, focus mainly on the continuity that exists between the two, whereas the constructivist theorists of nationalism, who followed in Ernest Gellner's footsteps, place an emphasis on the rupture that exists between the two. Others, such as Benedict Anderson, find a way to adopt a position that is somewhere in the middle by throwing attention to the construction of the nation as a community through imagination as well as the manufactured narratives and myths about the process of nation-building. If nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, as Ernest Gellner puts it, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not be cut across political ones.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, in the construction of the nation-state, the key question is how to better govern the borderland and shape the diversified ethnicity into a unified nation considering the tension from the previous image of inferior and Other imposed by the revolutionaries, the decades-long revolts, and the ethnic divide that followed, especially for the Muslims in the region who occupy over one-fifth of the territory of China. In particular, one of the most intense conflicts—the Dungan Revolt—resulted in a population loss of 20 million people due to a combination of massacres, migration, famine, and corpse-transmitted plague.<sup>12</sup> According to Lipman's research, the concept of Hui was a reference to all Muslims in general, before the establishment of the communist-dominated New China in 1949, which was not fully equated with the present-day Hui people in *minzu* (民族) form.

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<sup>11</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Weidong LU, “Qing Dai Shan Gan Ren Kou Yan Jiu” (PhD Thesis, Shanghai Fudan University, 2008).

By looking back at the history of the Hui in China, we can see the dynamics of the Hui people as an unfamiliar ethnic group existing on this vast land for centuries. As for those Chinese Muslims, the acculturation began in the Tang Dynasty, accelerated in the Yuan Dynasty, and matured in the Ming Dynasty. Since the Timur family Islamized the Turfan-Hami region during the Ming Dynasty, the entire trade was controlled by Muslim merchants. In the northwest of China, they undertook both import and export trade. Meanwhile, the Ming government turned a blind eye to acquiesce, and also allowed the Muslims to secure their horse supply. In this context, the Muslim community grew rapidly, and a large number of Muslims were also valued by the Ming government, such as the well-known explorer He Zheng and the Persian-literate Huan Ma. In the Hui uprising of the late Ming, they even fought as Chinese in the name of a Ming pretender to the imperial throne in Beijing against the Manchu. But then during the Qing Dynasty, with the popularization of Sufism within the Muslim community, religious divisions began to emerge. The Muslim was previously a mosque-based local unity, connected by the emotional ties of Islamic identity, rather than a Sufi-style institutional bond. Sufism broke the foundation of the local community and reshaped a new hierarchy where a leader-centered system was able to gather more power and use religious force to mobilize.<sup>13</sup> The catastrophe eventually broke out inevitably at the end of the Qing Dynasty, bringing tears and wounds that remained uncompensated for decades. The Dungan Revolt caused a population loss of over 20 million people which changed the demographic landscape profoundly in northwest China, especially for ethnic minority groups. Since it marked an intensification of ethnic conflicts, large numbers of people, both from Muslim minorities and Han majorities, were relocated after the war. In particular, many of

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<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Neaman Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, Studies on Ethnic Groups in China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).



the defeated Muslim rebels were forced by the Qing authorities to migrate to farther wildernesses in order to avoid further trouble, while some of them even chose to move into Imperial Russia afterward.

Thus, facing the necessity of state-building as well as the ethnic integration of one family with the reality of ethnic division, the young Han elite led the way and embarked on a new quest. The common destination of their trip was borderland, a notion which needs to be further explained. Scholars like Richard Muir claims the difference between frontier and boundary, in which boundaries as vertical interfaces, have no horizontal extent, and have been described as being linear while frontiers are zonal and therefore contain various geographical features.<sup>14</sup> “Lacking the zonal extent of the frontier, the boundary has no cultural identity and is inner-orientated, being created and maintained by a central government anxious to define the limits of its sovereignty and to monopolize the allegiances of the enclosed population.”<sup>15</sup> Given the discussion focuses on the area between so-called “China proper” and “Outer China”, this dichotomous terminology has been chosen to be set aside for the moment, while borderland is used to refer to the zonal extent, mainly the Muslim region, located in northwest China during this transition period, which is loosely considered as a heterocultural region, involves provinces like Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Shaanxi, and Inner Mongolia where the inhabitants and dominant culture are made up of minorities.

Forging nationalism in a place without homogenous culture needs solid ideological backup. Regarding the region of Western Europe, the modern era witnessed the formation of the ideology of nationalism, which celebrated the country in conjunction with the homogenous

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Muir, *Modern Political Geography*, 1981, 119, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-86076-0>.

<sup>15</sup> Muir, 122.

nation-state. Among other things, it basically drew from two sources: on the one hand, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in identifying the nation and the state and in articulating the national sovereignty of the citizens living within the territory of the state and obeying its government and laws; and, on the other hand, German Romanticism regarding the nation as an organic community of people sharing some crucial common features, such as language or culture. Both of these sources were influential in the development of the concept of the nation.<sup>16</sup>

Along the same vein of thought and methodology, in the case of nation-building in China, we need to adopt a more pragmatic perspective as Liang argues, to review how nation-building went hand in hand with state-building and modernization blueprint. From borderland traveling, one must wonder why the borderland is important for a new nation-state? How did borderland inspire the nationalism ideology? How did they write about ethnic differences and integration in their discourse and fit into a unified historical narrative? The answers can be found by scrutinizing their travelogues and diaries.

These diaries, as a form of non-public writing, albeit later published, still differ from the articles in the press that loudly speak out about ideology. Action is a better expression of political participation than argument. Most of the time, only physical and visual experiences were objectively recorded, but one can see the thinking and practice between the lines from the first-person perspective. The diaries and travelogues span the period from the beginning of the Republic to World War II, albeit only two decades, the ideas and practices of nation-building at different times have been covered, which also witnessed an increasingly urgent and more determined Chinese nationalism that accompanied the invasion of foreign powers

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<sup>16</sup> Vasilios N Makrides, "Why Are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and Even to Nationalism," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 54, no. 3/4 (2013): 325–52.

from Sun Yat-sen to Chiang Kai-shek. Despite the fact that the young elite traveled with different purposes to reach the Northwestern borderland, Like Li Gufan, who worked in a Hong Kong bank, mainly examined the economic situation, and Lin Jing was mainly commissioned by the government to study transportation affairs, while Chen Wanli accompanied Professor Langdon Warner of the Harvard University Archaeology Team on a cultural expedition, and Gu Jiegang focused on the education sphere. These travelers all have a complex identity, which includes professors, academics, technical experts, financial practitioners, journalists, overseas Chinese, and military personnel. What they shared was concrete political participation in the construction of a new nation-state from the borderland trip, in which they provided rich and informative details in different fields about the new paradigm of national integration and national historical narratives.

Notably, in the early 1930s, on the one hand, the Japanese imperial invasion led to a heightened awareness of the national crisis, and the border issue and geopolitics became more sensitive in the increasingly complex international relations. In the context of Mongolia's insecurity and the collapse of the northeast, domestic demands for the development of the northwest were in high gear, since the northwest region became the backbone and the last stronghold. Zuo Zongtang's "theory of defending the inner-frontier" was referred to repeatedly, as a result, those who were concerned about, studied, and eager to investigate the northwestern region became widespread.<sup>17</sup> According to statistics, among the Chinese journals in modern China, there were only five titles with northwest before 1930, but more than 70 between 1931 and 1945. Even Shanghai Star Film Company made a film *To the Northwest* in 1934 to address the importance of borderland and further bring everyone's

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<sup>17</sup> TAO Yong-shu YI Yong-qing, "Comment on the Quarrel about Boundary Defence and Coastal Defence between Zuo Zong-Tang and Li Hong-Zhang," *Historiography Anhui*, 2004.

attention to the Northwest.<sup>18</sup> The young elite who traveled during this time, therefore, showed a more determined political engagement under the clouds of crisis.

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### The affiliation of a nation: from cultural landscape to scientific material

The Western Regions or Xiyu(西域) is a historical name specified referring to the region beyond the Great Wall, which is generally thought to be the borderland of China. From the Han to the Tang dynasties, this land has been the core of communication with the external world as its strategic location astride the Silk Road. Beyond the geographic and territorial implication, it also represents a cultural alienation, Eastern and Western civilizations converge, and both Buddhism and Islam have reached the Chinese hinterland via this area. When compared to the Han-centric tradition that has been passed down through the years, the cultures of this region are more diversified as a consequence of the continual intermingling that takes place throughout. This literary motif, which originates from the Han period, is typically connected with the concept of homesickness as well as a commitment to national defense. Therefore, in the majority of literary renderings, this region is the conflict between countries replete with yellow sand and corpses, as though there is no turning back once the Great Wall has been crossed. In the meantime, it is also a space of vastness and solitude, serving as a playground for the creative imagination in many poems as a result of the experience of exile and military service. The Han Chinese imagination was likewise set ablaze by these pictures with the concept of a mysterious and legendary realm that was unknown. During the Tang dynasty, poets such as Wang Wei and Wang Changling composed

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<sup>18</sup> Sung-Chiao Shen, "Travel Writing and the Imagination of Chinese Nationhood during the 1930s: A Case Study on the Northwestern Region," *Taiwan University History Report*, no. 37 (2006): 145–216, <https://doi.org/10.6253/ntuhistory.2006.37.03>.

a lot of poetry about the borderlands. These poems denounce militarism and the misery of protracted garrisoning of the borderland, even though they are full of heroic zeal as well as personal sadness and romanticism.<sup>19</sup>

However, beginning from the fourteenth century, as a result of shifts in the world configuration, environmental conditions, and maritime connections, this east-west traffic hub gradually faded out of sight and further disconnected from the hinterland. Therefore, in the majority of historical documents about China, it has been described as being on the edge of the Chinese civilization due to its great distance from the rest of China, the low population, and the significant cultural differences that exist between the two, all of which contributed to the formation of a place which has an existence that is far more exotic. Especially after the conquests of the Qing Dynasty to the west, this minority region was managed by a special administrative institution, and not aligned with the central management model of other provinces. However, the borderland has never been absent from the traditional Chinese literary writing region though the region has lost its former hustle and bustle, while poets can only reminisce about the past and wax nostalgic about a time when Han Chinese culture was at its absolute pinnacle. Therefore, in the poetry of the literati during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the splendor of borderland has been gradually generalized from the imagery of geographical space to a spiritual plateau in the dimension of cultural and poetic space. This has the effect of perpetuating and passing on myths and legends to subsequent generations without direct experience and practice.

