FORGING THE NATION THROUGH RAILS: TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF CHINESE NATIONALISM

by

DYLAN P. BRADY

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Geography
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

December 2013

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Dylan P. Brady

Title: Forging the Nation Through Rails: Transportation Infrastructure and the Emergence of Chinese Nationalism

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of Geography by:

Daniel Buck	Chairperson
Alexander B. Murphy	Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research and Innovation; Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded December 2013

© 2013 Dylan P. Brady
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (United States) License.

THESIS ABSTRACT

Dylan P. Brady

Master of Arts

Department of Geography

December 2013

Title: Forging the Nation Through Rails: Transportation Infrastructure and the Emergence of Chinese Nationalism

While nationalism remains a vital element in the production of the political and economic landscape, it is often treated as a static container for other processes or neglected altogether. Rather, it must itself be treated as a process—a nationalizing project—emerging from a constellation of often contradictory social forces. One such process of nationalization is the development of large-scale transportation infrastructure, such as railroads. These projects produce both new spheres of circulation and new understandings critical to navigating these novel environments, which together radically transform the relation between people, government, and territory.

In early twentieth century China, the complicated contest over railroad rights produced and was produced by a fractured political economic geography. Understandings of both identity and space remained fragmented, cohering only partially into a singular entity, thus demonstrating the intimate interrelation between state power, political identity, and territories both real and imagined.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Dylan P. Brady

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Geography, 2013, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Asian Studies, 2006, Whitman College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Political Economy of Chinese Nationalism
Social Impacts of the Development of Modern Transportation Infrastructure

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Geography, University of Oregon, Eugene, 2010-13

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Geography, 2010 - present

Foreign Language and Areas Studies Scholarship, University of Oregon, 2012-13

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to Professors Buck and Murphy for their patience and insightful critique at every step of this process. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Department of Geography staff, whose timely assistance was indispensible, and the US Department of Education, whose FLAS Scholarship enabled me to take my studies to China and back. I would also like to acknowledge the support and sacrifice of my wife, Ruty Wherland, without which none of this would be possible.

To Ruty, for coming with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

I. RAIL AS INVASION, RAIL AS NATION 1

II. NATION AS NATIONALIZING PROJECT 10

A New Materialist Approach to Nationalism 13

Nationalism at the Edges 17

Chinese Nationalism 30

What Is Needed Then 38

III. FORGING THE NATION THROUGH RAILS 41

Theorizing the Emergence of Nationalism 43

Infrastructure and the National Imperative 52

The Transformation of Skill 53

The Skilled Environment 61

The State and Infrastructure 63

The Impact of Railroads on the Production of Space 66

State Impact at a Slant 85

IV. THE FRACTURED GEOGRAPHIES AND IDENTITIES OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA 87

Social Histories of Rail 90

Rail and the Transformation of Chinese Society 93

New Cities, New Hinterlands 97

The Provincial State and Provincial Identity 100

Chapter Page

Shanxi.......... 105

Sichuan.......... 107

Manchuria.......... 108

An Infrastructural Lens.......... 117

V. BUILDING BEYOND THE NATION.......... 119

REFERENCES CITED.......... 126

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Schematic of Chinese rail, 1911 & 1949. 93

CHAPTER I

RAIL AS INVASION, RAIL AS NATION

When the Boxer rebellion broke out in 1900, railroads were a major target of their anger. Seen as foreign pollutions, accused of being black magic driven by human sacrifice, rail lines were destroyed by Boxer forces as a way of purifying China and incidentally, slowing the incursion of foreign armies. In 1911 the eruption of the Railway Protection movement in Sichuan, sparked by an imperial attempt to seize control of privately- and locally-owned rails (in order to pay indemnities), forced imperial forces to leave their posts in Wuchang. Shortly thereafter, revolutionaries in Wuchang seized the opening and rose up, sparking a chain of events known today as the Xinhai Revolution, culminating in the establishment of the Republic of China.

These two incidents, so closely juxtaposed, give a sense of not only the central position played by rail in the emergence of Chinese nationalism, but also its complex and shifting valence. Railroads are both an intolerable foreign incursion and also the people's inviolable right—much like nationalism itself. In the past decade Chinese nationalism has surged to the fore and has surprised many observers with its sudden and pressing political relevance, both within China and without. While the moment of its emergence is long past, it remains a vital force in China and the world, capable of dynamic changes and unexpected impacts. Yet understandings of nationalism, particularly Chinese nationalism, emphasize its structural and functional elements, leaving us with a theoretical apparatus poorly suited to understanding where it came from or what it is capable of. Examining the period when it first began to cohere into a movement is not therefore just a project of

historical interest, but can provide insight into the processes which continue to sustain and shape it today.

In this thesis I analyze the emergence of Chinese nationalism through the railroad —not merely as a symbol, but as a material force in shaping the terrain of nationalism. This approach is atypical, particularly in the context of China. Most discussions of nationalism, particularly Chinese nationalism, focus on rhetoric, ethnicity, politics, government-led education campaigns, street protests and similar aspects. While these are important moments in the formation of nationalism and particularly in giving it direction, they are, in my mind, just the tip of a very large iceberg: the unseen bulk of which is not the explicitly nationalist but rather the perceptions and understandings that emerge from the everyday life of people living in modern society. People don't identify as part of a nation because they sang some songs in elementary school: they identify as part of a nation because it is simply obvious to them, in the daily course of their lives, that it is so. The multitude of ways it is not so, the ways the nation is a far more problematic and fragmented object than it appears, does not make its appearance of cohesion any less apparent.

A great deal of the work that focuses on Chinese nationalism concentrates its attention on the overt, rhetorical manifestations of nationalism. Much of the work that isn't explicitly about nationalism tends to either assume the nation's unproblematic existence or ignore it altogether. These tendencies produce narratives of the Chinese nation that too often reduce it to an uncontrollable popular, resentful chauvinism or the cynical manipulations of a plutocratic elite, missing not only the diversity and vitality of

past and present incarnations of Chinese nationalism, but also isolate nationalism from the social context that gives it meaning.

My goal in this thesis is to sketch out a different approach, one that puts nationalism at the nexus of social, economic, and territorial change. To accomplish this task, I draw on the conceptual tools pioneered in the new materialisms scholarship. This field challenges many of the dichotomies—agency and structure; human and non-human; discursive and concrete; produced and natural—that have traditionally prevailed in the social sciences. Instead, the emphasis is in how these apparent opposites interpenetrate and mutually constitute material reality; this opens up a realm of analysis where physicality of rhetoric is as important as the social aspects of the built environment, and each is capable of acting on the other.

I focus on the built environment, and railroads in particular, because rail offers an unusually direct link between the tenuously-connected realms of state action and individual consciousness; it is intimately entangled both in vast movements of capital and state power and in the everyday experience of individuals. By producing both new kinds of territory and a popular awareness of those territories, rail transportation can be critical to creating the perception of a national territory, or geo-body: in the railways one can see the national unit being built.

Ultimately, what I am striving for is a way of looking at Chinese nationalism that acknowledges its volatile relationship with its own nation and state. I'm looking for a way of studying the development of nationalism in China that takes the long view, and isn't obscured by fluctuating trends in political rhetoric. A way of exploring the interaction between large-scale political and economic shifts of state and capital and the experience

of individuals, mediated through the construction and navigation of social space. A way that examines the shifting importance of territory and nation without granting their "self-evident" validity on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, disregarding their existence altogether. With any luck, this thesis represents the first steps on that path.

Chapter II contextualizes my project within the current literature on Chinese nationalism—not just work which explicitly takes nationalism as its object of study, but even work that examines other objects but unknowingly relies on naïve conceptions of nation and territory when constructing its field of study. Indeed, the tendency to unproblematically use nations as the "natural" containers for societies, literatures, languages, economies, states, and so on is endemic even among post-colonial area studies specialists who ought to know better.

Materialism is introduced here as a way of understanding the shortcomings of these approaches as well as directing attention towards alternative analytics. At closer examination, the production of the nation dissolves into a complex nest of whirring parts, a set of processes operating at different spatial and temporal scales. While they do come together, this union is far more happenstance and temporary than unitary models of the nation suggest. Rather than a nation, it is a nationalizing project, whose goal of nationhood is never reached but is always in the act of being produced.

The literature that focuses on the subject of Chinese nationalism also exhibits certain problematic trends. With some notable exceptions, the literature on Chinese nationalism focuses on the role of the state in founding and shaping nationalism in the past and today. The initial position of Chinese nationalism as a fierce critic of the contemporary Qing state, and the marshaling of nationalism by modern critics against the

state receives far less attention. Even when nationalism is analyzed outside of the state context and populist, heterogenous nationalisms and sub-nationalisms are included, discourse remains the crux of the analytic. To understand nationalism's emergence and continued vitality as a social force, I maintain, its discourse must be analyzed side by side with its social and economic relations; nationalism is not just a discursive phenomenon but a tangible one as well. The state's influence on nationalism is considerable, but nationalism is never entirely within the state's grasp and often manifests in ways quite orthogonal to its interests.

In Chapter III, I trace out a theoretical apparatus capable, in theory, of executing this kind of analysis. This begins with a re-examination of two prominent theories of nationalism which emphasize the relation between nationalism and the great social transformations of industrialization and modernity. Benedict Anderson emphasizes the creation of the imagined community, conceived of by the mechanism of shared language and culture enabled by print capitalism; Gellner emphasizes the transformation of social structure and work set into motion by industrialization. Placing these different mechanisms of nationalization side by side suggests the fragmentary, heterogenous nature of nationalism's tendencies towards cohesion and homogenization, and also draws attention to the role played by skill in the emergence of nationalism.

Skill mediates the relation between the worker and the means of production. Long conceptualized by Marxists as being continuously degraded under capitalism, prompted by Gellner I suggest an alternative interpretation of skill's transformation: rather than destroying skill outright capital transforms it, homogenizes it. Homogenization accomplishes the function of eliminating capital's dependence on any particular subset of

the working class, while maximizing that average level of skill maximizes the workers' efficiency as well. The line between skill and culture—as seen in the example of literacy—is always quite blurry, and in creating a homogenous but complex skill set among workers, industrialization also creates a shared culture.

This culture is not unbounded, however. The sphere of circulation the broadly-shared industrial culture creates only extends as far as that culture, and several factors conspire to limit its scope. One important factor is the influence of the built environment. As the infrastructure of the built environment is subsumed under capitalism, it is revolutionized just like any other means of production, also revolutionizing the skills which relate to its use. Particularly for large-scale infrastructure, the state plays a major role in enabling and supervising its construction and maintenance, and is often the instigator and owner of the projects. The population that lives within and depends upon this environment can only live and move about within the area they understand. Thus as the built environment becomes more similar over large spatial extents and demands more specialized knowledge to navigate, people are simultaneously freed to circulate beyond the local sphere, but are still constrained by the extent of the social environment their knowledge pertains to. As the state becomes increasingly involved in producing the environment, and the population becomes increasingly dependent on that environment, the triple imperative of nationalism—that demand for the coincidence of the national people, government, and territory—begins to emerge directly from the logic of capitalist development.

The means of transport play a particularly significant role in defining the sphere of circulation. Here I focus on the role of rail, the exemplar of industrial transport. The

technical demands of rail create strong homogenizing, standardizing, and centralizing tendencies.[1] Rail both produces new environments for people to navigate, in the form of rail carriages and train stations, and also drastically reworks the existing geography of the country. Any location accessible via the rails moves closer both temporally and perceptually, and other locations move further away. Rails create a sphere of circulation for people and commodities with far less friction than before, to the point that the distance between points begins to be forgot: commodities appear as products of the market through which they circulate, and places appear as products of the rails which carry one there. Paralleling Anderson's imagined community, rails contribute to the creation of an imagined territory.

Rail, then, is a site where the collision of state, capital and the individual is particularly abrupt: vast flows of capital and labor work to assemble a tremendous network of state-scale infrastructure, which then becomes an immediate and integral part of people's lives. Rail mediates the relation between the individual and the state in an uncommonly direct way.

In Chapter IV, I take the theory worked out above and attempt to apply it to the history of Chinese rail development in the first half of the twentieth century. The theory indicates that governmental power, regional consciousness, and rail are entangled in a mutually-constitutive ensemble, and therefore will tend to manifest on a similar scale. Rail developed in China within a complex political environment where national governments, provincial governments and imperial powers all attempted to consolidate their power by controlling rail. This led to, and resulted from, the formation a set of

1. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The railway journey: the industrialization of time and space in the 19th century (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986).

partially overlapping spheres of circulation that reworked the previous spatial structure in dramatic ways, but did not create a single national sphere.

Early twentieth century China was characterized by weak central and strong provincial or regional government; nationalist movements battled with political movements at the provincial scale to become the primary form of political engagement. At times provincial identification superseded national identity; domestic rail projects were similarly conceived, administered, and supported at the provincial level. The strong influence of foreign powers on the development of Chinese rail in the pre-War period contributed to the fracturing of China's rail network: particularly in the Northeast, where Russia and Japan invested heavily in rail construction, rail created primarily regional rather than a national sphere of circulation. This demonstrates the potential for even as homogenizing a process as rail to exert heterogenizing influences under certain conditions.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I examine the limitations of this project and indicate some further directions this strand of research might be extended. Rail is, in the end, only one of a countless number of nationalizing mechanisms, each with their own specific history and ramifications. As I have argued previously, nationalizing projects are manifold, and their many parts are only in sync some of the time. Nor are railroads a singularly fitting exemplar: rather, their state-centric and capital-intensive nature emphasizes centralized and centralizing nation-building at the expense of relatively horizontal, multi-valent processes. Indeed, even within rail difference is produced anew: access to rail is uneven economically and politically. It is uneven geographically. The centralizing logic of nationalization is powerful, as the organization of the globe attests,

but it is not monolithic. Other forms of transportation networks undoubtedly manifest different patterns, much less entirely different nationalizing mechanisms like mass education, modern militarization, or industrial work itself.

After the triumph of the Communists in 1949, rail in China plays a very different role in Chinese history. United under the control of a strong central government, rail develops rapidly into a cohesive national network; after 1978 it serves as the conduit for unprecedented population flows. This thesis does not touch on this history, though it can suggest its importance. China's rail network continues to transform to this day; its influence on political consciousness has not come to a close. Rail, and this view of nationalism, offers us a way to talk about Chinese nationalism not just as something inherited from Sun Yatsen or as a disciplinary tool methodically deployed by today's Party, but as an ongoing project, shaped but not constrained by state action, capable of change and a vital force in its own right.

This thesis makes the argument that nationalism must be studied, and studied as more than a rhetorical endeavor. Nationalism is a vital part of the larger discussion of political and economic geography, and is absolutely essential to any discussion of territoriality.

CHAPTER II

THE NATION AS NATIONALIZING PROJECT

The nation continues to be a unit of analysis that is itself under-analyzed. This is a flaw extending into the very heart of area studies: too often, the nation is either the implicit area of analysis or is elided altogether from the analytic; rarely is the object of the nation itself, or the state with which it is mutually constitutive, the focus of analysis. Those approaches that do directly address the nation grant to it too easily the story of its own homogeneity—even those critical of the idea of an eternal national essence do not doubt its current cohesion. Yet to take seriously the idea that the nation was constituted at a particular point in history must also take seriously the ongoing and incomplete nature of that project: nations are no less being created and recreated today than they were at the moment of their ascendance. The focus is typically on points of origin and boundaries; yet reproduction and internal spaces are no less in need of explanation.

A more complete approach to nationalism would avoid these pitfalls: rather than treating nationalism as a singular object, it would instead be treated as a set of distinct social and technological processes, each with its own relations with material and governmental practice. This approach would integrate sensitivity to nationalism's internal heterogeneity with an awareness of the pull of its homogenizing logic, without attributing to it a teleological force. The nation would be collectively constituted as a *nationalizing project*: an emergent phenomenon capable of generating novel forms and relations not reducible to original intentions or necessary laws of development. The nation would thus be treated as an open-ended, contingent process rather than an idealized, static object.

This sort of approach breaks not only from traditional conceptions of the nation, but with traditional conceptions of objects. The challenge is therefore as much ontological as it is theoretical: how to articulate this sort of process-oriented understanding? In order to re-conceptualize the nation as a nationalizing project, this work draws from the renewed materialist tradition. This philosophic approach offers a number of ways of thinking about contingency, non-human agency, and emergent complexity. Within a new materialist framework, all objects are ongoing processes of materialization within which human agency co-participates: this frees objects from the trap of a static reductionism, unable to change or to impact the world. Instead, the relations that compose processes such as nationalism are capable of change—even of generating entirely novel and unexpected relations.

After laying out the materialist epistemology that lies at the core of my analysis, this chapter employs that analysis to critique previous approaches to Chinese nationalism. This section is composed of two parts. The first examines several recent works on China, but not explicitly on Chinese nationalism, and the ways that the national is treated therein. While nonetheless valuable works in their own right, their failure to address the question of the nation leaves a gap in their account of modern China. Some of the works put the cohesive state narrative squarely at the center but fail to adequately address dissenting or tangential discourses and realities, while others err too far in excluding the state and its homogenizing projects from analysis. Understanding the nation requires addressing both its cohesion and its heterogeneities; without capturing both aspects, the relation between the two cannot be explained.

The second part of this essay focuses instead on the challenges faced by work that explicitly takes Chinese nationalism as its object of study. These accounts regularly take one of two approaches: either they focus on the Republican period, which emphasizes the evolution of Chinese nationalism towards a single whole, or they discussion the renaissance of Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century, typically emphasizing the role of state power. Both of these approaches emphasize the discursive, state-centric, and unitary elements of nationalism at the expense of the socio-economic, non-state, and disparate elements. While the state—or in the Chinese case, states—play a crucial role in the constitution of nationalism, it is equally important to emphasize the role that nationalism (or competing nationalisms) play in constituting the state: any theory that casts nationalism entirely as a lackey of the state has misstepped.

Some works avoid these pitfalls to some degree, but few are able to wholly integrate both the discursive and concrete aspects of nationalist development: it remains primarily a discursive object. While a few scholars grapple with popular nationalism, they do not invoke the society-wide cultural and economic shift that the theorists of nationalism such as Gellner or Anderson emphasize. Without explaining what grip nationalist rhetoric has on the masses—what it is in the lives of Chinese people that it resonates with—these accounts of nationalism can only be partial.

Nationalism remains a vital force on the global stage, and our understanding of it is far from complete. Further investigation is necessary not only for specialists in the field, but for anyone who wishes to understand today's world.

A new materialist approach to nationalism

This work turns to the materialist philosophic tradition as a means of incorporating non-discursive social and economic processes into our understanding of nationalism. Materialism takes the stubborn contingency, vitality, and unpredictability of matter as a central object of inquiry. Several strands of materialist thought have recently been put to useful work within human geography: Maria Kaika has used Haraway's notions of cyborg social/material hybridity to analyze the complex nature of municipal water supply; Meehan, Shaw and Marston have taken the object-oriented ontology of Graham Harmon to explicate the force-full potential of objects within the urban ecology.[2] While I pursue materialism from a different angle, these projects nonetheless point to the potential for materialist thinking to open new avenues of inquiry in modern critical geography. Coole and Frost, in their recent anthology, provide an overview of this approach's recent revitalization and its concerns.[3]

Discussions of materialism are difficult. As Coole and Frost point out, “there is an apparent paradox in thinking about matter: as soon as we do so, we seem to distance ourselves from it, and within the space that opens up, a host of immaterial things seems to emerge.”[4] To this one might add the inverse problem: metaphors derived from the physical (things emerging “within the space” opened up) are constitutive of the language we use to discuss “immaterial” things. Discourse and material are thus confused from the

2. Maria Kaika, City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City (New York: Routledge, 2005); Donna Jeanne Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature (New York: Routledge, 1991); Katharine Meehan, Ian Graham Ronald Shaw, and Sallie A. Marston, “Political Geographies of the Object,” Political Geography 33 (March 2013): 1–10, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2012.11.002; Graham Harman, Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphyics of Objects (Chicago: Open Court, 2002).

3. Diana H Coole and Samantha Frost, New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics (Durham [NC]; London: Duke University Press, 2010).

4. Ibid., 2.

very start. New materialist approaches do not reject this con-fusion but take it as an opening to explore the ways in which social discourse and corporeal existence are intertwined and mutually constitutive. This approach to materialism is not, therefore, an attempt to assert the dominance of some grossly-defined physical over the discursive. As Coole and Frost point out, "for critical materialists, society is simultaneously materially real and socially constructed."[5] Social constructions are also material, in the sense that they contain the same vital excess as any other object: they are not passive recipients of human agency, but capable of generating imperatives and complexities outside the intentions of the humans who compose and enact them. Nor are they free-floating, unmoored from concrete physical manifestations: social relations exist in a dialectical interpenetration with physical relations.

My understanding of materialism is strongly influenced by Marx's. In Marx's work, physical objects, such as commodities, take on social relations that are as essential to their constitution as objects as their physical relations. Their social meaning is not separable from their physical reality: a commodity is not a commodity if it has no concrete use; nor is it a commodity if it does not exist within the social relations of exchange. The social and the physical are coupled, each capable of impacting and being impacted by the other. Nationalism is similarly a hybrid physical/social object: its constitution depends on both concrete physical processes and on social discourses.

Along with coupling the physical and social, new materialisms also refuse the traditional ontological distinction between passive matter and active humans. Rather, human and non-human actors are both capable of exhibiting agency: the "monotonous

---

5. Ibid., 27.

repetition of inert matter from which humans are apart" is replaced with "active processes of materialization of which embodied humans are an integral part."[6] This opening up of the agency of non-human (or not entirely human) process has two major implications for the study of nationalism. First, it opens the question of the origin of nationalism to new influences: if processes are capable of generating novel effects beyond the intention or control of their instigators, then nationalism cannot be only understood as a result of the intentional work of nationalists (indeed—what inspired these originary thinkers?). Secondly, it opens the question of nationalism's own impact: if nationalism is itself a vital process, what novel relations is it generating? The purpose of this approach is not to displace human agency, merely to place it in the context of other forces.

New materialisms thus opens up different ways of examining how individual experience and state power are mediated. "New materialist scholarship testifies to a critical and nondogmatic reengagement with political economy, where the nature of, and relationship between, the material details of everyday life and broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures is being explored afresh."[7] Attempts to couple these disparate scales are not unique to new materialist approaches: Joe Painter, in "Prosaic geographies of stateness" emphasizes how mundane, everyday experiences are permeated with social relations of the state and create a perception of a singular state institution.[8] However, with

6. Ibid., 8.

7. Ibid., 7.

8. Joe Painter, "Prosaic Geographies of Stateness," Political Geography 25, no. 7 (September 2006): 752–774, doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.07.004. Beyond the obvious substitution of nation for state, my project is differs in making a distinction between conceptions of a singular nation, and a singular conception of nation: simply because a nation (or state) is conceptualized as unitary does not mean that everyone conceives the same unitary object. Secondly, I give more weight to the reality of the nation-state than Painter: for all its heterogeneities of practice and conception, it does form a relatively dense nucleus around which these conceptions circulate. The unity of the state does have a real, though not an ideal, existence.

its singular understanding of social and physical, new materialisms offers a unique perspective on the problem. The capacity to clearly conceptualize the relation between extremes of political scale—the individual and the state—is of particular importance to the study of nationalism.

One aspect of this approach is the increased attention within new materialist ontology on the body. “For new materialists, no adequate political theory can ignore the importance of bodies in situating empirical actors within a material environment of nature, other bodies, and the socioeconomic structures that dictate where and how they find sustenance, satisfy their desires, or obtain the resources necessary for participating in political life.”[9] The processes of acculturation, both pragmatic and ideological, by which people come to understand themselves as members of a nation (or not) are deeply entangled with corporeality. By collapsing distinctions between discursive and physical objects, a materialist approach is able to put the state and the individual in remarkable proximity.

A materialist approach thus offers a concrete set of approaches to rethink the nation as a nationalizing project. It is a method of analysis which can span the gap between the individual and the state, that can conceptualize the material as a simultaneously discursively social and concretely physical reality. This approach can revitalize the question of nationalism's emergence, examining the various processes of nationalization that collectively constitute the nationalizing project as both discursive and physical processes, capable of generating homogenizing effects at one level and heterogeneity at another. Nationalism itself can be understood as a vital object, constantly

9. Coole and Frost, New Materialisms, 19.

in the process of re-creating itself, though never in quite the same way, and thus capable of unanticipated movement.

Yet the nation is rarely approached from this perspective. Instead, the nation is treated as a static container and otherwise ignored; it is treated as internally coherent and internal variation is waved away; or it is denied any relevance altogether. Emphasis is placed on the rhetoric of nationalism and the direction of politicians and thinkers to the exclusion of other social processes. In order to fully characterize the gaps left by previous approaches to nation, I turn several recent works that address Chinese nationalism directly and implicitly.

Nationalism at the edges

The question of nationalism continues to haunt area studies, even in works that do not directly address it. Many variations of area studies take the national form as their subject, yet when its boundaries determine the field of study, the nation-state's legitimacy is often taken for granted rather than entering the analysis as a question needing an answer. Alternately, some projects deliberately cut across national boundaries, making precisely that which falls outside state control the object of analysis. Even for studies which ostensibly avoid the nation-state however, the presence of those boundaries remains a constitutive condition that must be addressed. This section focuses on four recent works on Chinese subjects, two which take the nation as the field of study without ever asking why, and two whose avoidance of the question of national cohesion leaves startling lacunae in their otherwise insightful analyses. I argue that these two approaches must be synthesized, and that it is the relation between the nation-state's homogenizing

project and the heterogenous reality (before, outside, and within the nation) that must be the center of analysis. How does the nation-state produce and reproduce itself against and within the non-state, the non-national? Research that fails to address this can only produce a partial view of its subject, even if that subject has only a distant relation with the nation.

One example of this is Haiyan Lee's *Revolution of the Heart*.[10] Lee's book explores the production of new narratives concerning sentiment, or love, in the first half of the twentieth century. Lee's account is built around three “structures of feeling,” the term Lee uses for loosely-conceived discourses around the subject of love. The three structures—Confucian, enlightenment, and revolutionary—have a history, but are not a chronological progression, Lee stresses. Nor is each discourse conceptualized as a singular entity: each structure of feeling has its margins, full of heretics and critics. Nor are they entirely distinct: Lee pays close attention to the spaces where the structures mingle and interact, their attempted reconciliations and overt attacks.