After centuries of silence, the Western Regions have attracted renewed attention since the seventeenth century in an era of colonial expansion by major powerhouses. Later, as a result

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Rouzer, ed., *The Poetry and Prose of Wang Wei: Volume II*, 1st ed. (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020).

of the development of geographic expeditions in Central Asia and the advent of international orientalism, expeditions from a variety of countries began to swarm to the area. However, the enthusiasm of the powerhouses has its own purpose, as the great game indicates, the Tsarist Russian Empire expanded and threatened the growing power of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent, and a delicate game of exploration, espionage and imperial diplomacy began between the two empires throughout Central Asia, including the borderland of Qing China.

In 1916, a 26-year-old Chinese young man named Lin Jing embarked on his journey to the Western Region from Beijing. The region Lin and his companions traveled through is the area with many legends in history but little is known by most Chinese. Compared to those Western explorers and travelers, such as Sven Anders Hedin and Marc Aurel Stein, who fully donated their passion and ambition towards a great expedition, and were unyieldingly committed to the mission of discovering oriental mysteries of a disappearing civilization, this young man had an utterly distinct target.<sup>20</sup> Lin and the later well-known Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek were from the same town and of similar age, he studied at Tokyo Hosei University which was run by Sun Yat-sen, and later returned home to fight against Yuan Shikai for his acceptance of the unequal treaties proposed by Japan at the Paris Peace Conference, then participated in The National Protection War. His experience illustrates his status as a representative of a new generation of travelers, significantly different from the traditional Han Chinese literati who had previously voyaged beyond the Great Wall and often in inauguration or exile.

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<sup>20</sup> Hedin's book *Från pol till pol* (From Pole to Pole), documents his journey through Asia and Europe between the late 1880s and the early 1900s in Turkey, the Caucasus, Tehran, Iraq, lands of the Kyrgyz people and the Russian Far East, India, China and Japan; Marc Aurel Stein wrote several volumes on his expeditions to Ancient Khotan, Serindia and Innermost Asia.

However, Lin's journey to the West is as arduous as overthrowing the monarchy. During the time of the Great Game, this region was strategically located between the spheres of influence of Late Imperial China, the Russian Empire, and the British Empire. As a result, it played the role of a buffer zone for several competing superpowers, which covers accounts for more than one-third of China's territory but is very sparsely populated with ethnic minorities whose culture and habits differ greatly from those of the Han Chinese, not only a great number of nomads but also many Muslims. The road along the way is bumpy, the livelihood is hard, and bandits are often frequent, accompanied by plague and various dangers. But this land, which is supposed to be exotic, has been recorded by travelers as a de-exoticized narrative approach. The writing of the Western landscape focuses on the discovery and reconstruction of the economic and cultural homogeneity between the borderland and the hinterland instead of eye-catching unfamiliar curiosity as widespread popular books of the time.

Indeed, in the process of national construction, history and geography often work together to coalesce national consciousness, and certain geographical spaces are also endowed with unique cultural significance and emotional connotations, even political implications. Thus in the construction of Zhonghuaminzu, the integrity of the historical narrative gets priority. In *Suiyuan*, following the footsteps of historical figures, Lin visited the legendary tomb of Wang Zhaojun, a young and beautiful lady who played a representative of the Han people and married far away to the West, underpinning the narrative of thousands of years of peace between the frontier and China proper. Zhaojun was considered one of the four major beauties of ancient China, but this label is merely a romanticized image of the long period of peacefulness she contributed to. Namely, the possibility of connecting the hinterland and the

borderlands into an organic unity through a peaceful way of setting up a kinship as imperial consorts is wildly recognized. This organic unity here, especially in the chaotic era, implies a unified nation-state with both external alliance and internal peace. Lin carefully noted the poem from the stone tablet of the tomb, on which is written the manifestation and gratitude for Zhaojun's personal sacrifice for the mission of long-lasting peace, which is worthwhile for remembrance for centuries.<sup>21</sup> Newly-educated elites like Lin ventured into new lands not only for the sake of state-building but also to establish a lingering affiliation with the existence of the organic unity from the Han dynasty, as a bedrock de-exoticized imagination of *Zhonghuaminzu* for readers in the modern nation-state era. For most people in China, borderland, which they may not have ventured into in their lifetime, cultural resonance is the only approach for building perceptions and knowledge of the geographic periphery against the inherent stereotype from literature.

Likewise, when Lin walked into the Chongfu Temple beyond the Great Wall, though “the interior is in disrepair, the Buddha statue collapsed, and lifeless”, he affirmed its historical value and described in his diary that the temple was built in the Kangxi period, with a large green tile roof and magnificent carved beams and painted pillars back then.<sup>22</sup> The stone monument in front of the main hall was a record of the achievements of Kangxi's conquest in four languages - Chinese, Manchu, Tibetan, and Mongolian - and it is clear that this has been an important part of the historiography of Qing's expansion. In this way, Lin cleverly sketched out the idea of the five races as a family, as well as identifying its historical legitimacy and recognition. And this “family” is exactly where *zhonghuaminzu* is. Besides, this emphasis on a certain moment in history is more of a reshaping of personal memory and

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<sup>21</sup> Jing Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, xi yu tan xian kao cha da xi (Xin jiang ren min chu ban she, 2013), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Lin, 17.



history recognition based on the necessity of the future. As a young revolutionary with an “anti-Manchu” slogan at the beginning, Lin, like Sun Yat-sen, reversed his political direction immediately after the revolution and changed the image of the Manchu ruler from an enemy to a hero to meet the need for a unified historical narrative of the region. The rehabilitated objects and the involvement of young elites subject together gave birth to this place of memory, the places of memory can be viewed as sites of remembering, as Pierre Nora argues when he reflects the French national history, our present historical situations determine the memory configuration attached to places. “Self-consciousness emerges under the sign of that which has already happened, as the fulfillment of something always already begun”.<sup>23</sup> Since the national consciousness has already been ingrained into the travelers’ mindset, this nation-building behavior also has been done spontaneously, consciously, or unconsciously. Also, establishing places of memory has taken on great meaning and value for nation-building, when there is a need to establish the legitimacy of their public identities and histories, particularly in times of political change and conflict.<sup>24</sup> As “memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where the consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn”, the places that carry memory always bear political implications, as with the inclusion of the Manchu from revolutionaries in shaping the unification proposition in the borderland at this time, it precludes their earlier concern with the brutality and massacre of Han Chinese during Manchu’s early entry into the China proper.

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<sup>23</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (April 1, 1989): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

<sup>24</sup> Duncan Light, “Street Names in Bucharest, 1990–1997: Exploring the Modern Historical Geographies of Post-Socialist Change,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 30, no. 1 (January 2004): 154–72, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-7488\(02\)00102-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-7488(02)00102-0).

Considering the approaching invasion of Imperial Japan, nationalism sentiment accelerated this process in the decades following Lin. The later travelers highlight their visits to those places where “sites of memory” (*lieux de memoire*)—the exhausted capital of collective memory condenses and is expressed.<sup>25</sup> This activity and the national sentiment of the time were mutually reinforcing and further strengthened. For example, Gufan Li records a tour of the cemetery of the vassal king of Ming, which commemorates his loyalty to a heroic sacrifice during the end of Ming, the last Han-oriented dynasty before the Qing, and when the vassal king of the borderland faced the Qing army in death rather than surrender.<sup>26</sup> This trip mirrored reality, and the tomb is definitely “of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings”.<sup>27</sup> Despite the scope of the nation in a geographical sense being different, and the Manchu being treated as an enemy, the essence of exclusion in nationalism, however, was accentuated and heroized for a current appeal. For these young elites, who were in the midst of the national crisis, cherishing the monuments and remembering the past had nothing to do with the psychology of “pining for the past”, but rather with the historical facts and realistic sentiment generated by the crisis context, for reshaping national cohesion and mobilization. This national essence is subject to recurrent reinterpretation which requires a part of cultural history to justify a present and permanent reality by addressing the long-live national spirits.

Accordingly, through the historicization of the landscape, Zhaojun, Kangxi, and the vassal king of Ming are imagined to be historical legitimacy of the borderland and the new national discourse of inclusion and exclusion. By emphasizing the relationship between conquest and

<sup>25</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History.”

<sup>26</sup> Gufan Li, Xifang Zhao, and Gufan Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 20 shi ji ren wen di li ji shi / Xang Lian zhu bian 2, Di er ji 1 (Bei jing: Zhong guo qing nian chu ban she, 2012), 41–43.