Of the three structures, only one can make a strong claim on the label “native.” The Confucian cult of sentiment, developing throughout the Qing dynasty, was itself an initially marginal critique of Confucian conceptions of emotion. Rebelling against a traditional emphasis on performative emotion, the cult of sentiment argued for the relevance of affective emotion, albeit still within the Confucian moral framework. The other two structures, however, Lee argues are heavily inflected by the influence of the European modern. The enlightenment view of love, as it was produced in Chinese literature, was a critique of and a rebellion against the oppression of Confucian practice;

10. Haiyan Lee, Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007).

unlike the Qing cult of sentiment, the critique was an existential attack, not an attempt at reform. Conceptualizing the individual in terms of a psychosexual subjectivity, free love became the purpose and the means of Confucianism's overthrow.

It is with the third structure, dominant in the thirties and forties, that the affective qualities of love and the affective qualities of nationalism become most closely entangled. The revolutionary structure of feeling paired romance, in variety of ways, with revolutionary fervor: sometimes as a synecdoche, sometimes as a supplement, and sometimes as an antagonist. These conceptions owed as much to foreign influences as earlier, individualistic “enlightenment” narratives, though the process of adaptation to the Chinese context makes characterizing them as imported ideals difficult. Here, the material from which the national culture was constructed was located not in China's past but in the foreign present.

As sensitive as Lee is to the heterogeneity of the portrayals of love in China in the early nineteen-hundreds, her perception does not extend to every aspect of her project. While the variations within every structure abound, presenting a seemingly endless set of permutations, as one steps back the discourse under examination seems more and more tightly bounded. Lee's conception of “the modern” serves as one entry point for critique: the term is used as a universal referent with a fixed and singular meaning. While the modern is applied in a multitude of different ways by Chinese writers, there is no sense that it might have multiple valences even before it reaches China's shores. Another telling gap in Lee's account of love in China is a lack of attention to its scope. Lee operates from a literary vantage, expressing the views of a variety of writers. The possibility that the views of these writers might not be representative of China as a whole remains

unaddressed: despite the fact that these writers are overwhelmingly urban, overwhelmingly upper-class, and by definition extremely literate. What of the rural, the poor, the illiterate? There is a tremendous slippage in Lee's work between her actual area of study—a narrow group of elites located primarily in Shanghai and Beijing—and the area of study that she claims—all of China.

This, then is another example of the nation assumed, rather than interrogated, as the field of study. Lee's conception of China does not enter into her analysis of it: it is an object with pre-determined boundaries whose content is being investigated, rather than an object whose content is intimately involved in its self-production. This is particularly troubling in a study which is directly concerned with the period of time during which the boundaries of the field of study are being furiously debated and which is connected, in the form of the revolutionary structure of feeling, with efforts to constitute the field of study. Without an acknowledgement and consideration of this problematic, Lee's project cannot help but misrepresent the object of its study, to speak for a singular China while only addressing a fraction of it.

A work somewhat more attentive to the matter of nation, Paul Cohen's *Speaking to History*, follows the continual and varied deployment of an ancient Chinese story throughout the twentieth century. The story of King Goujian served as a symbol for the Kuomintang's struggle against Japanese and European imperialism, and then after the retreat to Taiwan, their struggle against the People's Republic. On the mainland, it was deployed by intellectuals first to valorize the CCP and then later as a form of underhanded critique; most recently it has again shifted valences and has become a model for individual, rather than national, perseverance.

Cohen's impetus for writing the book, he explains, was in discovering the story for the first time after decades of studying China—yet also discovering that the story was almost universally known among his Chinese friends and colleagues. Many of them considered learning the story one of the foundational moments of their growing national consciousness.[11] Cohen argues that growing up conversant with this story—hearing it taught in school, transmitted through the media, shared within the family—is a surprisingly universal and important element of Chinese culture as it is understood by insiders. This does not mean that the story had a singular meaning within the Chinese cultural context; indeed Cohen stresses the variety of ways the story was used, often contradicting and critiquing each other. Rather, the story was a shared medium, creating a culturally-delimited arena of debate.[12]

There is, however, in this account a certain tension. The story is an ancient one, going back to the Spring and Autumn period. Yet the story was deployed, in the cases the book discusses, in service of a nation-state that was in the late nineteenth century still in the process of being initially imagined. The mechanisms by which Goujian's story was spread, including state-run schools, newspaper advertisements, radio plays, and CCP-sponsored theatre troops, were overwhelmingly institutions developed in China only in modern times. To what extent, then, is the emergence and constant reworking of the Goujian story something happening within a pre-existing Chinese cultural sphere, and to what extent was its spread—and the development of the mechanisms of its spread—the very process of the constitution of that cultural sphere?

11. Paul A Cohen, Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-Century China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 231.

12. Ibid., 169.

One of the most persistent problems faced by early Chinese nationalists was instilling, or awakening, a sense of Chinese-ness among the populace at large. This is not uncommon—a similar challenge faces most nascent nationalist movements. Cohen shows that the story of Goujian was self-consciously promoted as a way to do this; specifically, it was an example of awakening the Chinese people to their national humiliation.[13] Yet if the Chinese populace failed to feel the shame of their ongoing national humiliation—a humiliation keenly felt by their nationalist intellectuals—it seems likely that it was the concept of nation that failed to resonate, not the concept of humiliation. The story of Goujian, then, isn't just a window into the nature and range of the Chinese national culture, but is an active, productive element of that national culture. They do not "bind [pre-existing] national communities together in the present," but rather in binding *produce* those communities.[14]

This may seem like a subtle distinction. Yet it makes a profound difference in how the nation is imagined: rather than a pre-determined, static object in which certain people exist and certain elements appear, the actions of the people within the nation and their choices about what elements to produce and reproduce becomes an active, ongoing set of processes. Even characteristics like *what are the boundaries of this object* are being actively produced. The apparently singular nation is opened and a tangle of moving parts is exposed for analysis. It becomes possible to imagine the nation as being produced not only with stories from before the nation, such as Goujian's, but also with narratives from outside the nation as well.

13. Ibid., 39.

14. Ibid., 240.

Both Lee and Cohen are exploring an aspect of Chinese culture, attempting to represent the reality of Chinese-ness. Yet, by treating the existence of the nation as a given, they both miss one of the most essential questions that must be asked about Chinese culture: how did it come to exist as any kind of coherent object at all? What are the processes by which that boundary was produced, and what are the ongoing processes that continue to produce Chinese culture as a coherent whole? Without asking these questions, it is impossible to explain, or in a profound way to even think about, their inverse: what are the ways in which Chinese culture is not a coherent whole? What are the ways in which Chinese culture is not reproduced? What, in other words, lies in the periphery of the Chinese nation, both internal and external? The failure to grapple with the nation as the natural and presumptive "container of societies" remains prevalent, hindering our ability to see the nation's messy margins and fractured internal geography.[15]

This failure has driven some scholars to adopt a radically opposite approach: to set aside entirely the concept of a unitary and homogenous object in order to foreground the fragmentary and heterogenous margins. This is a space characterized by a flat ontology: power structures emerge and dissipate rapidly, a constellation of different processes constantly in flux. Attention is paid to transformation and difference, rather than stability and sameness. By doing so, scholars find a very different reality than the ordered, often teleological structures typically used to explain the world—more agency is attributed to both individuals and material reality than in state-centric, structure-emphasizing approaches.

15. John Agnew, "The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory," Review of International Political Economy 1, no. 1 (April 1, 1994): 53–80, doi:10.2307/4177090; John Agnew, "Still Trapped in Territory?," Geopolitics 15, no. 4 (2010): 779–784, doi:10.1080/14650041003717558. In the latter, Agnew emphasizes the role of the national in conceptions of state-as-container.

One, perhaps extreme example of a research project warped by its unwillingness to address the nation-state's role is Mei Zhan's *Other-Worldly: Making Chinese Medicine Through Transnational Frames*.[16] In this book Zhan traces the set of interactions between a diverse set of practitioners connected in a network spanning Shanghai and the Bay Area and how their practice serves to “world” traditional Chinese medicine. By the process of “worlding,” Zhan does not mean the globalization of traditional Chinese medicine: that implies that there is an extent object that is being distributed on an increasing scale. Zhan, however, is interested in the way in which traditional Chinese medicine is made *through* this process of worlding—traditional Chinese medicine is in Zhan's conception constituted by the specific encounters through which it is enacted. Thus, Zhan's understanding of traditional Chinese medicine allows for (insists upon) a substantial amount of internal discontinuity and heterogeneity, as well as continual flux and evolution.

Zhan's approach emerges in close relation to her research topic. As Zhan shows, the worlding of Chinese medicine is taking place via a set of processes that do no easily fit into any neat analytical boxes. The process is stubbornly trans-local, emerging out of a flow of people and ideas between nexuses located in different countries. Nor does the practice itself admit to any easy generalizations: the relation between biomedicine and traditional Chinese medicine is hotly contested from both within and without, seen as both a corrupting influence and a source of validation. Traditional Chinese medicine thus provokes interesting questions about a number of deeply entrenched binaries: East versus

---

16. Mei Zhan, Other-Worldly Making Chinese Medicine through Transnational Frames (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), http://site.ebrary.com/id/10350247.

West, tradition versus modernity, science versus art. The present moment is without doubt a moment of great disruption and flux in the field of traditional Chinese medicine.

Yet, in analyzing this moment, Zhan fails to examine with sufficient depth other moments in the history of Chinese medicine where the role of powerful structures, often in the form of states and nation-building projects, shaped Chinese medicine in a very different way—a legacy that continues to inform it today. This can be seen—as can Zhan's preference to minimize the institutional element of traditional Chinese medicine—in her decision not to use the acronym "TCM" in her book. Her rationale is that TCM implies the particular form of Chinese medicine that was constituted and promulgated by the CCP in the post-WWII period. Yet this institutionalized lump in Zhan's effervescent worlding is not so easily ignored: the very sites in which she performed her ethnography owe their very existence to this legacy.

To focus on the state-driven element of the institutionalization and standardization of Chinese medicine is perhaps to err again too far to the other side. More important, arguably, is the drive towards institutionalization and standardization that originates with the field of flux and dislocation where Zhan begins. One place where this might be seen is in the story of the founding of the first colleges of Chinese medicine in Shanghai, referred to as *laosanxiao*. Zhan mentions that these schools were founded as part of a nationalistic wave of protest against the growing presence of Western biomedicine: a self-institutionalization, consciously appropriating the norms of its rival. The resonance between this and more explicitly state-building nationalizing projects is striking, despite the difference in scope and scale.

Nor is the American side of traditional Chinese medicine free of institutionalizing and standardizing processes: American schools, insurance companies, governments and even biomedical practitioners are all engaged in creating standards for Chinese medicine. Zhan's attention to the subtleties of the creation and recreation of traditional Chinese medicine is rewarding: she uncovers open-ended change where others would see only teleological, uni-directional development. Yet despite its lack of teleology, the development of Chinese medicine does evidence the consolidation of certain structures that do not stop being recreated, do tend to recreate something very like themselves. These self-reproducing objects also demands attention. While the disruptions and dislocations within the complex networks of traditional Chinese medicine are manifold, they are only meaningful in the context of coherence and locatedness. In focusing on these elements to the exclusion of the self-ordering and structuring processes, Zhan can only create a partial view of the terrain.

Jing Tsu's *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora* is an example of an approach emphasizing the margins of the national unit. Tsu's aim is to uncover the complicated and contentious process by which the modern Chinese language emerged in the form it has today: standardized around a single pronunciation, written in the scripts that it is written in, spoken by the population it is spoken by. To do this Tsu radically questions the concepts of "mother tongue" and "native speaker," denaturalizing the assumption that language is something "each speaking subject ... come[s] already armed with."[17] Tsu's research shows that the production of modern Chinese and modern Chinese speakers was a process of mutual production throughout the modern Chinese history; a historical

17. Jing Tsu, Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3.

pattern of literacy and oral fluency had to undergo a massive, contentious re-constitution in order to become what we refer to as Mandarin today.

The period Tsu begins in is the same late Qing, early Republican period that Lee and Cohen begin with, though her book continues into the modern era, tracing the persistently marginal participants in Chinese nativity. Tsu's focus is not the history of how the modern Chinese language came together—rather, it is the story of how it did not. What she finds in this early period is a wide range of mutually exclusive and much contested proposals for how to standardize Chinese, and for whom. The central question, echoed in Tsu's title, is the contradiction between orthography and pronunciation: while orthography (in the form of classical Chinese) was widely but shallowly dispersed, pronunciation varied widely even within dialect clusters, much less between mutually unintelligible linguistic families. Tsu pays close attention to the influences these seemingly insignificant but stubbornly material factors had on the development of modern Chinese.

Tsu's field for this project is explicitly not the Chinese state: rather, it is the “Chinese-speaking world,” a field encompassing multiple state and trans-state populations. Tsu's term “literary governance,” she stresses, is not meant to imply top-down control, but a horizontal power structure of multiple competing and cooperating alliances. One recurring theme of Tsu's work is the multiple scales on which linguistic identities are negotiated; often emphasizing similarity within to assert difference without. Here also Tsu pushes back against traditional state-based histories.

Yet Tsu errs too far in the other direction. In underplaying state power as a force —a powerful force—in the formation of the Chinese national language, Tsu produces a

distorted image of literary governance as it is and was practiced within the Chinese national sphere. One example is found in her treatment of Malaysian Chinese writing, her ultimate example of literature beyond the fold of the nation-state. Tsu analyzes at length the double marginalization such writers face when writing in Mandarin—yet little depth is given to the various projects that created the educational system in which these writers were "nativized" into that language. Tsu mentions only briefly the Guomindang-sponsored schools that taught modern Chinese to Malaysians before the Anti-Japanese War, and doesn't speak at all about the powerful Chinese lobby that keeps Chinese language education alive in Malaysia.[18]

Indeed, one question that Tsu's book does not even mention is that of why the drive to standardize a spoken and written Chinese language arose. Outside of the literate elite indoctrinated into classical Chinese, the diversity of Chinese dialects had presumably been only growing up until the late nineteenth century. Why the sudden reversal? As limited as the success of standardization has been in many ways, as many margins as it has created and sub-national dialects it has failed to assimilate, the sheer fact of the construction and subsequent dominance of a standardized Chinese remains. This is not a reality that Tsu's multi-polar, constantly negotiated literary governance can easily articulate.

In the cases analyzed above, we have seen how different approaches to the questions of nation and structure emphasize different elements of the field, foregrounding either processes of cohesion or of disruption. While Lee's analysis is acutely sensitive to the subtle variations and imbrications within early twentieth century Chinese literature,

18. Alan Collins, "Chinese Educationalists in Malaysia: Defenders of Chinese Identity," Asian Survey 46, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 298–318, doi:10.1525/as.2006.46.2.298.

she fails to critically address the question of what binds that literature into a singular whole and what lies at the margins, politically and intellectually, of that whole. She thus misses the slippage that occurs when Chinese literatures of love are substituted for Chinese understandings of love. Cohen's focus on the recurring use of a single narrative thread can fill an internally complex but self-referential cultural field with touchstone concepts intuitive to insiders but inaccessible to outsiders. However, his assumption that the field—the Chinese nation—pre-dates and exists outside of the recurrent narratives and touchstones within it blinds him to the process in which the field is actively constituted by the narrative's recurring deployment, not merely operating within it. In both of these projects the question of structure is treated as an assumption, an organizing principle within which the project may be executed rather than as a problematic the project must address.

Zhan and Tsu, in contrast, emphasize the processes that are not manifest exercises of hegemony, that do not lend themselves to centralization and institutionalization. Zhan's analysis of traditional Chinese medicine captures the effervescent, disruptive transformation that dominates its present but addresses neither the powerful pull of institutionalization that characterized its past nor the processes of standardization that form an undercurrent within it today. Tsu's approach to the constitution of the Chinese national language is focused on the excesses that fall outside, prior, or are suppressed within the standardizing process. Yet in shining light on the periphery, the vast swathe of hegemonic space is cast into shadow; the structure-building processes within language, and the shifting balance between structure and chaos, remain outside the analytic. Both concentrate on the active process of their object's constitution, emphasizing the partial,

contingent nature of its existence. Yet at the same time they fail to address the emergent processes by which these diverse, chaotic entanglements of disparate elements are constituted into fields; that there are processes which dominate and exert hegemonic, structural influence on the world.

It seems that scholars take two approaches to the question of the nation-state: either they work within the structure, describing the processes that occur within its confines but without addressing how it came to be so or why it continues to be so; or they emphasize the *making-through*, the active constitution of the national, but do not fully confront the efficacious structuring power these processes have. Each of these frameworks captures accurately one aspect of reality at the expense of the other. To understand nationalism, we need a framework that can capture both aspects simultaneously, understanding each in the context of the other.

This is not, sadly, a common quality among the approaches to the study of Chinese nationalism. Indeed, Chinese nationalism is a subject which has only belatedly become a major area of research within and outside of China: the projects that balance recognition of the coherence and multiplicity of nationalism in China are few and far between.

Chinese nationalism

Nationalism presents itself as an ontological problem to scholarly projects that assume either its "fundamental" validity or its illusory superficiality. For most scholars of nationalism, however, the problem is less abstract: the emergence—and therefore dynamic movement—of nationalism is the central question. Instead, it is the nature of

that dynamism that presents the challenge: when was nationalism constituted, how, and by whom? Consistently, accounts of Chinese nationalism provide rather simplistic accounts of when nationalism emerges and whose actions brought it forth. One factor in this is a poor integration with theories of nationalism outside of China. Two narratives, emphasizing different time periods but similar themes, occupy the bulk of the writings on Chinese nationalism. The first of these is the modern narrative, centered around the emergence of nationalism leading up to the Republican period under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, Liang Qichao, and other luminaries. Here the anti-imperial impulse is foregrounded and the role of an intellectual vanguard is valorized: the history of this period emphasizes the role played by various intellectuals in hashing out the core values of Chinese nationalism and its gradual coalescence into a singular national consciousness. Some writers have challenged this narrative, calling attention to the variety of nationalist discourses erased post facto to create the appearance of a linear development towards a unified China. Even these accounts, however, do not accord the era's vast socio-economic changes a role in changing consciousnesses.

The second, contemporary narrative fast-forwards past the Maoist era straight to the opening of China. Here the CCP government plays the active role, propagating anew the narrative of humiliation and inculcating a new generation into a propagandistic belief in the nation's dependence on the state. Nationalism is here often modeled as an apparatus of state control—one, perhaps, on the verge of slipping the CCP's grip, but still considered primarily as a political discourse.

What these narratives share is a discursive perspective: nationalism emerges as a result of the action and rhetoric of intellectuals and great leaders, literati and agitators.

Almost entirely absent is a conception of nationalism as an emergent tendency of socio-economic change; largely absent is nationalism as anti-state populist protest. Nationalism is understood as consisting primarily of intentional action on the part of powerful institutions or actors, and is analyzed primarily as a discursive object; nationalism's relation to material processes such as the development of mass media, popular education, mass transport, or industrial employment are only occasionally and unsystematically addressed.

These omissions become startling lacunae when these accounts of Chinese nationalism are compared with those by scholars of nationalism in the abstract. These accounts, heavily influenced by European nationalisms, emphasize the importance of the societal shifts resulting from industrialization in the emergence of nationalism. Rather than confining the analysis to the intellectual and popular media in which nationalism explicitly appears, this approach emphasizes the degree to which ideological and political currents are interconnected with every aspect of social organization, from educational institutions, modes of transport, and daily work. Nationalist discourse, in this view, is one aspect of a vast social transformation and cannot be understood apart from it; overt nationalist rhetoric is its most obvious manifestation, not its whole.

Chinese nationalism, it is generally accepted, had its origin in the late Qing under the threat and influence of foreign imperialism. Though there has been some debate whether anti-Manchu sentiments—reflected in the actions of literati and secret societies—evidences a nationalism of sorts, the general consensus has been negative.[19] While

19. Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Lucian W. Pye, “How China’s Nationalism Was Shanghaied,” The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs no. 29 (January 1, 1993): 107–133, doi:10.2307/2949954.

there is an idea of Chinese-ness at stake in this earlier period, it is reflective of a cultural and civilizational chauvinism rather than a nationalist imperative. Nationalism has therefore been largely understood in the Chinese context as at least initially a foreign import, though in its domestic development it took many unique turns. This foreign influence can be seen in the personal histories of many of China's early nationalists: Liang Qichao, known for introducing the concept of *minzu*, or nation, into Chinese, studied western ideologies and travelled in Canada, the United States, and Australia.[20] Sun Yat-sen studied in Hawai'i as a child, as well as traveling widely throughout his life; an entire generation of Chinese students were sent abroad to study in Japan, the US, and Europe during the early 19th century.

As Prasenjit Duara documents, conceptions of nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century were unusually diverse.[21] Several problematics animated early debates about Chinese nationalism: what was the proper scope of Chinese nationalism, i.e. did it include ethnic minorities (in particular the Manchu) or only the Han? What was the proper form of government for China: monarchy, republicanism, or federalism? Was nationalism already evident in among the Chinese, and if so, where? While it would be a dangerous mischaracterization to portray modern Chinese nationalism—on indeed any nationalism—as a homogenous, coherent whole, the debate over early Chinese nationalisms encompassed a menagerie of perspectives that were incompatible to their cores. It is difficult to find any point of universal agreement, other than a) China exists and b) it is under attack. This period was evidently a crucial one for the formation of

20. Suisheng Zhao, "Nationalism's Double Edge," The Wilson Quarterly (1976-) 29, no. 4 (2005): 76–82.

21. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation.

political identities.[22] The newly formed identities did not always correspond, however: not even the primacy of Chinese identity over provincial identity was certain.[23] However, even Duara confines his analysis to the rhetoric, rarely turning to the rapidly-shifting material conditions under which these debates were taking place.

The richness of these elite debates has led many writers to focus their attention on them, and to analyze the actions of the populace primarily in terms of whether or not and which rhetoric succeeded in mobilizing them.[24] The apathy and general lack of national consciousness among the peasantry was posed as a central challenge of Chinese politics by elite nationalists.[25] Counter-intuitively, some turned to tradition to awaken them: Sun Yat-sen for a time considered the anti-Manchu avowals of the secret societies, as attenuated as they had become by the late Qing, a prototype for ethno-nationalism. This avenue ultimately proved fruitless, and Sun abandoned his attempt to enlist the societies in his movement.[26]

Anti-imperialism proved a more fertile ground for the instilling of national zeal. Zhao argues that it was precisely the ability of the Communists to mobilize a mass nationalism, in the form of anti-Japanese struggle, that allowed them to ultimately win out against the KMT.[27] While Mao Zedong's leadership is often understood within the

22. James Hugh Carter, Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Rana Mitter, The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

23. Wei Liu, "Wan Qing 'sheng' yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian [晚清'省'意识的变化与社会变迁]," Shixue Yuekan 史学月刊 no. 05 (1999): 59–65.

24. Mary Backus Rankin, "Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics: Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing," Modern China 28, no. 3 (2002): 315–361.

25. Cohen, Speaking to History.

26. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation.

27. Suisheng Zhao, A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

context of Marxist-Leninist ideology, for Mao communism was always firmly ensconced in nationalism. Particularly prior to Communist victory in 1949, raising national consciousness regularly took precedence over raising class consciousness.[28] While Chiang Kai-Shek prioritized elimination of the CCP over fighting the Japanese, the CCP advocated a united front and executed a rural land reform that simultaneously bought loyalty from an enriched poor and middle-class peasantry and developed social institutions enabling those peasants to mobilize in support of the CCP. However, the agency of the peasantry in shaping that nationalism, and the material effects of the social changes wrought by mass mobilization are rarely central to the discussion: it remains Mao's story.

Many, if not all, accounts of Chinese nationalism minimize or leave out entirely the period of Mao's rule.[29] This lack of interest has several possible explanations. Among foreign China specialists, the Chinese case was too particular, both in the nature of its nationalism and of its communism, to be straightforwardly compared to other countries: thus China escaped the modernization/nationalization analytic that dominated much of area studies.[30] Within China, a similar lack of attention held, perhaps due to the internal emphasis on communist ideology. Only after 1980 did Chinese language work on Chinese nationalism begin to appear.[31]

---

28. L Ladany, The Communist Party of China and Marxism, 1921-1985: A Self Portrait (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1988).

29. Maria Hsia Chang, Return of the Dragon: China's Wounded Nationalism (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001); Peter Hays Gries, China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Zhao, A Nation-State by Construction.

30. Pye, "How China's Nationalism Was Shanghaied."

31. Houli Luo, "Cong sixiang shi guanjiao kan jindai Zhongguo minzu zhuyi [从思想史视角看近代中国民族主义]," Strategy and Management 战略与管理 no. 01 (1998): 103–110.

Several trends have thrust nationalism back into the limelight post-1978: the government began the Patriotic Education Campaign in the early nineties, promulgating a new primary school curriculum designed to instill patriotism in Chinese youth.[32] In the mid-nineties, the book *China Can Say No* became a massive bestseller in the PRC arguing a strongly nationalistic stance.[33] Bridging popular and state-led nationalisms, popular protests against Japan went, over the course of the nineties and the oughts, from government-initiated to spreading beyond the government's control. There is no doubt that nationalism is playing a larger role in Chinese domestic and international politics; the only question is why.

The dominant narrative centers on an "instrumental" view of nationalism: "...nationalist consciousness is seen as a consequence of the historical context in which some interests or political forces successfully imagined a political community or national history and persuaded people of artificially shared origins that they were indeed one people: a nation."[34] Two elements deserve emphasis here: firstly, in this view nationalism is driven by the self-interest of an elite; secondly, it is driven primarily via suasion and rhetoric. This is the view mostly commonly found outside of academic writings, and quite often within it; the "resurgence" of Chinese nationalism is a self-conscious project of legitimation by the CCP to fill the gap left by the collapse of communist idealism.[35] In

32. William A. Callahan, "History, Identity, and Security: Producing and Consuming Nationalism in China," Critical Asian Studies 38, no. 2 (June 2006): 179–208, doi:10.1080/14672710600671087; Zheng Wang, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China," International Studies Quarterly 52, no. 4 (2008): 783–806.