<sup>27</sup> Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 9.

reciprocity, it constructs a heterogeneous group with internal complexity and ambiguity into a family as a homogenous national community. “Using the past to serve the present (and suppressing that part of the past deemed not to be useful) is the standard operating procedure in China”, as Dittmer and Kim posit, and it also works for all political systems, and “what survives is a matter of time and context. “ Historical memory as a means of legitimizing the national community regardless of whether it is about the visible legacy of lifestyles, ritual traditions, architecture, myths, or even natural scenery and other landscapes becomes part of the national construction, and through the historical presentation of nature, travelers give the scenery and human landscape a consistent spirituality.

Apart from the ideological level, as Wang Mingke argues, the combination of nation and state comprises the modern construction “nation-state”, which to some extent ignores the ancient foundations of modern change, and more importantly, overlooks the human ecological changes in this long history.<sup>28</sup> Hence, rather than considering it as a modern invention from a constructivist perspective, the change in the modern sense of nation should be seen from a historical perspective with more concrete modern practice. Namely, a human group often collectively imagines, memories, and believes in a common “blood” relationship, and this is the root emotion that unites the group (ethnic, national, or state), to claim, consolidate, or expand the group's resources and defining the boundaries of the people who have access to these resources.<sup>29</sup> However, no matter what communities, nations, or nationalities, they are all empty shells that require “substantive” political and social organization in order to carry out their purpose of maintenance and expansion of common resources. The memory alone

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<sup>28</sup> Mingke Wang, *Hua xia bian yuan: li shi ji yi yu zu qun ren tong*, 2020, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Wang, 8.

can only establish historical legitimacy at the level of myth, insufficient to establish a community of resources in the modern sense from pragmatism.

Therefore, the West region and the borderland are firstly presented as an intellectualized and scientific material form beyond the cultural landscape, to meet the need for the political reality, which is a physical space or resources package composed of specific contents and data such as agriculture, industry, minerals, transportation, waterways, population, cultural relics, houses, etc. This research, examination, and documentation of resources is thought to be a practice of state-building that has been going on for decades. According to their interests and expertise, each person donates their knowledge on the distribution and construction of certain industries and resources in their records. Like Lin explores the possibility of railway construction and the distribution of mineral resources, Gu Zhizhong provides a detailed account of the distribution of oil on the way, the history of development, the number of oil wells, oil extraction, and oil refining, Mingtuo mainly records the taxation and income and expenditure of the people, and by presenting the volume and value of products involved, Zhou Xiwu records information on Mongolian and Tibetan production and trade in Qinghai as well as the structure of the local economy. More specifically, Li zhuchen as a senior expert in the field of chemistry in China later, went to the northwest specifically to look at the local saline and mineral situation. He discovered natural sulfate and recognized the local yields of gold and manganese, as well as documented the entire process of copper production from sulfate refining.<sup>30</sup> Also, in Li Gufan's examination of Qinghai during the Japanese invasion, he took a detailed inventory of its resources, including gold mines, coal mines, animal skins, licorice, antler, salt, etc., and concluded that if the livestock industry got improved and

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<sup>30</sup> Zhuchen Li and Xiaobin Yang, *Xi Bei Li Cheng*, Di 1 ban, Xi Bei Xing Ji Cong Cui (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 2003), 8.

various mineral deposits were exploited, Qinghai would be spared from poverty. Even the important task of defending against Japan hinged on the active development of Qinghai.<sup>31</sup>

All geographical units of the borderland have regained favor because of their abundant resource properties for an industrial society. As a result, when China is involved in the modernization process of global integration and the transformation of the whole society from an agriculture-oriented model to industrialization, the components of modern infrastructure gradually become the key focus of people's attention, and also the core of state-building. That is to say, the nation somewhat is built on the utility of the borderland from a pragmatic approach towards modernization and so-called modern civilization, which is considered an accelerator of being progressive. Sun Yat-sen believed in the “Industrial Plan” that the development of the northwestern region was an important part of the revitalization of China as a new nation-state, and it is of great value and significance to the strategic vision of “Enrichment and Strengthening”. He wrote to Li Hongzhang that he wished to travel to the borderland, especially Xinjiang, “to examine the fields of cultivation, herding, and sericulture, then elaborating on the interests of the people. As long as following the western methods, recruiting people to reclaim land, and gathering merchants to a unified market. It would be of great benefit to the country's livelihood.”<sup>32</sup> Under the influence of this view, people from the hinterland and borderland were gradually forming a community of benefits. As with communism, rather than shaping a common history, a common future becomes possible.

This view had in fact sown the ideological seeds for the public as early as the period of the Self-Strengthening Movement. During the 1870s and 1880s, China made substantial progress

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<sup>31</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 64.

<sup>32</sup> Y. Sun et al., *Sun Zhong Shan Quan Ji* (zhong hua shu ju, 1985), 18

in heavy industry and military modernization through the construction of shipping, telegraph lines, and railroads. Albeit failing to break the conservative Confucian worldview that most of the ruling elite still shared, the promotion of economic and military modernization by the “self-strengtheners” opened the eyes of a new generation who realized the importance of industrialized production. Li Hongzhang, as a representative of the Self-Strengthening Movement, advocated learning the advanced technology of the West for “self-reinforcement”, especially in the military and civilian fields, and machines should be vigorously promoted. All this was undoubtedly passed on to the young elites, through Sun Yat-sen, especially those who received a Western education. Following in the footsteps of their predecessors and the ideology of modernization, these travelers were particularly concerned with the raw materials of industrialized society, and this narrative reinforces nationalism from the instrumentally rational perspective with pragmatism, shaping a common community for securing access to these key industrial resources. In this vein, The construction of *Zhonghuaminzu* lies not only in history but also in a pragmatic future, the nation-building process following the rhythm of state-building and accelerating by nationalism sentiment.

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#### Migration: from connectivity to ethnic integration

One of the reasons why the border region deviates from the stereotype of the poetic imagination of solitude stems from its complex political, economic and cultural context along with the fact that before the introduction of modern trains and highways, long-distance travel was incredibly difficult. Lin’s interest in the West originated from geopolitical concerns and national defense, which was generated from Zuo Zongtang's “theory of defending the inner-

frontier”, as he writes at first in the diary, “we must recognize that the economic and political status of the Northwest has a value that affects the whole world... this region is haunted by strong neighbors, hidden disputes and religious divergences threaten the safety and security of the nation”.<sup>33</sup> Lin saw the situation of the new nation-state under the pattern of The Great Game and realized that the turmoil of the local division would be hard to eliminate soon, besides, the new policies would encounter resistance to implementation. In his point of view, state-building should strive to avoid conflict but to prosper the economy, especially by encouraging agriculture and mining, probably would be the best strategy. Also, as a state builder, Lin’s emphasis on the borderland from territorial and military significance turned to the discovery and exploration of the economic value. As a result, he documented the operational details of various industries throughout his journey, albeit with a certain bias, in which the traditional agricultural practices and the exploitation of natural resources are valued more highly than the capital-intensive commercial activities and nomadic patterns. As Lin commented on the wool and fur trade, “These businesses have always been controlled by the Westerners, who came to Suiyuan with capital, set up banks, and were powerful enough to manipulate the market for a monopoly on a regular basis, but they were also the ones who suffered losses when fur exports stagnated later”.<sup>34</sup> Evidently, Lin remained cautious about such high-risk trade, while he speaks highly of the agriculture made by Han Chinese in Mongolian land. For instance, He mentioned several times that the Han Chinese rented the arable land belonging to the Mongols because they were better at farming, and that was also a complementary advantage that would promote the integration of ethnic relations.<sup>35</sup> Compared

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<sup>33</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Lin, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Lin, 33, 38.

to the industries, he cared more about the people who are willing to migrate here from the hinterland.

In general, there are three significant production systems in the Western region. The first is the nomadic system represented by the Mongolian and other steppe minorities, the second is the oasis agricultural culture represented by the Uyghurs, Hui, and other minority groups, and the third is the dry farming culture in the central and western part of the Loess Plateau represented by the Han Chinese.<sup>36</sup> Lin, as a man who grew up in the Yangtze River valley of China, has the best knowledge of the Han mode of production and consequently unfolds his imagination of ethnic relations from that point. When he thinks about the ethnic communication brought about by economic development, it does have the tendency to facilitate the migration of Han Chinese people to the borderlands, as the migration plan was also popularized and implemented by the Republic government at that time.

However, this claim is not a novel proposal, since the Han Chinese population was, at that time, migrating extensively to the borderland area and expanding its arable land, especially to Manchuria, located in the northeast of China, which is the traditional homeland of the Manchus. In the Qing Dynasty, initially, that land was only allowed to be inhabited by Manchu banners, while the Han Chinese were excluded. Yet, due to the war, chaos, and changes at the end of the Qing Dynasty, the Qing court gradually lifted the regional restrictions. Statistically speaking, in Manchuria, the proportion of farmland cover was around 4 percent until the middle of the 19th century. From 1840 to 1908, the average yearly rate of growth was 1.6%. In 1914 and 1931, there were two peaks of yearly average growth

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<sup>36</sup> Bao Gu, "Guan Yu Xi Bei Li Shi Wen Hua De Te Dian," *Lanzhou Univeristy Academic Report* 3 (2003): 38–41.



rates of 2.3% throughout the 20th century.<sup>37</sup> In fact, long before the Republican government encouraged migration, there had been many agricultural populations in the Qing Dynasty who spontaneously made their way to the West Region. An important factor contributing to these historical changes is the choice of people to break through various boundaries and paradigms. In other words, the Great Wall, in its capacity as a blockade of resources, has gradually disintegrated as a result of the actions of many individuals and groups throughout the course of history. This has enabled these individuals and groups to cross racial, ethnic, and tribal boundaries, as well as to break through traditional economic production methods and social structures.