33. Gries, China's New Nationalism.

34. Zhao, A Nation-State by Construction.

35. Kjeld Brødsgaard and David Strand, eds., Reconstructing Twentieth-Century China : State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Chang, Return of the Dragon; Wang, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory."

this discourse, the Chinese citizens enacting the nationalism are no more than “puppets in the hands of the Communist elite.”[36] Nationalism is reduced to a function of state power.[37]

Less prominent, though influential, narratives argue a more “authentic” origin for popular Chinese nationalism; the stirrings of democracy in the eyes of some and the beginnings of a dangerous ethnocentrism for others. Gries argues that the balance of power, once tipped firmly in favor of the state, has gradually shifted towards the popular nationalists, requiring delicate negotiations between state and popular demands. Regardless of what position they take on mass nationalism, however, few of these writers look beyond nationalism's discourse about itself: it remains a rhetorical object.

Throughout the period of its existence, Chinese nationalism has primarily been understood in terms of state-led development of nationalist consciousness, usually through the mechanism of overtly nationalist rhetoric. Even when the role of popular nationalism has been addressed, the analysis has still focused on rhetoric and self-depictions of overt nationalism. This focus on the rhetoric of nationalism has left a large hole in the historiography of Chinese nationalism; i.e. the period between 1949 and 1978, when Maoist thought dominated the state rhetoric in China as well as the analysis of foreign observers. Lack of material, therefore, led to a dearth of analysis.

However, it only makes sense to think of the Maoist period as a gap in the development of Chinese nationalism if one assumes that ideologically-driven state action is the only process necessary for or capable of producing nationalism. In contrast, theories of nationalization derived from the non-Chinese experience often include social

36. Gries, China’s New Nationalism.

37. John Fitzgerald, “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs no. 33 (January 1, 1995): 75–104, doi:10.2307/2950089.

processes outside the realm of state propaganda, relating to changes in the fabric of everyday life, that nonetheless play a significant role in the emergence of nationalism. Rather than focusing on the deliberate inculcation of nationalism, they highlight the inadvertent and accidental ways that the exercise of state power and the subsumption of society under capital can create the conditions for the emergence of nationalism.

The necessity for rethinking the state-nation relation becomes clear when contrasting the state's role in the early 20th century and its role in the late 20th. The state's impact in the formation of these early nationalisms is clearly significant, though more akin to the role of a grain of sand in the formation of a pearl than that of a puppet-master. Both foreign powers and the Qing were foils against which nationalists rose, not their keepers. This is not an unusual situation for nationalism; indeed it is far easier to find examples of nationalism emerging against the state than in support of it. It does pose a problem for those who view Chinese nationalism primarily as a tool of the state.

The state's impacts on nationalism are not reducible to propaganda or manipulation—it works through the creation of an economic and cultural territory as much as through rhetoric. Yet in order to capture the manifold ways state power shapes nationalism, the analytic must be capable of articulating the impacts economic policy, infrastructural development, education, and other state projects can have on nationalism —even when they are orthogonal to the state's explicit aims.

What is needed then

To date, the study of Chinese nationalism has centered analysis around the evolving discourse of Chinese nationalism, the rhetoric of nationalists, and the direct and

explicit use of state power to instill nationalism. While these are important processes within the nationalizing project, they are only a partial view of nationalism.

What is needed is an approach that recognizes the hegemonic aspirations and capabilities of the nation-state but is equally aware of the limits of those; that is attentive to the lacunae in state power and the heterogeneity of national identity, but does not elide the power that institutionalization can bring to bear. What is needed is an approach that conceptualizes structure not as a negation of individual agency, but as a form through which agency is expressed. What is needed is an approach that recognizes the complex composite that is "the nation" without ignoring that the nation is for all that no less an object—if for no other reason than that so many see it as such.

In order to accomplish this balancing act, the nation must be simultaneously understood as a range of disparate processes moving often at cross-purposes, distributed unevenly over space; yet also as operating under a not-coherent-but-*cohering* logic; a system shaped by but not solely composed of self-reinforcing cycles; a structure in which the state dominates but does not determine.

A materialist ontology allows the study of nationalism to break out of a discursive, intentional model of nation-building, and incorporate a wider variety of processes and influences. How does our understanding of nationalist development, its advances and setbacks, change if rather than tracing rhetoric, we examine changes in the social organization of work under industrialization, or the character of mobility? By tracing the material social and technological processes by which nationalism is produced, a balance can be maintained between the particularities and heterogeneities of the different processes while still understanding their function within the larger,

homogenizing process. It is the recognition of the existence of a nationalizing project, rather than the existence of a nation.

In the chapter that follows, the details of this analytical method will be worked out in greater depth. This begins with a close study of the theories about the social impacts behind nationalism's emergence and the transformation of skill that accompanies industrialization. The distribution of these skills and their connection to the built environment is crucial to producing the territorial element of the nationalist imperative. Ultimately these changes involve the state as well, uniting the state, the territory, and the people in the form of nationalism. Railroads are considered as an example of the simultaneously physical and discursive materiality that constitutes the nation both as an ideal, as a people, and as a specific territory.

CHAPTER III

FORGING THE NATION THROUGH RAILS

The need for a theory-driven re-engagement with Chinese nationalism is clear. Recovering from a history of neglect, the literature on Chinese nationalism remains superficial in its focus on state action and nationalist rhetoric, the most obvious elements of nationalism rather than the most central. This misdirected attention distorts even projects that do not take nationalism as their core concern. Articulating a theoretical approach to Chinese nationalism that encompasses both state and popular action, both overt and subtle processes of nationalization, serves not only China specialists, but scholars of nationalism at large. China has been excluded from general theories of nationalism due to the particularity of the case it presents; yet all nationalism are ultimately particular, and the value of understanding the nationalizing project within China is self-evident.

Generalized models of nationalism tend to depict it as a suite of mutually-reinforcing processes more or less centered around the changes of the industrial revolution. While some theorists have treated nationalism as a singular process, even a teleological evolution towards nationhood, these accounts have been thoroughly critiqued: more recent scholarly approaches emphasize the partiality, multiplicity, and incompleteness of the various mechanisms which produce the nationalist imperative. The first section of this chapter discusses nationalism theory, drawing primarily on Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, still two of the best systematic approaches to the question of nationalism, in the context of the Chinese experience. The Chinese case is an excellent example of the multiplicity of the nationalizing project: some aspects of

nationalism appear much earlier than theory assumes, and others much later. This provides a unique opportunity to analyze nationalizing processes not as a cohering whole, but as collection of disparate, sometimes conflicting processes operating on distinct sub-populations at different chronological and spatial scales. By applying nationalism theory to China, and the Chinese case to theoretical predictions, our understandings of both are enriched and transformed.

A closer attention to heterogeneities within the nationalizing project centers analysis on the powerfully entwined concepts of the state, the people and most of all, territory. Tracing the origins of nationalism to the revolutions of industrialization and imperialism does not explain why these revolutions, which spread past border after border, did not obliterate those borders but instead caused them to grow stronger. The nationalist imperative demands the co-incidence of these three units: the national state, the national unit, and the national territory. The dominance of nation over class remains a major challenge for Marxist accounts of the world economy: if the dominant class relations are between the working class and the capitalist class, then why does the nation loom so large in the minds of workers and capitalists alike? To dismiss the nation as a fetish is to miss the point—fetishes still require a real basis for appearing as they do.

My contention is that this nexus can be explained by the immanent logic and internal contradictions of capitalist expansion. Following a Gellnerian explication of the demands made on the workforce by industrialization, I argue that the development of capitalist production simultaneously homogenizes and increases the skills, or knowledge, of the labor force working within it. This homogenization also, however, applies to the space of production: the human environment both becomes more similar over large

spatial extents and has more abstract knowledge embedded within it. Labor is thus simultaneously freed to circulate within a larger social sphere, but still constrained by the extent of the social environment their knowledge pertains to. This environment does not build itself, and demands substantial maintenance: the state, even if it is not initially involved, plays a crucial role in bankrolling and maintaining this infrastructure. The state, the people, and their shared territory thus become increasingly interdependent, forming the nucleus of the nationalist imperative.

Focus then shifts to one particular infrastructural project: rail. Rail is uniquely relevant to the process of territorialization; not only is it a large-scale infrastructure project with which the state is inevitably involved, it is also heavily implicated in an unprecedented change in the nature of mobility and space. The material qualities of rail —the precise joining of rail and engine, the necessity of standardization and central coordination force the entire rail network to function as a single machine, producing centralization and homogenization across the entire space. Rail also gives rise to new perceptual spaces, transforming the relation of traveler and landscape, traveler and fellow traveler. Rail projects also help define a sphere of circulation for populations and commodities on a wider scale than ever before. Together, these changes give rise to a new perception of territory, one which is imbricated with conceptions of nation and identity.

Theorizing the emergence of nationalism

Despite the long history of the debate over nationalism, it has rarely been entangled with discussions of China, even of Chinese nationalism. Before attempting to apply this theory to China, we must summarize some of the major conclusions theorists

have come to. This section focuses on the theories put forward by two of the best-known theorists of nationalism, analyzing their work from the Chinese context and applying their thinking to the historical development of nationalism in China. While both of their theories tend to underplay the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the nationalizing project, their work nonetheless is a crucial starting point for thinking through nationalism. We begin with Benedict Anderson.

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson puts forward a theory of nationalism based around the idea of the "imagined community:" observing that any nation is far too large in population for every member to know even a small fraction of the members, he argues that national communities are essentially different from the tribal or familial (or in some cases, religious) communities that they superseded.[38] One of Anderson's central questions therefore is: through what mechanisms is this community imagined? By what means is the idea of a nation spread? Anderson identifies the emergence of print capitalism as the primary dispersal mechanism, operating in three ways: first, it produced a sphere of linguistic circulation wider than the spoken dialect but still limited to a particular language-field; second, it gave a new fixity to language; and third, it pushed certain dialects (those most similar to the print-language) into a position of dominance.[39] By creating a community of people who read the same books and newspapers, wrote the same script, who could participate in a shared culture, print capitalism produced a space within which nationalist imaginings could emerge, and a social institution around which

38. Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London [etc.]: Verso, 2006).

39. Ibid., 44.

they could coalesce. The reach of nationalism is then defined by and confined to the reach of the shared print media.

What precisely was the reach of this media? It was delimited geographically by several factors, including dialect, distribution and government. But even within the territory so defined, print culture was not universally accessible. Printed media are constrained by both language and literacy: in order to access the ideas within, the audience must know the language and be literate within it. The first limits the reach of printed media to those conversant with the language and its associated culture; the second limits the media's reach to a particular class within that group. Literacy has always been unevenly distributed within society; historically it was confined to an administrative/intellectual elite, with its breadth gradually broadening to encompass the bourgeoisie and the working class. Apart from the role of formal education, pre-existing dialectical variation also created a set of winners and losers with the emergence of a print language. The community of literate readers was never representative of the population at large in either cultural or class terms: this disjuncture between the imagined and the imaginers lingers throughout the nationalizing project. The very process by which the nation emerges creates heterogeneity within the national group: it is from the outset privileging certain sub-groups above others. Even within the aegis of its homogenizing influence, the nationalizing project creates a new set of differences.

While Anderson's theory captures the interaction between capitalism, state-formation, and cultural change within the development of nationalism, its analysis of territory is substantially lacking. This is symptomatic of its focus on language and literature, neither of which are bound tightly by state or natural boundaries. While

Anderson pays an admirable attention to the material economic and technological structures which enable the seemingly unhindered flow of information, this attention is limited. While Anderson recognizes that linguistics are never a perfect match to nations (particularly, as Tsu shows, in the case of China and the Chinese language[40]), Anderson does not explain how territorial boundaries emerge independently of linguistic ones. Given the centrality of territory in the nationalist imperative, Anderson's focus on literature introduces a significant distortion into his model of nationalism: while the idea of the imagined community is a powerful one, and shared media is a powerful conduit through which that identity is forged and regulated, it is only one mechanism within the nationalizing project. Other theories take a broader view of the process: this bird's eye view of nationalism highlights a different set of processes, driven by different social forces.

One such theory is laid out by Ernest Gellner in his book *Nations and Nationalism*.[41] Gellner's account of nationalism is centered around industrialization and the social changes that historic shift entailed. Gellner argues that the kind of work, and therefore the kind of laborer, demanded by industrial society is very different than that demanded by agricultural society. Where agricultural society emphasizes divisions between different kinds of work, cultivating specialists who spend substantial periods of their lives in dedicated training, industrial societies train their workers very differently: the vast bulk of the training people receive is generic, universal, common to every worker. Specialization only enters the training process at the very end, if at all.[42] The

40. Tsu, Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora.

41. Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

42. Ibid., 26–29.

nature of industrial society demands it—the mercurial, chimeric character of the industrial division of labor requires its workers to have a high degree of flexibility, to move between different jobs as they are destroyed and created. A second characteristic of industrial education is the nature of the skills being trained: no longer are physical skills (weaving, farming, smithing, building) the primary content of the education, but intellectual and social skills, the "manipulation of meanings" become central.[43] In order to perform their daily tasks, workers must be able to reliably communicate and cooperate with a vast and fluid range of people whom they have never before met and may not know tomorrow, and interact with workspaces embedded with symbolic meanings. Thus, a certain kind of cultural literacy (of which linguistic literacy is only one aspect) becomes the skill on which a vast amount of labor relies, and the educational system, formal and informal, that produces that literacy becomes a vital element of modern society. While specialized skills do not vanish, they are build around a shared core of skills of equal or perhaps greater complexity; a core that due to its very universality hardly appears to constitute "skill" at all.

The mobility of workers also increases dramatically: centers of production draw immigration, and as they are displaced by new centers, the population shifts again, resulting in the more rapid circulation of population over a wider sphere. Mechanisms that enable this heightened mobility—shared language and cultural norms, transportation systems and the ability to navigate them—become increasingly relevant to daily life.

An interesting echo of this shift in the culture of work, albeit at the regional scale, can be seen in the work done by AnnaLee Saxenian on the differing trajectories of Silicon

43. Ibid., 32–33.

Valley and Route 128 in the nineties.[44] Saxenian locates Silicon Valley's edge over Route 128 in the sharply divergent regional networks that emerged in each place. Silicon Valley culture begin with a core of developers with very similar backgrounds: overwhelmingly young, white men from the Midwest who had studied at MIT or Stanford and disdained the Eastern establishment.[45] This homogeneity served as the core around which a unique regional identity coalesced. Even as small firms multiplied and competed, a sense of shared culture and collegiality endured. Employees within Silicon Valley were highly mobile and highly networked: workers moved rapidly between firms and maintained their connections with past (and potentially future) colleagues. This unique regional structure was reinforced by a shared language of work, and also by a sense of identity tied to the region rather than the firm. Saxenian quotes one Silicon Valley CEO: “There are a lot of people who come to work in the morning believing that they work for Silicon Valley.”[46] Silicon Valley thus serves as an example of how homogeneity, mobility and a shared sense of identity interplay to create a highly productive work environment; Route 128, Silicon Valley's foil, serves as an example that the extent of this interplay remains variable. Silicon Valley, of course, due to its limited size functions as an actual community; at the level of the nation, *pace* Anderson, the shared identity is produced as much by imagination as by personal interaction.

Much like Anderson's print culture, however, Gellner's widened cultural sphere is still constrained: the culture of signs in which workers have been educated is only

---

44. AnnaLee Saxenian, Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

45. Ibid., 30.

46. Ibid., 37.

functional within that culture's boundaries. Beyond those bounds, the use-value of their skills rapidly diminishes. In addition, the educational apparatus necessary to produce this generic cultural education is complex and expensive: Gellner argues only the state can manage it properly.[47] Thus the workers are bound in turn to a particular cultural sphere and to a particular state. Culture and state become inextricably linked, not just in the minds and experiences of a hyper-literate elite, but in the minds and experiences of every worker dependent on that shared culture to perform their work. In schools, in the military, in the factories, the daily importance of this culture is hammered in again and again, not just in overt propaganda but in every facet of everyday life.

Gellner's work suffers from an overemphasis on the homogenizing tendencies within nationalizing project, downplaying the ways in which nationalization fails to homogenize and in some ways even produces heterogeneity within the nation. Gellner's theory is structured around the demands of industrialization, and thus tends to treat the nationalization process as a coherent, goal-oriented process: nationalization happens because industry wants to create better workers. Furthermore, homogenization of work never goes as far as Gellner suggests: deep distinctions between the working and managerial classes persist, and even divisions within the working class (often entangled with gender and race) render industrial work an uneven field. Military service, picked out by several scholars as a potent process of nationalization, affects only one part of the male half of the population.[48] Saxenian's work on regional advantage offers one example

47. Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 37.

48. Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830," Past & Present no. 113 (November 1, 1986): 101, doi:10.2307/650981; Daniele Conversi, "Homogenisation, Nationalism and War: Should We Still Read Ernest Gellner?," Nations & Nationalism 13, no. 3 (July 2007): 371–394, doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00292.x.

on the contingent elements of this process as well as its variability.[49] Homogenization is thus properly understood as a tendency rather than a certain outcome; nationalizing processes are partial and contingent, and generate discontinuities as well as cohesion.

In outlining the mutually-reinforcing feedbacks between the transformation of work, on the one hand, and education and mobility on another, Gellner leaves little room for the independent development of any of these processes: the emergence of widespread literacy outside the context of industrial education, for instance, is not considered. The transformations come all at once, or not at all. Arguably this is symptomatic of Gellner's default Euro-centrism: as is clear from his models of the organization of pre-industrial society, his theory is centered on the European context. This Euro-centrism does not render Gellner's account inapplicable in the Chinese context; it merely requires judicious application.

Examining the historical development of Chinese nationalism through the lens of Anderson and Gellner's theories yields an interesting set of questions and opens a number of avenues of investigation. Anderson's theory establishes a new vantage point from which to examine the well-trampled literature of Chinese nationalism. Rather than focusing on the content of the dialogue within which Chinese nationalism coalesced as a political force, Anderson's theory suggests that the infrastructural skeleton supporting that dialogue is equally important: how was the shared community of literacy produced? While the discourse of nationalism takes place within this matrix, it needn't be explicitly nationalist rhetoric that spurs nationalism: romance novels, advertisements or railway signage may be equally important in creating the sense of a shared cultural space. If

49. Saxenian, Regional Advantage.

media and language play such a significant role in nationalism, then it becomes imperative to establish the scope, both spatial and socioeconomic, of its influence. How widespread was literacy in print Chinese? What role did it play in everyday life? How important was literacy to navigating different social spaces? The impact of literacy needn't be confined purely to the realm of literature: linguistic signs become embedded in the human environment in a multitude of ways. Anderson's theory would predict very different levels of nationalist engagement depending on these variables, and at first glance the relation holds: the coastal regions, where print media flourished and abstraction-rich environments like factories and train stations first appeared, were also hotbeds of nationalism.

Gellner's theory offers a different angle of entry. While Anderson opens literature and signs to analysis from a new angle, Gellner establishes a link between nationalism and a myriad of social changes. What has the impact of industrialization as a whole had on China over the past century? How has mobility altered, thereby altering people's perception of the environment around them? How has industrialization changed the breadth and intensity of the circulation of goods and people? Where has industrialization been most concentrated, and has there been a correlation with the development of nationalism? These two approaches, emphasizing literacy and print culture, and the other the everyday experience of industrial work and society, each concentrated in a different class, suggests that perhaps different classes are nationalized differently, via distinct and even competing processes: how do these heterogenous experiences of the nation affect debates over the nature and responsibilities of nationalism?

Combining the study of Chinese nationalism with theories of nationalism generated outside China can produce insights for scholars of both fields, suggesting avenues of empirical inquiry for those studying the history of Chinese nationalism and providing opportunities for fine-tuning the theory of nationalism. However, nationalism is not just a transformation of societal organization: it is also intimately connected with concepts of the state and the territory. The relation of these to national identity remains murky. The relation of territory to nationalism has long been a bugaboo of political geography: constantly assumed, but rarely adequately theorized.[50] Both Gellner and Anderson provide clues, but territory remains the weakest link in our understanding of the nationalist imperative; the boundedness of the national space is assumed more than explained. In the following section, I argue that the key element relating state, nation, and territory is large-scale infrastructure. By developing further the transformation of skill that occurs under industrialization, the mediating role infrastructure plays in embedding skill into space becomes apparent, clarifying the relation between nationalism's cultural, political, and territorial claims.

Infrastructure and the national imperative

In this section I argue for placing infrastructure at the heart of the nationalizing project. Infrastructure relates questions of territory, governance, and culture: as its impact and necessity grows with industrialization, it exerts a gravitational pull, drawing the three closer together. Questions of national infrastructure precede and inform debates about nationalism, offering a glimpse into how concretely physical and discursive processes entwine.

50. Agnew, "The Territorial Trap."

The central problematic here is that of skill, and how it is transformed as the labor process is subsumed within capitalism. I argue that this transformation has been subtly misrepresented in Marxist theory (though not by Marx), which emphasizes the diminishment of skill under capitalism and the transformation of abstracted labor power into a universal attribute of the working class. Rather than shifting to the working class as a whole or disappearing entirely, I follow Gellner in arguing that it is only the differentiated guild and craft skills that vanish and they are quickly replaced with equally sophisticated, albeit generalized skills that are held in common by the national unit. The territorial focus of nationalist movements is accounted for by exploring the nature of the built environment as a means of production from the vantage of skill. Finally, the role of the state in developing and maintaining an increasingly elaborate built environment and thus disseminating new forms of skill entangles the state with the coalescing nationalizing project. All of this, however, begins with a re-examination of the nature of skill.

The transformation of skill

"Labour," for Marx, "is, first of all, a process between humanity and nature, a process by which humanity, through its own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between itself and nature."[51] This labour is distinguished from the production of animals by its intentionality: "At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally."[52] With intentionality, we catch a glimpse of the role of skill: how does the

51. Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (London; New York, N.Y., USA: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990), 283. Edited to avoid an implicit gendering of labour.

52. Ibid., 284.

worker conceive of production, other than through a past knowledge of its details? Marx, however, rarely foregrounds skill in his analysis. Instead it is discussed primarily in terms of the "average" skill of labour, a decision that still shapes Marxist understandings of skill.

The concept of skill as used here has a some degree of commonality with the concept of performativity, or Bordieu's habitus, Foucault's discipline or other related theoretical apparatuses. Skill emphasizes several important elements particularly important when working from a materialist perspective: relationality, agency, and embodied-ness. Skill does not exist in a vacuum; it describes a relation between a person and an object, or a series of objects. Skill is an inherently active, constitutive force; it endows its possessor with new capabilities and widens their choices. Finally, skill is materially embodied not just in its possessor of the skill, but also in the objects to which it relates, having thus both an abstract and a concrete existence. Skill centers analysis around an active, volitional constitution of material reality by agents in a realm they do not wholly control but neither are they powerless within.

How then, does skill change under the subsumption of capitalism? One interpretation, laid out by Braverman and followed by Harvey, centers around the concept of "deskilling." The term deskilling is misleading; the word refers to the shift from traditional craft or artisanal skills to the generalized education characteristic of the modern economic mode. This shift, crucially from the perspective of capital, also entails a shift from highly specialized and therefore monopolizable skills to generalized and therefore substitutable skills.[53] This shift has many ramifications: firstly, it removes an

53. David Harvey, The Limits to Capital (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 109.

important negotiating advantage from labor in the struggle over wages by making the skills necessary to the production process harder for sub-sections of the working class to monopolize: workers are always under the threat of being replaced by their fellows in the industrial reserve army.[54] Secondly, it affords capital much more freedom in the revolution and expansion of the labor process, moving workers as market shifts and technological advances demand.

This understanding of the process does not rest comfortably with the term "deskilling," which implies more an absolute loss of skill than a transformation in the nature of skill. It is not clear that Braverman or Harvey appreciates fully the consequences of this distinction: certainly their language suggests that despite their acknowledgement that fully-subsumed, homogenized skill is still a skill, they still view it essentially as a diminishment. Braverman says the worker "would *sink* to the level of general and undifferentiated labour power [emphasis mine]";[55] Harvey calls the transition to "mere machine-minding skills"[56] a "reduction of skilled to simple abstract labour".[57] The language of reduction conceals the potential for the transformation of necessary production skills to increase the absolute level of skill as easily as to decrease it. Indeed, it is hard to argue that the intensity and length of the educational process has decreased since the industrial revolution.

---

54. Marx describes the manner in which guilds were structured as designed specifically to avoid developing along capitalistic lines and ultimately devaluing their skills; see the example of guild skills as "the mysteries" in Marx, Capital, 616.

55. Quoted in Harvey, The Limits to Capital, 110.

56. Ibid., 108.

57. Ibid., 110.

While he foregrounds the violence of this transformation, Harvey is not blind to its emancipatory potential: “By 'liberating' workers from their traditional skills, capital at the same time generates a new and peculiar kind of freedom for the worker”.[58] Yet a fuller understanding of deskilling as a transformation of rather than a negation of skill —“reskilling,” perhaps—remains stubbornly in the shadows. Crucially, if skill does not disappear but are merely transformed, the role it plays in wage negotiation and other aspects of the labour process do not vanish but simply appears at a different scale.[59] Harvey mentions two levels at which skill continues to be relevant: its peculiar liberation of the working class, and the lingering artisanal quality of scientific and managerial craft. Yet a closer consideration of the levels at which the new skills operate—“literacy, numeracy, the ability of follow instructions and to routinize tasks quickly”[60]—shows that they inhere to neither of these scales, but to another altogether: that of the nation. Literacy in a print language, the ability to follow instructions given in a common language and according to a particular set of norms; all of these are aspects of a national culture.[61] In slipping the bonds of guild specialization, labour nonetheless remains bound up in a more spacious, but no less limited sphere. What is it about skill, which exists within individuals, ties it to the particular community of the nation, and to the nation's particular territory? To understand why skill takes on the nation's shape, it is necessary to examine more closely the nature of the skill-tool relation.