The reasons for migration extend beyond the economic to political considerations. As a result of the enormous conflict and famine that occurred at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, a significant portion of the hinterland was deserted, and the Qing government implemented a number of different incentives to encourage people to reclaim the land. The relationship between the population and the land was relatively accommodating, and no need to migrate from their hometowns to make a living outside the gateway. The so-called “gateway” was originally designated after the Longqing emperor of the Ming dynasty along the Great Wall opened in the “mutual market” pass, which later evolved into a trade pass to Mongolia. By the late Kangxi period, the society gradually became stable and the population increased. Till Kangxi implemented the policy of abolishing the poll tax and collecting only land tax, the population exploded and the relationship between people and land began to lose its balance. Meanwhile, the imperial court opened part of the Mongolian land, thus the Han Chinese from the hinterland began to migrate outside the gateway to the West Region of the large-scale.

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<sup>37</sup> Yu Ye et al., “Cropland Cover Change in Northeast China during the Past 300 Years,” *Science in China Series D: Earth Sciences* 52, no. 8 (August 2009): 1172–82, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11430-009-0118-8>.

The main reason for spontaneous migration lies in poverty since the cold climate and infertile land in northern Shanxi and Shaanxi often caused droughts and made life difficult for the inhabitants.<sup>38</sup> Lin also acknowledged that he met some people in the West region who had migrated from other provinces, mostly because of the years of famine.<sup>39</sup>

Later, after the signing of the Treaty of Xinchou, the Qing court decided to open up a wide range of financial resources in the country to increase the revenue to pay the huge war reparations and alleviate the financial crisis. Some officials proposed to reclaim the land in Inner Mongolia and levied a deposit of silver and rent. Therefore, the Qing court was determined to reclaim the Mongolian land on a large scale, and in 1902 appointed the Ministry of Military Affairs, Yi Gu as the minister to supervise the reclamation of the Mongolian land. Some agricultural areas, which had already been increased by immigrants at that time, had no drastic impacts on the economic and social life of the Mongolian region. However, the official reclamation of Mongolian land at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and the establishment of agencies by the Qing authorities to recruit large-scale reclamation, have shaken the whole Mongolian region. This policy completely broke down the demographic divide between the borderland and the hinterland, resulting in a trend toward the integration of different ethnic groups. The official reclamation of Mongolian lands reached a total of about 100,000 hectares plus more than 3.3 million hectares of land and levied about 7 million taels of silver for the reclamation. The predatory large-scale reclamation at the end of the Qing Dynasty excluded the traditional livestock industries of the region and caused it to start on the path of a deteriorating ecological environment. At the beginning of the 19th century, there were 425,000 Han Chinese in the sixth town of Guihua City and Fengzhen town, also at

<sup>38</sup> Junbin Wang and Zhenye Zhao, ““Zou Xi Kou” Yu Jin Dai Sui Yuan Di Qu de Fei Huan,” *Journal of Shanxi Normal University(Social Science Edition)* Vol.35, no. No.1 (January 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 36.

least one million Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia. By 1912, there were 1,010,954 Han Chinese in Suiyuan and more than 1.5 million Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia. While in 1937, the population of Suiyuan reached 2,064,565, and the population of Han Chinese in Inner Mongolia reached 3,719,113.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, he also notes the problems associated with too frequent population mobility, like the tendency of some “mobile colonization” during this period, such as the arrival of many Han Chinese from the hinterland in the spring to farm and then left after the harvest in order to avoid the annual government tax, which caused a lot of trouble in the region. In the same vein, Pengxia observed the same situation and offered a female perspective to depict the damage to the local women. Since Han Chinese frequent immigrants were mostly male laborers who come as unaccompanied single men, so they were prone to deceive local women and married them when they arrived. Then those migrants left and abandoned the local wife after the busy season was over, without a care in the world for them. When a woman was abandoned, she had no choice but to become a prostitute to make a living at that time. For example, more than 800 illegal private prostitutes operated in Gaolan, mostly as a result of this.<sup>41</sup> Despite the many problems associated with migration, Lin underlined many of its advantages from a macro perspective and provided solutions for further optimization. Though the Han people were able to rent land for reclamation, owing to the inconvenience of transportation and limited local consumption, the labor surplus failed to produce more economic benefits, which is also known as “farmers produce more and get less”. To better prove this point, Lin also offered a counter-example. On his journey, there were cases where the wasteland around Suiyuan was only used by the Mongols as pasture for livestock without

<sup>40</sup> Naigong Song , Wang, Mingzhong,, Zhang, Zengzhi,, Mao, Zhaohui,, *Zhong guo ren kou* (Beijing: Zhong guo cai zheng jing ji chu ban she, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Pengxia Lin, *Xi Bei Xing* (Yinchuan: Ningxia Renmin Chubanshe, 2000), 70.

reclamation, while daily food had to be taken from the hinterland. However, due to the inconvenience of long-distance delivery, there was a vicious circle in which the local inhabitants were exploited at different levels.<sup>42</sup> Lin highlighted the ability of the Han Chinese for agricultural production from different aspects. In his deep consciousness, the division of labor and collaboration among ethnic groups is not only the key to productivity improvement but also crucial to changing the status quo of indigenous people's lives as well as the ethnic relation, as in the cases of the Manchu land suggest. This reciprocal solution for state-building further led to his plan of the construction of transportation.

The success of both the settlers in the Manchu and the Mongolian region certainly reinforced Lin's desire to continue to expand his migration program to the northwest border. As the Chinese Eastern Railway officially opened to the public in June 1903, Chinese immigrants began to gradually increase, and during the Sino-Japanese War at the end of the nineteenth century, there were only 2.5-3 million people in the northeast, but in 1907, the *Political Strategy of the Three Eastern Provinces* revealed that the population of the three eastern provinces had reached 14.45 million, which was nearly five times more than a decade earlier, which shows the rapid growth of immigrants.<sup>43</sup> The key infrastructure that supported this mass migration was one of the cores of modernization, the train, which is able to solve the problem of population mobility as well as commodity transportation. Baotou has been addressed as a role model for being one of the biggest markets by virtue of its accessibility to all kinds of traffic. In 1919, the trade volume exceeded 5 million and increased to more than 10 million in 1926 because of the full connection of the Beijing-Baotou railway.<sup>44</sup> In

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<sup>42</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Shan Wang, "A Study Causes That the People of the North China Emigrated to the Northeast in 1920s," *Journal of Qiqihar University (Phi & SocSci)*, September 2001.

<sup>44</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 42.

particular, the role of Baotou as a center for the distribution of commodities to the domestic hinterland and abroad highlights the value of constructing transportation in the borderland.

Thus, Lin's views on state-building and ethnic integration for Zhonghuaminzu were oriented toward transportation, and he believed that nation-building must begin with state-building, and from the improvement of mobility and traffic conditions. As he mentioned in his diary, South Road from Baotou southwest through Ningxia and then west to Liangzhou this road can make Zhili, Suiyuan, Gansu, and Xinjiang provinces should be connected as one. The north can control Mongolia Xinjiang, the south can reach Qinghai Tibet, and the first can consolidate national defense. Gansu, Qinghai's annual output of ten million goods and millions of people, can enjoy the convenience of mobility. At the same time, the rich coal mines along the way, and the forests around the Qilian Mountains have the best raw materials for railroad ties, making it easy to supply materials for railroad construction. Besides, there is no drifting sand, many rivers, and plenty of water along the way. Once the railroad is open, there will be frequent traffic, and the problem of the separation between the Han and the Hui can be eliminated.<sup>45</sup>

A comparable situation existed in nineteenth-century French rural areas, which shows that the train firstly served for economic purpose and then enhance communication, facilitating the nation-building process. Amidst a well-developed network of highways and transportation, by the late 1830s, about 70 percent of 34,512 km had been made serviceable. In beginning, railroads served a notable role in the underdeveloped areas of the countryside, since they had a great demand for capital, that is why railroads created by urban capital go where the interests of capital and urban industry are, and not where people actually live, which

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<sup>45</sup> Lin, 398.

facilitates more in the industrial development than people's economic engagement from the mobility. In the 1890s, judged that regions ten miles from a railway, or even less, gave it about one-tenth of the traffic that they would have given it had they been closer. Then, a law of 1865 meant to create cheap railway links "of local interest" showed results only after another law of 1880, providing the economic situation that made such projects achievable. In 1882, the length of rail had increased from 19,746 kilometers to 26,277 kilometers in 1879. In 1910, there is 64,898 km, including almost 12,000 km of lines "of local interest" and nearly 10,000 km of electric tramways and narrow-gauge railways giving villagers easy access to markets where they could buy and sell.<sup>46</sup> It follows that railroads were not intended to improve people's lives in the first place but to serve more unexplored areas and economic development. The mobility and communication of people can be gradually done by cheaper railroads with lower costs after the first phase is completed. The railroad in this way changed the economic landscape of the countryside significantly and then further contributed to nation-building.