58. Ibid., 109.

59. Such scale-shifting is, from a certain perspective, implicit in the exhortation of the global working class to organize. However, this positions labour skills as shared in common by the entire working class—I argue it inheres to a more limited scale.

60. Harvey, The Limits to Capital, 109.

61. Numeracy is notably left out here; while I argue that a great deal of skill and work-discipline adheres to the national culture, this is of course not true of all skills.

Skill is not abstract—it is concrete, and requires specific tools and particular working conditions.[62] A spinner requires a spindle; a weaver a loom. Far from annihilating this material relation, the transformation to general skills merely alters the dimensions along which this interdependency manifests. This need not, and has not, produced a general deskilling any more than the drive to reduce labor content in commodities has resulted in a Keynesian paradise of fifteen-hour work-weeks: resources freed by simplification in one area are simply absorbed elsewhere. One element from the above quotation from Harvey provides an excellent example: literacy. Literacy in one sense operates to universalize skills; a literate worker with access to manuals can quickly learn a range of quite sophisticated skills, operating in a variety of mechanized work environments. Literacy itself is no simple skill, however, and indeed the literate worker is no less dependent on her tool—the book—than the specialized workers whom she replaces. A manual written by someone who does not share her language is useless to her in a way that a hammer manufactured by someone who does not share her language is not. Language thus serves as a barrier through which certain kinds of labor may pass and other kinds may not, strengthening certain relations even as it dissolves others. A number of the other skills central to the subsumed labor process are similarly constrained: language serves here as an exemplar, but less obvious elements such as a sense of time discipline or styles of social organization are also crucial. At this point it becomes clear that the line between skill, with its association with tools and work; and culture, with its association with custom and society, is more apparent, and less real, than is commonly thought.

62. Marx, Capital, 285–86.

Thus when Braverman writes that labor "comes ever closer to corresponding, in life, to the abstraction employed by Marx in an analysis of the capitalist mode of production," he jumps too quickly from the concrete to the abstract, missing how even the most abstracted of concrete labor remains embedded in a complex web of material social relations.[63] Even in *Capital* this distinction is less unidirectional, and more ambiguous than is commonly understood. Marx ends the chapter on machinery not with a prediction that hyperspecialization will continue, but that, like the reckless extension of the working day, must reverse itself in order for capitalism to continue.

> ...large-scale industry, through its very catastrophes, makes the recognition of variation of labour and hence of the fitness of the worker for the maximum number of different kinds of labour into a question of life and death. This possibility of varying labour must become a general law of social production, and the existing relations must be adapted to permit its realization in practice. That monstrosity, the disposable working population held in reserve, in misery, for the changing requirements of capitalist exploitation, must be replaced by the individual human who is absolutely available for the different kinds of labour required of them.[64]

This is not, crucially, Marx making a normative claim about what *ought* to occur, but an observation about what the immanent drives of capitalism demand: an individual capable of any kind of work is more useful for capital than one suited, ultimately, to nothing.

While capital wishes to avoid complex labor, complex labour is defined by Marx as that which has some additional inputs beyond the average, therefore requiring more training time and higher wages. The word "average" is crucial: complexity in this sense is a purely relative term. If the "average" level of social labor is seven year's of schooling, then work requiring eight years is complex; if the average is nine years, then what was

63. Quoted in Harvey, The Limits to Capital, 110.

64. Marx, Capital, 618. Edited to avoid an implicit gendering.

complex has become overly simple. Insofar as more highly trained labor is more efficient, there is an incentive for capital to increase the average level of skill. Thus while there is a constant drive to force all labor into the form of simple labor, to homogenize it, there is equally a drive to improve the efficiency of “simple” labor by raising the level average level of skill.

This immanent drive manifests clearly in the training and disciplinary regimes discussed by Foucault: the elaboration of military training in the seventeenth century, in which every movement was broken down and carefully instilled in each soldier, and the systematization and regulation of education, in which each student was observed and controlled, both reflect a considerable increase in level of formal training necessary to function in society.[65]

The possibility of reskilling is reflected in the literature on post-Fordist production. Piore and Sabel pioneered the arguments for “flexible specialization” in *The Second Industrial Divide*, sparking a long running debate over the nature of skilled labour in the post-Fordist world.[66] In their model, the production line model (and its associated deskilling tendency) characteristic of Fordist production is being superseded by an alternate production method emphasizing dynamic production methods relying on a workforce with flexible skillsets. While there has been considerable debate about the precise nature and meaning of this shift, the “embeddedness” of economic production in social and cultural context has become increasing apparent—a context largely, though not

65. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

66. Michael J Piore and Charles F Sabel, The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

exclusively, thought spatially.[67] In its emphasis on skill, culture, and territory, this body of scholarship presents an interesting parallel to the work being done here.

Yet in its treatment of regionality, and of skill, embeddedness scholarship focuses on a narrower sense of region, and a more specialized sort of skill, than is our object of analysis. Any skill which appears as the regional advantage of one region in a country versus another region in that country is, by that measure too specialized to constitute the sense of common understandings and acculturations that on the one hand form a sense of national identity, and on the other delineate the national territory. It is the skills that do not appear at all because they are so omnipresent, that we must excavate. It is the skills of basic literacy, ability to work under discipline, to show up on time, and interact within workplace culture, that without which an individual appears deficient and cannot function in any workplace at all, no matter how "deskilled" the work appears, that constitute our object of study here.

It is from this perspective we address the "freedom" of the worker. The peculiar liberation the subsumed labor process offers workers is still constrained by language, custom, education—it is by no coincidence that these social boundaries, defined from within or without, become increasingly relevant in the political sphere. Yet the characteristic claims of nationalism are not yet fully articulated; in particular, the territoriality that is so central to the nationalist drive remains obscured. In order to understand the importance of territory the skill and tool relation must be applied on a

67. Martin Hess, "'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness," Progress in Human Geography 28, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 165–186, doi:10.1191/0309132504ph479oa; Andrew Jones, "Beyond Embeddedness: Economic Practices and the Invisible Dimensions of Transnational Business Activity," Progress in Human Geography 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 71–88, doi:10.1177/0309132507084817.

macro-scale, bringing the built environment, its function as a means of production and its function as a tool in the hands of the populace into the analysis.

The skilled environment

A rich literature addresses the built environment, noting among other characteristics its mingling of productive and consumptive uses, its progressive deepening under the demands of capital, and its use as a spatial fix. Harvey opens up the built environment to analysis as an arena of capitalist investment: the vast slow realization of the value embedded in infrastructure serves as a sink for excess capital, delaying the onset of crisis.[68] For our purposes, the crucial point is that it is not only the machinery of the factory floor or cubicle farm that is subsumed by capital and undergoes transformation, but the entire infrastructure that society inhabits; by the same token it is not just within the narrowly-defined production process that increasingly abstract (but still bounded) knowledge becomes necessary to properly function.[69] Storper and Walker drive this point home: the geographies produced by the built environment are just that: *produced*. They stress the role of capitalism in producing these built geographies and driving its expansion, alteration, and even abandonment.[70]

Thus capital's impact on skill stretches beyond the workroom into the skills that mediate the entire built environment: navigation, modes of public sociality, and countless

68. Harvey, The Limits to Capital.

69. The question may be asked whether the built environment is more complex to navigate or use than the natural environment. I do not argue that it is: rather, the character of the skills necessary undergo a transformation in two important ways. First, the complexity is no longer produced by non-human processes, but by human ones; secondly, the complexity is encoded in abstract symbols—language, etc. This entangles an abstract cultural element into the environment-skill relation.

70. Michael Storper and Richard Walker, The Capitalist Imperative: Territory, Technology, and Industrial Growth (Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989).

other aspects of everyday life. For all its size, the built environment is simply another set of tools, requiring a certain set of skills. Even as from the perspective of capital it is necessary that the built environment yield value, and therefore necessary that they be properly employed, from the perspective of those inhabiting that environment acquiring those skills is just as vital.

In the same moment the sphere of capital's subsumption of the labor process becomes society as a whole, it is inextricably joined to a particular space. The spatiality of the built environment necessarily territorializes its corresponding skill set: the skills which allow individuals to take advantage of that particular environment will not transfer perfectly, and in some cases not at all, to other settings. Insofar as it needs to realize the value of the built environment, capital is tied not only to a particular territory but to a particular population, and the population is tied to that territory as well. Their interests are entangled in a particular space, and with a particular set of skills, or culture. In order to maintain people's livelihoods, the built environment must be maintained: if it is too radically transformed or let fall into disrepair their hard-won skills will become worthless. The outlines of nationalism begin to emerge out of the logic of capital.

One might argue: such society-shaping infrastructure might not be maintained on a national scale; cities in particular are characterized by complex lumps of interdependent infrastructural systems that do not extend into the nation as a whole. Sometimes the cultural skills embedded in the built environment have a tighter scope than the nation. Indeed, much of the literature on the embeddedness of economic production has focused on a regional or trans-regional scale.[71] In her classic study, Saxenian contrasts two regions

71. M Storper, "The Resurgence of Regional Economies, Ten Years Later: The Region as a Nexus of Untraded Interdependencies," European Urban and Regional Studies European Urban and Regional

within the United States with very different regional environments that produce very different systems of production; her collaboration with Jinn-Yuh Hsu focuses on linkages between Silicon Valley and Hsinchu, Taiwan.[72] While testifying to the power of "untraded interdependencies," in Storper's words, the regional focus of these studies highlights the absence, at the regional scale, of the nationalizing skills I am interested in excavating. These skills cannot appear at the regional scale because due to their very universality, they do not appear as "skill" at all. By the same token, they cannot create regional advantage, because they are held in common across the nation.

The state and infrastructure

The state's role in the production and maintenance of this nation-producing infrastructure is without question significant: case after case of nationalism coalescing within state boundaries—even when the ethnic characteristics upon which nationalism is purportedly founded do not correspond—suggest that state influence over the formation of the nation is profound. There are several mechanisms through which this influence is exercised. The first is the role played by the state in incubating capitalism in its earliest stages—the extent to which capitalism began in Europe as a tool of the state in intra-state conflict is rarely adequately addressed in Marxist theory.[73] The state system, while

Studies 2, no. 3 (1995): 191–221; Trevor J Barnes and Meric S Gertler, The New Industrial Geography: Regions, Regulations and Institutions (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Costis Hadjimichalis, "Non-Economic Factors in Economic Geography and in 'New Regionalism': A Sympathetic Critique," International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 30, no. 3 (September 2006): 690–704.

72. Saxenian, Regional Advantage; Jinn-Yuh Hsu and AnnaLee Saxenian, "The Limits of Guanxi Capitalism: Transnational Collaboration between Taiwan and the USA," Environment and Planning A 32, no. 11 (2000): 1991 – 2005, doi:10.1068/a3376.

73. Charles Tilly, Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990 (Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1990).

eventually modified substantially by capitalism, precedes it and profoundly shaped its structure. More tangibly, the state plays an essential role in shaping the skills of the national working class via the construction formal, standardized education. While the informal habituation and indoctrination of the workplace is also critical to shaping the new working class, as production grows increasingly sophisticated the educational limitations of working children from the age of five became increasingly clear, as Marx records.[74] It is no more beneficial for capital than the fourteen hour working day; greater profit is to be had from an educated workforce. As with many of the collective action problems that confront capital (where the benefit is too diffuse for a single capitalist to profitably capture), the state takes the lead in building the infrastructure from which all capitalists benefit. In doing so, the state plays a significant role in delineating the space within which that skillset holds sway: coincident with the state boundaries.

Most relevant to our focus, however, are the many state-led or -associated infrastructure projects: investments in rail networks, roadways, communication systems and so on often involve a substantial state regulatory role, if not direct state investment or management. Consequently, they are also typically fitted to state boundaries. The management and maintenance of infrastructure may be seen as one arena for the everyday production of "state effects."[75] Yet, operating within a materialist ontology, the origin of these projects in the state does not mean that their result—the gradual coalescing of a nationalist consciousness—was in any way intended. Linda Colley's examination of early nationalism in England draws this distinction quite clearly: while state projects, such as the military mobilization of the male populace played a key role in

74. Marx, Capital, 370.

75. Painter, "Prosaic Geographies of Stateness."

the emergence of a popular nationalism, that nationalism was an unintended and unwelcome consequence.[76] The state's influence on nationalism thus occurs not directly, but at a slant.

This infrastructure often relies on the standardized education discussed above: communication is transmitted in the state language, or signs are written in the state script. While these signs are the most obvious way that cultural skills are materially embedded in the built environment, they are in some sense the least significant: it is that which goes entirely unmarked and implicit that demands the greater skill on the part of the individual. Taken as a whole, this process of investment and education creates a homogenized space and a homogenized population within which there is a great deal of flexibility, inter-communicability and circulation of population—all of which end sharply at the state's border.[77]

The relation between the cataclysmic restructuring of the production process during its subsumption under capital and the emergence of the nationalist impulse has been sketched in rough outline. The demands of capital to reshape the labor process to its own needs and away from the monopoly of artisan craft entail a drastic homogenization and generalization of skill. Yet the abstraction of skill continues to depend on a concrete set of linguistic and social relations, displacing but not eliminating the specificity inherent to the production process. This shift relates not only to the tools within the immediate production process but also applies to the human environment within which

76. Colley, "Whose Nation?".

77. The implicit contrast here is with pre-capitalist models of territorial control, where both state influence and cultural homogeneity are concentrated in state centers and blur out or vanish entirely towards the edges of allegedly state-controlled spaces. cf. James C Scott, The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

both productive and consumptive activity take place; the state's role in developing that large-scale infrastructure that comes to characterize that environment creates a substantial co-incidence between it and the state's borders. This built environment, studded with culturally-specific abstractions and assumptions, plays an ever greater role in the everyday life for its population: work, leisure, communication and circulation all take place within its confines and are bounded by its boundaries.