Accordingly, Sun Yat-sen's construction plan originally set Lanzhou as the central point of China's railroad network, which largely coincided with Lin's vision, given the utilization of resources and geographical advantages along the way. Lin's words hinted at his future position and career path. His sound background, insight into the economy, and hands-on experience contribute to his ambition, and this journey also set the direction of his subsequent political involvement. He had the privilege to meet Sun Yat-sen in Shanghai and state the proposal for the development of the West Region, then became a counsellor of the Ministry of Transportation in charge of his blueprint construction, and was responsible for civil affairs

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<sup>46</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France ; 1870 - 1914*, Nachdr. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press, 2007), 195–220.

in the western provinces one after another later on. Despite the trivial and informal tone of the diary, Lin's participation was highly political from the outset, and his top-down thoughts have shaped his opinion regarding nation-building and effective solutions. Lin is undoubtedly a pioneer, but not the only witness of his time. In addition to the political level of engagement, other young elites of the same generation were also paying attention to the matter as part of the state-building agenda. For instance, Liu Wenhai puts in his diary that the improvement of transportation is favorable to solve the problem of food shortage, mainly because it can optimize the allocation of food within and outside the region, and indirectly because all other means depend on transportation to be effective. For example, his idea of “replenishing food with minerals” is based on the idea of mining minerals in exchange for food rations. The same goes for the failure to protect forests. Because of the lack of access to food and climate, survival became more dependent on fuel, and the lack of fuel led to the massive destruction of forests.<sup>47</sup> As Li Gufan comments, “Start with transportation first, and the rest of the construction undertakings will be solved naturally”.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, the transportation issue has another political implication in addition to economics and ethnic integration. Liu Wenhai, who studied in England and later became a university professor, noted the incapacity of the Republican government to administer the borderland after the Xinhai Revolution during his visit to the borderland. In his diary, he emphasized that the Qing dynasty, in spite of its corruption, was still able to manage the country and be relatively responsible. Officials in the borderland had scruples if they committed misconduct once they were denounced. However, since the establishment of the Republican government, the foundation of the central authority has not been consolidated, and the provinces are

<sup>47</sup> Wenhai Liu and Zhengyu Li, *Xi Xing Jian Wen Ji*, Xi Bei Xing Ji Cong Cui (Lanzhou: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 2003), 43.

<sup>48</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 46.

equivalent to their independence, not subject to the jurisdiction of the Republican government. Therefore, it was common for local officials to set up local dictatorships, but for the borderland, in light of its inaccessibility, local officials were more reckless than in other provinces.<sup>49</sup> This aptly demonstrates one of the great challenges in the construction of the state after the Xinhai Revolution, which is thought to be the reconstruction of central authority. As Jerome Chen argues, the fragmentation of the Chinese empire was manifested in the absence of central control over localities and the ineffectiveness of law to control factions.<sup>50</sup> Although the monarchy was overthrown, the entanglement of democracy and feudalism continued. While the Xinhai Revolution was modeled after the American Revolution of Independence, once the Republic was established, it failed to continue on the American-style path of constitutional statehood. Rather, the institutional arrangement is replaced by a power struggle that comes in a manner akin to the French revolutionary. Thus in every region, the reproduction of feudalism was carried out in the name of civil rights, and the expansion of civil rights was backed by local feudalism.<sup>51</sup> The situation is even worse on the borderland.

Admittedly, it has a certain historical origin as the centralized and bureaucratic rule works more for the hinterland while the prevailing pattern on the borderland carries indirect and feudal attributes in the Qing dynasty. The main reason lies in their loyalty to the Manchu court rather than to China itself. In fact, although the Qing Dynasty was founded by the Manchu minority, it essentially adopted a dual system of governance that had both the nature

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<sup>49</sup> Liu and Li, *Xi Xing Jian Wen Ji*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Jerome Chen, *Jun Shen Zheng Quan: Jin Dai Zhongguo de Jun Fa Shi Qi* (Guilin Shi: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2008), 24.

<sup>51</sup> Jilin Xu, *Jia Guo Tian Xia: Xian Dai Zhongguo de Ge Ren, Guo Jia Yu Shi Jie Ren Tong*, Di 1 ban (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 2017), 160–75.



of the long history of a centralized bureaucratic system and Manchu ethnic formation. The frontier affairs belong to the latter one. During the time of the Qing dynasty, all of the frontier affairs were managed in the capital by a separate institution named the Court for Frontier Dependencies (Lifanyuan, 理藩院), apart from the Six Boards that governed China proper. Notably, the Court for Frontier Dependencies was the exclusive preserve of Manchus and Mongols, and frontier concerns were kept out of the hands of the Han Chinese. As a result of this institutional system, it was the Manchu emperor who had political and institutional power over ethnic border elites, rather than the Chinese state. As a result, the imperial process of cultural and political socialization remained fairly consistent throughout the empire.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the ambition of the Republican government was not only to create Zhonghuaminzu but also to strengthen the effective control and governance of the central government over the borderland. Although the actual situation after the Xinhai Revolution was one of warlord chaos, the plan for transportation routes was undoubtedly the most effective way to bring the central government into close contact with the border areas, and this idea could be further implemented through the migration program.

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### The image of the minorities: from barbarism to progress

Many scholars compare such travelogues with colonial documents, aiming to use a postcolonial methodology to demonstrate the similarities between the young elites of the Republican period and their former colonial masters, even describing it as an internal

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<sup>52</sup> Esherick, Kayali, and Van Young, *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, 232.

colonization process of the Han Chinese people towards the borderland minorities.<sup>53</sup> For the colonizers, from a perspective of Orientalism, their primary intention was to use a backward and uncivilized “East” to shape the superiority and identity of the “West”.<sup>54</sup> In this narrative, one can see a clear hierarchy and dichotomy between *Self* and *Other*. Under the sentiment of nationalism and the need for Zhonghuaminzu construction, travelers endowed modernity to the living habits and economic behavior of ethnic minorities, which was regarded as a component of the Zhonghuaminzu. The emphasis is on eliminating Other and integrating the minorities into a new narrative of a shared nation. In this process, they strive to dissolve the prejudices and stereotypes of Han Chinese against ethnic minorities, and the vision of Zhonghuaminzu's future and the imagination of citizens in a powerful state were filtered into the journey by the Han elite.

When it comes to ethnic conflicts, the Han-Hui dispute stands out as the most prominent example. It is imperative to review the historical issues of the Hui-Han separation and the hostility which encumbers ethnic integration to construct a new nation. The decades of Dungan revolt led to great demographic changes in the northwest, and Zuo Zongtang, who had settled the turmoil, redesignated the living areas for the Hui-Han in order to avoid the intensification of the Hui-Han conflict. To better secure the living environment of the Han, the majority of the Han Chinese were placed inside the town, while the Hui people were either living outside or forced to migrate to the wilderness region. The main town, like Lanzhou, still followed the rule of revolt output, separating Hui and Han to “preventing

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<sup>53</sup> See “Sung-Chiao Shen, 'Travel Writing and the Imagination of Chinese Nationhood during the 1930s: A Case Study on the Northwestern Region,' *Taiwan University History Report*, no. 37 (2006): 145–216, <https://doi.org/10.6253/ntuhistory.2006.37.03>.”

<sup>54</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Facsimile edition, Penguin Modern Classics (London: Penguin, 2003). One of Edward Said's central ideas in *Orientalism* is that knowledge about the East is generated not through actual facts, but through imagined constructs. The “West” defines itself by setting the “East” as its antithesis, rather than studying it objectively.

inside contacts who may offer assistance when revolts emerge”.<sup>55</sup> Pengxia confirmed in her visit that this segregation still exists, hence fewer Muslims, including the Uyghurs (which was thought to be a branch of the Hui), can be found in the city, as was the case throughout the whole West Region. Meanwhile, she also held a strong position that in a different historic era, with the idea of five-race in one family, this geographical segmentation should be abolished as soon as possible to realize genuine equality.<sup>56</sup>

From the travelogues, those young travelers coincidentally emphasized the shared principle that Hui-Han is neither a religious nor a racial dispute, but a gap of communication caused by cultural differences and habits. For instance, the prohibitions against Muslims consuming pork and alcohol are always ridiculed by the Han Chinese as superstitious and stubborn, and the Muslims feel that they are not respected. Similarly, the daily routine of Han Chinese is to invite people to eat together, but given the Muslim dietary restrictions, such communication has been reduced, and consequently less opportunity to bridge the gap.<sup>57</sup> Radical viewpoints assert that without dining together, one cannot achieve total socialization, and without complete socialization, one cannot intermarry, and without intermarriage, one cannot eliminate racial distinctions, therefore interracial misunderstandings are inevitable.<sup>58</sup>

For eliminating ethnic prejudice, Han's shortcomings are highlighted in their writings, which undoubtedly dissolve Han Chinese superiority from the previous dominant ideology of “the great Han” and mono-Han ambition, especially when it comes to irrefutable scenarios like “no smoking for men and no foot-binding for women” of the Hui people.<sup>59</sup> The concept

<sup>55</sup> Jiegang Gu et al., *Xi bei kao cha ri ji* (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 2002), 40.

<sup>56</sup> Lin, *Xi Bei Xing*, 31.

<sup>57</sup> Lin, 64.

<sup>58</sup> Liu and Li, *Xi Xing Jian Wen Ji*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 25–26.

“foot-binding” refers to the Han Chinese practice of artificially stunting the normal growth of women's feet and making them unnaturally shaped and tiny. That foot-binding was thought to be a benefit of good breeding provided an additional justification for the transmission of the practice. In a patriarchal society dominated by an agricultural civilization, women have always been viewed as subordinate to men and shaped by men's aesthetics, imagination, and obsession. Also, in Han Chinese marriages, women without foot-binding are unwelcome, hence gradually this constructed ideal of beauty and marital aspirations makes foot-binding a compulsory part of every Han woman's upbringing, albeit cruel torture for them. A popular upper-class saying pointed out, “If you care for a son, you don't go easy on his studies; if you care for a daughter, you don't go easy on her foot-binding.”<sup>60</sup> Foot-binding became increasingly critical within Western Protestant missionary circles after the Opium War, in virtue of the habit as pointless brutality committed on innocent young girls. Since foot-binding was regarded by the Westerners as one of the most obvious outward signs of ignorance and backwardness, later during the Hundred Days' Reform, a series of movements opposed to foot binding became the only widely-engaged social improvement movement during the Restoration Movement. During the period of the movement, foot-binding has been highly symbolized. Almost a hundred societies of various names emerged throughout the country, and most of the participants of the anti-footbinding groups were local squires, sometimes local officials, and celebrities who were influenced by the latest ideas. It was precisely the strong urge to erase this shameful mark that made the Hundred Days Reform, one of the modernization movements in China, be coated also with “women's emancipation”, even though it was only the men who organized the liberation of women's feet, and the

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<sup>60</sup> Alison R. Drucker, “The Influence of Western Women on the Anti-Footbinding Movement 1840-1911,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 8, no. 3 (1981): 179–99.

emancipated women showed no enthusiasm.<sup>61</sup> This movement, begun by Christian missionaries but taken over by male Chinese nationalists, became entangled in a modernization agenda that left the concern for female freedom behind. Therefore, the anti-footbinding agenda was regarded both as a sign of progress and modernity.

In fact, not only the Hui, the Manchus, Mongolians, and many ethnic minorities have no foot-binding culture, which may be related to their non-cultivated agricultural lifestyle in the borderland. This customary distinction has been constructed with superiority or inferiority in a certain narrative in order to demarcate the progressive modernity from tradition and backwardness, though it should be attributed to a particular survival environment as a historical concern. In the process of the construction of a modern Zhonghuaminzu, it is clear that the young generation was aware of how to further promote the so-called “progress” from appearance, even though this progress is merely a consequence of different cultural habits. It also serves that function, which can mobilize a wide range of Han Chinese while being favored by patriotic fighters. Even the travelers, who occasionally met Hui women following the Han custom of foot-binding, showed no sign of backwardness or conservatism. Rather, this phenomenon is branded as a sign of Hui-Han cultural integration and affinity.

The same methodology was applied to another shameful mark for most Chinese, which is opium consumption, but it carries deeper economic roots in the Northwest region. In 1860, the Chinese government was forced to change the name of opium to “foreign medicine” in the Treaty of Tianjin, allowing the legalization of the opium trade, which was consumed in large quantities by the population. By the time the Qing court announced the anti-opium campaign in 1906, there were many opium houses around the country, dozens in small towns

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<sup>61</sup> Ming Zhang, *Li Shi de Sui Pian: Ce Ji Xin Hai* (Beijing Shi: Dang dai Zhongguo chu ban she, 2011), 22.

and nearly a thousand in large cities. In Shanghai, there were 1,437 shops selling opium.<sup>62</sup> The Qing court was more concerned about the profits generated and the outflow of silver overseas than the damage to national health, so China gradually produced large quantities of its own opium, and the British, having introduced Chinese tea cultivation techniques and grew tea in India, no longer required opium to avoid a trade deficit with China, especially since local opium was cheaper and more competitive, thus the British almost ceased the opium trade. Given the fact that opium abuse deprives adults of motivation and productivity, it has always been criticized by progressives as one of the causes of laggardness.

Although the young elites traveled during an age when a nationwide anti-opium campaign had already been implemented, nevertheless, with the fall of the Qing government, which pursued the anti-opium campaign, the warlords saw a shortcut to a rapid bonanza in the collection of opium-related charges. Chen Wanli recorded that opium cultivation and trade continued under a system of fines, such as “the 20 to 30 shops openly sold opium inside and outside the city of Weinan, paying monthly fines, with store owners who were Han Chinese from Shanxi”. Chen saw how they served addicts to take opium and ended up sighing pathetically.<sup>63</sup> In 1912, after Ma Qi became the general of Xining Town, he actively expanded his troops with a limited population of only 500,000 and 2 million acres of land, with isolated transportation and a depressed economy. In exchange for armaments and ammunition, Ma thus first set up an official opium franchise, monopolizing the opium trade from the northwest to the broader China market via Inner Mongolia. This led to the Ma family ruling the northwest for over 37 years. Wu Xintian of Shaanxi was also a warlord who

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<sup>62</sup> Shanghai shi jin du gong zuo ling dao xiao zu and Shanghai shi dang an guan, eds., *Qing Mo Min Chu Di Jin Yan Yun Dong He Wan Guo Jin Yan Hui*, Di 1 ban (Shanghai Shi: Shanghai ke xue ji shu wen xian chu ban she, 1996), 222.

<sup>63</sup> Wanli Chen, Daofashi Xin, and Xiaobin Yang, *Xi xing ri ji* (Lanzhou: Gan su ren min chu ban she, 2002), 31.

grew up with opium, from 8,000 soldiers in 1921 to 30,000 in a few years, with most of his income coming from the opium trade, and thereby 40% of the arable land in the Hanzhong basin was planted with opium.<sup>64</sup> Once the government introduced a prohibition on cultivation, this created new problems, which were also raised from Lin's diary that the previous economy was sustained by the massive cultivation of opium. The local population inhaled opium, but as the production outweighed the consumption, it could still be sold throughout the country, despite the high transportation costs, the local economy could be supported because of its enormous profits. However, after the prohibition of cultivation, the people had to rely on external imports for their consumption and the local government was unable to collect taxes, resulting in a sharp decline in revenue and a vacuum in the rule.

The problem of opium, therefore, is essentially a problem of the local economy and local politics, meanwhile, this issue also reveals the importance of a comprehensive approach to the state-building from the economic community, starting with the modern infrastructure. Another industry that had previously supported the local economy was the wool and fur trade, but exports were also hampered by the outbreak of WWI. Thus the indigenous commented that the tyranny of taxation has been done in the name of "anti-opium".<sup>65</sup> This problem lingered in borderland until the WWII, and from Gufan's diary, in spite of the prohibition of opium has passed several years, he wrote that five or six members of the team were taking opium on a dirt bed, men were addicted to it, and women were backward with foot-binding,

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<sup>64</sup> Zhiliang Su, *Zhongguo Du Pin Shi*, Di 1 ban (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian Shanghai fa xing suo jing xiao, 1997), 134.

<sup>65</sup> Lin, *Xi Bei Xing*, 53.

“even the Red Cross team members fail to exempted from those bad habits, which is very deplorable”.<sup>66</sup>

It is noteworthy that all the observations on opium abuse feature Han Chinese, and several authors have deliberately emphasized that opium consumption is a “Han” inferiority rather than a “Chinese” one. In this sense, the progressiveness of Zhonghuaminzu excludes the bad habits of the Han Chinese. Since the pernicious image of opium abuse is deeply rooted in people's minds, the opposite figure of the Hui people has been enhanced. Especially in the army, as the Han Chinese continued to be defeated by external enemies, though not entirely owing to the addiction to opium, the popularity of opium indeed dampened the soldiers and affected their performance. Opium has been completely symbolized as the cause of all the backwardness in the past. In the contrast, this feature was amplified and then formed the strong image of the Hui army, as Xiafu Xuan recorded his experience of participating in the Northwest Army expedition from 1925 to 1927, his military perspective is a true record of the changing times in the Northwest, in which he describes the Hui army being strong and powerful that all the people of the villages they passed through escaped away.<sup>67</sup>

Another advantage of the Hui spotlighted by the youth elite is their hygienic and environmental cleanliness, which also adheres to people's imagination for the future of modernity and Zhonghuaminzu. From the late eighteenth century onward, the Industrial Revolution prompted dramatic and unprecedented changes in social and demographic structure. Unhealthy overcrowded housing conditions in rapidly growing modern metropolitans led to the increased spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, typhus, and

<sup>66</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 78.

<sup>67</sup> Xiafu Xuan, Zexuan Zhuang, and Jun Da, eds., *Xi bei yuan zheng ji*, Di 1 ban, di 1 ci yin shua, Xi bei xing ji cong cui (Lan zhou shi: Gan su ren min chu ban she, 2002), 58.



tuberculosis. This new context motivated the emergence of the modern hygiene movement in many countries, in which modern thinking on the motif overwhelmed the private sphere and took on social significance as it affected public health. This progressive idea was also brought to the borderland, where the travelers surprisingly noticed that the Hui people have a much better sense of hygiene than their Han Chinese neighbors due to some cultural and lifestyle differences. In general, sanitation and personal hygiene are crucial in the daily life of Muslims since Islam emphasizes personal hygiene and cleanliness to ensure that Muslims are able to perform their worship properly, as Allah SWT mentioned in the Quran in surah al-Baqarah verse 222, “Indeed, Allah SWT loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves”.<sup>68</sup> Pengxia put in her diary that the houses of the Hui people are spotless, neat, and uncluttered, and the Hui people's homes that she saw along the way were all extremely clean, though they are not well off, even clothes were torn, still fully mended and clean. “You don't need to ask much to know whether the residents are Hui or Han Chinese when you walk into a house” she finally commented.<sup>69</sup> Besides at home, the hygiene of the Muslim restaurants was also far better than that of the Chinese, and Li admitted that the Chinese were “so far behind in this respect that it is a total weakness and should be considerably improved”.<sup>70</sup>

Those portrayals of the merits of ethnic minorities are rarely found in previous texts by the Chinese intellectual elite, hence it can be regarded as a radical turn in the narrative for nation-building, and another shift about bandits is also worth drawing attention to. As a typical representative of those who grew up in traditional Chinese education before the Xinhai

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<sup>68</sup> Syuhaida Idha Abd Rahim et al., “Food Safety, Sanitation and Personal Hygiene in Food Handling: An Overview from Islamic Perspective,” *International Journal of Civil Engineering and Technology (IJCIET)* 9, no. 9 (2018): 1524–30.

<sup>69</sup> Lin, *Xi Bei Xing*, 92–93.

<sup>70</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 79.

Revolution, Li Deyi's description of the Hui in 1907 on the same route as Lin, mostly focused on how they robbed passersby as bandits and slayers, for instance, in 1904, a camel caravan returning to Tianjin from Xinjiang was plundered of more than 200,000 taels of silver and nine people were brutally killed, allegedly by the Hui people despite lack of the evidence.<sup>71</sup> Once he had recorded more of these stories, Li himself became wary of the Muslim groups, not only Hui but also other Muslims in Xinjiang. In his diary, Li showed not merely a lack of direct communication with the Muslims, but also an intention to avoid meeting them up as much as possible, even though he "originally wanted to visit Shanshan County, but was told that the Muslims were swarthy, so the trip was rescheduled, which was not pleasant, but had to be done for safety reasons."<sup>72</sup> Three decades later, Pengxia directly and sharply criticized this stereotype of Muslims with her own experience. She wrote outright in her diary that it's never correct to convict someone without seeing the facts, and depicted an experience that once on a trip. One day as many travelers competed for a room, there was only a mixed-gender rustic bed left for the night. She expected to get a room, but no one else in the hotel was willing to help. Eventually, the Hui folk offered her their room as they had always been more respectful and caring to women. In addition, having received a lot of support from Hui people along the way, she found it ridiculous and foolish to be suspicious based on race.<sup>73</sup> These stories by Li may not be false and Pengxia's experience may just be survivor bias. Their opposite representations nevertheless stem from the political agenda brought about by different ages and personal backgrounds. In particular, Li traveled far to the borderland in the era of Han-centric ideology dominated by the nationalists who attempted to restore the mono-Han nation for a new China, coupled with the fact that the Hui revolt makes

<sup>71</sup> Jiegang Gu et al., *Xi bei kao cha ri ji* (Lanzhou Shi: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 2002), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Gu et al., 30.

<sup>73</sup> Lin, *Xi Bei Xing*, 32.

it difficult to eliminate racial hatred in the short term, various ethnic rifts and shadows still linger in the minds of the next generation. While Pengxia, on the other hand, lived in a quite different period. When the Japanese Empire began to gradually invade Chinese territory, the demand for unity among all ethnic groups to resist foreign enemies became the priority, also the construction of Zhonghuaminzu worked, especially for borderlands, which were easy to defend and difficult to attack, and it became the core of China's backline. In wartime, nation-building determines the engineering between a united front and an alliance with a common goal. Thus, this conflict of an ethnic dispute between Li and Pengxia manifests different visions and imaginations about ethnic and national purpose and blueprint.

Likewise, for bandits, the images that appear in Lin's diary are of local Han Chinese called Lu Zhankui, and Lin described him as a cruel and short man being a monster and a murderer, who made residents around all fear.<sup>74</sup> Although Lin actively promoted immigration, the issues posed by Han Chinese migrants were shunned. Indeed, many of these bandits came from the Qing Dynasty immigrants, who made their way out of the gateway because of famine and poverty. As a result of the arrival of a large number of young and strong immigrants, the gender ratio in Suiyuan was extremely high. According to a survey conducted in 1933, the population of Suiyuan province was 2,275,072, with 1,165,548 males and 734,274 females, and the gender ratio was as high as 159:100 in several counties with a high concentration of immigrants. In Baotou, the total population of 122,723 men is 79,770 women is 42,953 and the gender ratio is 186:100; in Wu Yuan, the total population of 35,364 men is 22,986 women are 12,378 and the gender ratio is also as high as 186:100.<sup>75</sup> So many young single men were unable to settle down with families as well as their responsibilities

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<sup>74</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> "Suiyuan Gai Kuang" (Suiyuan sheng zheng fu, 1933).

and obligations; it was very likely to form an unstable social force. Once the external social conditions deteriorate, it was prone to be thrown into the banditry. Another reason for this situation was owing to the weakness of the new government's control over borderland society and the lack of adequate rural organizations, which revealed the lag in state-building.

Among these young elites, one female explorer, in particular, should be mentioned for her remarkable contribution to these grand propositions from a feminist perspective. Lin Pengxia, who endured the physical discomfort brought by the long-distance bumps, experienced the frightening moment when the sheepskin raft almost capsized in the whirlpool, crossed the mountains and rivers, and traveled over 10,000 miles from Shaanxi to Suiyuan in half a year.<sup>76</sup> In addition to these signs of what is considered “progress” in line with Western society, Pengxia also found in the life of the Muslims what she believed to be a continuation of traditional values and propagated them along with the “progressiveness” of the minority. Namely, her praise for minorities was also derived from the fact that they were seemingly closer to modern marriage patterns, and lifestyles she subscribed to and actively advocated. In the course of China's modernization, align with women's emancipation, women were gradually abandoning the image of the virtuous wife and mother and are stepping into society and factories, becoming participants in the socialized division of labor like men. Whereas Pengxia had a different view on this radical transformation. From her perspective, the core of nation-building should respect its historical heritage, especially the role of the family in

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<sup>76</sup> Pengxia Lin, formerly known as Lin Shuzhu, was born in Putian from a wealthy Chinese merchant family, and in 1925 she went to the United States to study economics, where she was exposed to a more diverse culture. In 1929, upon completing her studies in the United States, she unexpectedly decided to study aviation in Britain, and became one of the few female pilots in early China. But at that time, the Nanjing National Government, represented by Chiang Kai-shek, insisted on the policy of “to strengthen the internal security before the external one” in order to stabilize its power, tolerated Japan's invasion of China and signed the “Song-Shanghai Armistice Agreement” Lin Pengxia, who wanted to fly a plane to fight for his country, began to explore other ways to save the country.

society. A united historical narrative thus should be regarded as a pursuit while maintaining traditional achievements.

She reiterated her claim through the experience of border minorities that there should be a balance between female emancipation and a female-centered family unit. The women's rights proposed by Pengxia were, firstly, equality between husband and wife without patriarchy, and secondly, a clear division of labor, while women should play a good role in running the household. In particular, she emphasized that a good wife and mother in the new era should be socially knowledgeable and insightful in order to raise a better next generation, and that “the strength of a nation was mostly attributed to women because they were self-reliant, committed, and responsible for the foundation of national education from family”.<sup>77</sup> It seems no longer important to delve into the roots of the differences in the institution of marriage and the relationship between husband and wife, as the borderland minorities here have become, to some extent, a symbol of “progress” like the Western society, for different nationalists to reflect their ideas. In this process of constant symbolization, borderland minorities are seen as the representative of an imagined Zhonghuaminzu with modern attributes and live up to the standard of modernity and progress.

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#### The Further Enhancement of Nation: from cultural tolerance to print capitalism and tourism

Apart from eliminating Han Chinese bias by shaping a progressive image of minorities, the young travelers also provoked problems with linguistics and education in the borderland. For instance, Lin noted in Gansu that the number of Hui is high and education funding was

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<sup>77</sup> Lin, *Xi Bei Xing*, 113.

relatively abundant, although the Hui population was 1/3, the number of students only accounts for 1/40 of the overall student population, the cause of the problem may be religious customs.<sup>78</sup> Education matters more to the minorities to shape their understanding of Zhonghuaminzu. Similarly, when Li saw Hui children writing Arabic letters on the ground with chalk, he felt that “not being able to read and write Chinese script is illiterate, and this trend should be corrected immediately.”<sup>79</sup> Though John Edwards concludes in his study on the relationship between language and national identity that “identities survive language shifts and it is naïve, ahistorical, and indeed, patronizing to think otherwise. The essence of group identity is individual identity and the essence of individual identity, ultimately, is survival, personal security, and well-being. To the extent to which a language hinders these things, it will be deemed a negotiable commodity”.<sup>80</sup> As Makrides reflects on the question of why are Orthodox churches particularly prone to nationalization and even to nationalism, he points out an endogenous reason that, due to the fact that while vernacularization denotes the accessibility of the local people to the new religion, it also nurtures the national consciousness and later enables modern nationalization.<sup>81</sup>

During that same period, in other parts of the world, public education has also been the focus of attention in the process of nation-building, either top-down approaches or bottom-up solutions. For instance, In the early nineteenth century, Americans expanded public school enrollments in the rural North and West can best be understood as a social movement implementing a commonly held ideology of nation-building. It demonstrates the outlook and interests of small entrepreneurs in a world market, evangelical Protestantism, and an individualistic conception of the

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<sup>78</sup> Lin, *Qin Li Xi Bei*, 124.

<sup>79</sup> Li, Zhao, and Li, *Xi xing za ji*, 78.

<sup>80</sup> John Edwards, *Language, Society, and Identity*, The Language Library (Oxford [Oxfordshire] ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell in association with A. Deutsch, 1985), 85.

<sup>81</sup> Makrides, “Why Are Orthodox Churches Particularly Prone to Nationalization and Even to Nationalism.”

polity before the spread of the bureaucratic system and urban industrialism.<sup>82</sup> Also, in the same era in Europe, by introducing state-controlled education, the “Frenchmen” and “Italians” are formed by government determination.<sup>83</sup> As Hobsbawm observes, “states would use the increasingly powerful machinery for communicating with their inhabitants, above all primary schools, to spread the image and heritage of the nation” and “governments were plainly engaged in conscious and deliberate ideological engineering”.<sup>84</sup>

However, This methodology of nation-state building in the Western world was not immediately adopted by the pragmatic Chinese elite. Although China's cultural system is deeply rooted and the Zhonghuaminzu has inherited imperial traits, even some Han Chinese elites consider language to be an important part of the cultural system and a rare objective criterion for defining “us,” especially in terms of the inclusion of marginal subgroups. However, the elites of the new state had to compromise to a certain extent as the Zhonghuaminzu was not the same as the Han nation and therefore required that priority be given to strengthening the economic and political bond of the new nation while remaining as culturally tolerant as possible, at least at this unprecedented moment of crisis.

Therefore, in the borderland, on the one hand, It was conceded that a top-down push for minority education issues from the state apparatus kept functional but with a plethora of limits, especially given that education was funded by the local treasury and teachers appear to be scarce, yet it was not addressed in the agenda of state-building. As such, the limited educational resources can only partially cover compulsory education, and enrollment was not mandatory for minority students. On the other hand, Large-scale education on the ground remained to be popularized and implemented by local

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<sup>82</sup> John W. Meyer et al., “Public Education as Nation-Building in America: Enrollments and Bureaucratization in the American States, 1870-1930,” *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 591–613.

<sup>83</sup> Alberto Francesco Alesina and Bryony Reich, “Nation Building,” 2015.

<sup>84</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 91–92.

enthusiasts. As Jiegang Gu puts it, In Lintao (a town in Gansu province) all men were able to receive general education for the sake of Yang Mingtang, who spent his life's passion and wealth to set up schools.<sup>85</sup> Another case was a high school in a Hui community, founded by the son of a local warlord Ma spontaneously with sufficient self-funding. However, the problem faced by the Hui community was unwilling to accept the new style of education, and the solution was subsequently settled when the warlord then opened the boarding school to allow parents to visit. Once parents saw the spiritual well-being and life security of their children, they would stop hesitating and promote it in their hometowns, so the number of enrollment increased day by day.<sup>86</sup>

Though it was never an act of state, the private endeavor to provide education was appreciated and applauded for another reason. As a balance between religion and education, Li believes that being educated in science, although one cannot go against religious beliefs, the dogma has been judged by recognizing what is not scientific and should not follow blindly. This is why he emphasizes the necessity of education, rather than merely imposing national identity, education plays a more significant role in the secularization of religion. Indeed, nationalism initially was mostly a secular ideology associated with the general process of secularization in Western Europe, such as in the French Revolution and the secularization measures imposed by Napoleon, or with various national ideologies of the nineteenth century. Modern secularization requires the peaceful coexistence of its citizens and various religions within its territory according to the Westphalian tradition.

While the policy of cultural tolerance was permitted for border minorities, education was further popularized in the hinterland. When a unified language became widespread through education and nationwide vernacularization after May Fourth Movement, a growing number

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<sup>85</sup> Gu et al., *Xi bei kao cha ri ji*, 184.

<sup>86</sup> Gu et al., 189.



of people were capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. As Benedict Anderson argues, in this process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language field and belonged. These fellow readers “formed the embryo of the nationally imagined community”. This “print-capitalism” facilitates the construction of subjective ideas of a nation in a tangible approach.<sup>87</sup> The industry of publishing reached its peak in the Republic of China, and the fact that the travelogues of young travelers gained a great resonance from the public was indispensable to the strong promotion of the publisher from the way of “print capitalism” and the increasing nationalism as well as insecurity at that time. In addition to the positive influence of the modern Western publishing business model during the late Qing Dynasty, the rise of private publishing institutions during the Republican period can be attributed to the sprouting and development of the capitalist economy, the growth of urbanization, and other factors like the improvement of infrastructure, as well as the participation of intellectuals and the construction of libraries. During that period, more than 124,000 Chinese books were published, mainly in the social sciences and literature, especially in the categories of literature, politics, and economics, accounting for 45% of the total number of books in the social sciences and literature. In addition to books, there were more than 20,000 kinds of periodicals and 13,000 kinds of newspapers published and more than 1,800 kinds of short or suspended periodicals that existed for a short period of time. The promotion and distribution of book publishing culture relied on a large number of publishing institutions. Publishing

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<sup>87</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44–45.

institutions were concentrated in the major cities of the time, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, and Chongqing.<sup>88</sup>

A further noteworthy aspect is that the concept of travel was also redefined at the time. In an empire dominated by agriculture, the settled mode of life made mobility reluctant and unnecessary, and most of the migrations were forced by survival or passive acts caused by assignment or deportation. So the travel records in the past are mostly saturated with emotions of nostalgia and sadness, inclined to personalized expression. With the intensification of modernization, travel as a capitalist lifestyle is gradually penetrating China, changing the mindset and lifestyle of a new generation.

Meanwhile, at a time when capitalism was growing in China, the tourism industry began to flourish, and it also played an active role in promoting travel in the borderland. This spontaneous travel influenced by the previous travelogue was unconsciously involved in the construction of the country in the frontier region. In 1927, the China Travel Service was founded to advocate domestic and international travel, print and publish travel magazines, and open branches of travel agencies in major cities in China to undertake ticketing, freight, accommodation, and other arrangements. According to statistics, among the Chinese journals in modern China, there were only five titles with northwest before 1930, but more than 70 between 1931 and 1945. Even Shanghai Star Film Company made a film *To the Northwest* in 1934 to address the importance of borderland and further bring everyone's attention to the Northwest.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, the infrastructure in the northwest was too poor to fully enhance the quality of travel, for the time being, visitors had a stronger ideological level of insight

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<sup>88</sup> Qiao Zhang, "Min Guo Shi Qi Tu Shu Chu Ban Wen Hua de Tui Guang Yu Chuan Bo," *Chu Ban Guang Jiao*, 2018 (10), <https://doi.org/10.16491/j.cnki.cn45-1216/g2.2018.10.024>.

<sup>89</sup> Sung-Chiao, "Travel Writing and the Imagination of Chinese Nationhood during the 1930s: A Case Study on the Northwestern Region."

about nation and state. This does not detract from the fact that the acceptance of travel as an emerging lifestyle and mindset has amplified the voice of nation builders on a social level.

As a result, from this period on, travel became an effective way to produce a sense of nationhood along with the spread of nationalism ideology. It bridges the spatial and psychological barriers imposed by geography, allowing the citizens to have more consciousness about the land where they settle down for generations. In this light, nationalism and tourism have long been intertwined and mutually reinforcing, driven by a burgeoning publishing industry. Travel is no longer a negative personal migration, but a realistic exercise of an ideology in the spatial realm, where knowledge and ideas about the nation are expressed. This narrative, which transcends the individual representation, gives travel publicity. The most influential magazine in China *Travel Magazine* adopted a patriotic stance and devoted itself to connecting travel with nationalism. As it put in “Year's Message” in 1938, “We aim to bring out the mysteries of the most famous scenic spots from our familiar country, to examine the monuments, to detail and research the places, and to study indigenous people, making sure the readers will have a deep understanding of each place and will be inspired with national ideas. Therefore, on the surface, this is just a guide to the sights of our homeland, but what the travel magazine contributes to the readers is the expectation that everyone should take note of the facts expressed in geography and humanities to spark a sense of nationalism.” What this nationalism did was to bring the borderland minorities, along with others, into a political community. In this community, common enemies were emphasized, the joint defense was discussed, and the status of the borderlands was elevated to an unprecedented degree.

## Conclusion

As the notion of travel was reshaped during the Republican era, the expression of homesickness and personal emotions that had previously been conveyed by long-distance exile diminished, and the passive spatial migration has been transformed into exploration and construction of the nation-state. Motivated by nationalism, borderland traveling gradually became a form of political engagement. Also, the travelogues of the early twentieth century cannot simply be seen as descriptions of certain regions and places, but more as re-creations of the borderland for the specific political agenda and international landscape of the times. It reflects the imagination of the novel nation of Zhonghuaminzu, which has been constructed along the way. To a greater extent, it also stimulated their political confidence to establish their own words for the country in a practical way by spreading travelogues.

In a period of constant turmoil and the idea of “five races in one family”, ethnic minorities in the borderland are no longer the heterocultural Other, instead, they represent progress and modernity and are a part of Zhonghuaminzu. In the process of construction, nation-builders first established an economic community with modern infrastructure, identified the advantages and division of labor for border regions to participate in industrial society, and tried to accomplish the first step of nation-building in a pragmatic way from state identity, which is considered to be a reciprocal solution for ethnic reconciliation and integration after the long-term dispute.

Meanwhile, the travelers discovered cultural affiliations on the borderland. By re-affirming the merits of the Qing conquest and retracing previous Han endeavors on the borderland, they eliminated the sentiment of anti-Manchu then hatred towards other minorities which was risen by the revolutionaries for their own political demands which encumber the construction

of Zhonghuaminzu. In addition, the merits of borderland minorities were perceived by travelers as signs of progress and modernity that fit their imagination of future citizens. And this imagination, together with nationalism, created political communities.

Furthermore, unlike the process of nation-building in the West, education in borderlands has been deprioritized; rather, it was more a matter of spontaneous civil sponsorship than imposing by the state apparatus. But in the hinterland, due to the influence of the new cultural movement and the development of capitalism, the publishing industry and tourism contributed to the borderland traveling and nation-building as the political engagement of the young generation.

In general, it argues that in the process of the construction of Zhonghuaminzu, borderland travelers integrated state-building and figured out a pragmatic way to shape a nation from economic community to political community with their political imagination during the transition from empire to nation-state.

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