All kinds of state-scale infrastructure projects contribute their own nationalizing effect, creating somewhat real and somewhat imagined shared spaces, shared senses of culture, shared spheres of communication. While they are never as complete as they represent themselves to be, and they are collectively less coherent than they seem to be, they nonetheless create a tangible push towards homogenization and standardization, coalescing into what I call the nationalizing project. One type of infrastructure, however, plays a double role, both creating a homogenization of environment and experience over a broader space and also increasing the circulation of commodities and populations throughout that newly unified territory. Transportation infrastructure, particularly rail, thus serves as a particularly apropos starting point for examining how these abstract nationalizing processes materially produce new kinds of spaces and experiences.

The impact of railroads on the production of space

The emergence of railroads radically altered the relation between time and distance, between humans and nature, collapsing vast chronological and psychological gulfs to a fraction of their former distance. It was essential in producing a new kind of travel, over a new kind of geography. While many heralded the arrival of the rail as the

“annihilation of time and space”, it produced instead a new time and a new space. For rail did not open all the world all at once: rail collapsed distance only selectively, only where massive infusions of capital laid the groundwork. The demanding precision of rail infrastructure—the precise joining of railway and railcar, the increasing fine tolerances within the machine, the demand for ever clearer lines of communication, and the horrendous damage incurred when any of these failed—all combined to make the rail network function less like a disparate collection of roads and more like a single machine operating under centralized control. The development of rail instantiates in reality the abstract logic of industrialization and capitalism outlined earlier: the drive towards homogenization of space and standardization of skill under centralized control. Where the rail ran, circulation of people and goods accelerated as the friction of distance decreased, creating an ever wider, less differentiated marketplace; consumptive and productive uses entwined in a uniquely close embrace. Rail, as a mechanism within the nationalizing project, calls to the fore its centralizing, homogenizing, and standardizing tendencies.[78]

Not only was the relation between existing spaces radically reworked, entirely novel spaces were also produced in the form of the rail carriage and the rail station. Inhabiting these new spaces required new modes of perception, new norms of interpersonal interaction: in sum, a novel set of skills. Skill, here, should not be understood merely or even primarily as that of the rail operators, but of the ridership: those skills which, due to their very ubiquity, tend to go unrecognized. The public's perceptions of the rail journey, as well as all those skills necessary to successfully

78. This is not to be understood as a claim that all mechanisms of nationalization have these qualities, or even that rail contains solely these qualities. An attention to the heterogeneity produced even by homogenizing processes is a central goal of this thesis.

navigate the rail system, also constitute an important body of skill with society-wide implications. Other state interventions collaborated to shrink this perceptual distance further: standardized language and orthography ensured that travelers could speak and read where ever they traveled—within the state, of course. Without traveling to every stop within the state, one can nonetheless get the sense that travel anywhere would be essentially similar, allowing the traveler to imagine far-off locations in a new way: as in some sense, part of the same spatial entity, the same geo-body. This sense may not be accurate, either in the ease of travel or in the similarity upon arrival; the perception is nonetheless potent. Rail thus creates an imagined territory, in the same vein as Anderson's imagined community: while there is no way to visit every part of the national geo-body, just as there is no way to know every member of the nation, it becomes possible to vividly imagine a relation to, and identity with that unknown place.

In the section on rail my engagement with materialism is clearest. As discussed in Chapter II, materialism takes seriously the active capacities of matter to shape the world: a vital excess inheres in everything. A core assumption of this work is that rail, and the nation, are material processes and thus partake of the same vitality. Rail, in its reorganization of territory and rerouting of social life, has the potential to work changes far beyond the imaginings of those who build it; and the nation, composed of the countless imaginings of countless individuals, is capable of transforming in ways unanticipated by those whose rhetoric gave it shape. Technological limitations have ideological implications, and economics can shape psychology; gauge changes shape social boundaries and psychological needs can impact carriage design.

It is around this core that I attempt to integrate economic, political, technical and social aspects of rail's development into a single analytic in order to understand the impact of rail on nationalism. While the large-scale social impacts of rail networks are widely acknowledged in economic geography, rail's role in nation-building is rarely analyzed in more than passing. In *Capturing the Horizon*, James Vance details the development of rail networks within the container of the nation—appropriately, as the state played a direct role in many lines—but dwells on their economic, not social, impact. This is despite such headings as "The Railroad as Liberator and Unifier: Italy."[79] Meinig, in the magisterial *The Shaping of America*, notes unreflectingly that the foremost goal of a transcontinental railroad was to "'bind society together in all its parts' until it becomes 'coextensive with the boundaries which embrace the American family,'" but offers little analysis on how rail accomplishes this other than through brute economic union.[80] Schivelbusch's *The Railroad Journey* is rare in the equal weight it gives to rail as both a technological and a social subject; this section relies heavily his account.[81]

More recently, some of the work associated with the "new mobilities" paradigm has begun to unpack the implicit skills of travel and the role of the traveler in producing the rail experience.[82] The mobilities paradigm, however, often begins from the

79. James Elmon Vance, Capturing the Horizon: The Historical Geography of Transportation since the Transportation Revolution of the Sixteenth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 246.

80. D. W Meinig, The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 6.

81. Schivelbusch, The railway journey.

82. Laura Watts, "The Art and Craft of Train Travel," Social & Cultural Geography 9, no. 6 (2008): 711–726; Laura Watts and John Urry, "Moving Methods, Travelling Times," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 26, no. 5 (2008): 860 – 874, doi:10.1068/d6707; Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," Environment and Planning A 38, no. 2 (2006): 207 – 226, doi:10.1068/a37268; David Bissell, "Vibrating Materialities: Mobility–body–technology Relations," Area 42, no. 4 (2010): 479–486, doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00942.x.

assumption that everything is always already mobile, ignoring the importance of relative immobility in producing other kinds of mobility: for example, the role of travel infrastructure, itself constantly evolving, in producing the mobilities of travelers.[83] To differentiate between mobility in these two registers, this section introduces the concept of spheres of circulation: spaces produced by the construction of travel infrastructure which enables circulation of populations and commodities within.

Rail operates in an essentially different way than most forms of travel. Vance draws a distinction between the facilities of travel, the road or sea over which travel takes place, and the technologies of travel, the means of mobility themselves.[84] In most transportation networks, these interlocking systems exhibit some degree of autonomy, and the management and operation of the facility and the management and operation of the technology can be, and typically are, separate. Early in the history of the the railroad, it became clear it could not function this way: a multitude of factors conspired to force the ever-closer joining of conveyance and roadway both technically and administratively. The technical demands of the railroad, the required close conjoining of the railroad and the engine on it, allowed scarce leeway even at its earliest stages. As rail technology developed, the coupling between rail and the engine became only more precise. The precision needed went beyond the contact-point between wheel and rail: as trains moved faster, with more momentum, carrying more people, a revolutionary level of communication was also necessary to avoid the most hideous of accidents. Trains could not give way, nor easily slow; preventing collisions required the construction of a

83. Peter Adey, "If Mobility Is Everything Then It Is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities," Mobilities 1, no. 1 (2006): 75–94, doi:10.1080/17450100500489080.

84. Vance, Capturing the Horizon, 4.

secondary network of telegraphs paralleling the rails.[85] Safety depended not on the vigilance or skill of the engineer, but on the proper functioning of a vast network of signals. The refrain of "one machine" was heard again and again, re-iterating not only the strength of this imperative, but also its novelty. The implications of this technology were only gradually worked out, and different answers emerged in different locales.

Rail's unity of facility and technology, to borrow Vance's terms, emerged as a technical necessity before it became a legal reality. It was first given legal sanction in Britain in 1840 with a law granting railways a legal monopoly on transport on their own line, an unusually direct intervention by the laissez-faire British state.[86] (Previously, any operator was allowed to use the track—a vision that now strikes terror into the heart of any railway passenger.) It is in Britain that the consolidating logic of rail is most evident: emerging piece-meal, without precedent, in an atmosphere strongly inclined towards minimal government intervention and individual property rights, Britain's rail network nonetheless developed extensive coordinating mechanisms between companies, and ultimately under state administration, standardizing such issues as inter-line ticketing, time, and gauge.

The first rails to be built in Britain were all private, local concerns, with no pretensions towards national scope or interconnection. As the system developed, this led to a chaos of competing standards and incompatible networks. Transfers between lines were nigh impossible for passengers or goods, with no impetus for any line to cooperate with any other. In 1842, the Britain's rail companies came together to found the Railway Clearing House (RHC), initially to coordinate ticket sharing but the institution became a

85. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 30.

86. Ibid., 28.

forum for determining technical standards.[87] The independent origin of the RHC evidences the importance of standardization in rail quite apart from any state influence; it is often the desire for enforceable standards that drives companies to seek state intervention.

Rail also brought about the centralized administration of time.[88] Prior to the development of rail in England, each city or town had its own time, tens of minutes or seconds apart. The difficulties first appeared even among the disparate private lines of early England: each station keeping its own time presented an nigh-insurmountable difficulty to schedulers, forcing each line to establish a standard time along its length. Eventually, as inter-line traffic grew, country-wide coordination became unavoidable and the RHC established a single standard time zone for the whole country, selecting the as-yet quite esoteric Greenwich standard.[89]

Inter-line operability was hindered by more than incompatible timing, however; arbitrary yet profoundly consequential decisions regarding leeway (the necessary clearances beside and above the rail) and, more importantly, rail gauge cast up obstacles to moving engines and carriages between lines. Despite standards agreed on by the RHC, a “gauge war” broke out between supporters of “standard” gauge and broad gauge, used solely by the Great Western Railway. Supporters of each were unwilling to squander the fixed capital of already-built lines and attempted to expand their own network. Ultimately

---

87. Philip Sidney Bagwell, The Railway Clearing House in the British Economy 1842-1922, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1968).

88. I mean this is in the practical sense, but Latour draws attention to how rail travel contributes to a perceptual disconnect between time and distance, time and experience, thereby causing time to appear as an abstraction. Bruno Latour, “Trains of Thought: Piaget, Formalism, and the Fifth Dimension,” COMMON KNOWLEDGE 6, no. 3 (1997): 170.

89. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 43.

standard gauge won out; whatever benefits broad gauge offered could not compete with the benefits of interoperability.[90]

Schivelbusch emphasizes the degree to which this centralization and standardization of rail administration happened in England quite against the dominant ideology, which centered around competition and laissez-faire economic policies.

> Thus the railroad as a machine ensemble finally became institutionalized even in this respect, despite the resistance offered by the economic thought of the period, which was based on the principle of competition. The machine ensemble, consisting of wheel and rail, railroad and carriage, expanded into a unified railway system, which appeared as one great machine covering the land.[91]

England's example thus evidences one of the more liberal interpretations of rail development, yielding to centralization and standardization only with the utmost reluctance. In France and Belgium, for comparison, the state played a far more direct role.[92] Regardless of the inclinations of those in charge, a multitude of factors inherent to the operation of rail yield advantages exponential in proportion to the level of investment, standardization, and administration. Whether present from the beginning in the form of direct state investment and control, or emerging from voluntary cooperation between rail companies, such standardization and centralization were logical complements of the development of rail. Rail was in many cases a key moment in the production of the modern state: it posed novel problems that demanded new forms of state intervention and new state structures.[93] However arbitrary the standards embedded in rail were—gauge

90. Vance, Capturing the Horizon, 218–220.

91. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 29.

92. Vance, Capturing the Horizon, 231; 227.

93. Cristina Purcar, “Designing the Space of Transportation: Railway Planning Theory in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Treatises,” Planning Perspectives 22, no. 3 (2007): 325–352, doi:10.1080/02665430701379142.

size, time zone, ticket format, language(s) of communication—once established, they exerted a tangible homogenizing force on the institutions they now partially constituted.

The idea of the railroad as "one great machine" deserves a moment's consideration. If the preposition is granted, then rail is most certainly the world's first country-, even continental-scale machine. While other (typically state) projects—for example the Great Wall or the Three Gorges Dam in China—mobilized the huge amounts of labor and capital towards the construction of a single structure, the railroad is unique in its geographical scope. Its function is dependent not only on its coherence, being regulated and maintained on a massive scale, but on its ubiquity, existing simultaneously at a local and regional scale. Vance notes that in the case of British rail, "it is striking how strong the drive for ubiquity became in the face of the original notions of regionalization or even specialization of lines."[94] Lines intended to improve connections between adjacent cities, or to connect provincial cities with the metropole, became the core of an unprecedented network interconnecting vast swathes of the country. Vance records that early rail builders, extrapolating from the technology's origins in coal-hauling, saw them primarily as commodity transport; they were caught off-guard by the demand for passenger services.[95] Rail not only creates new centrally-administered institutions, but recreates the very environment in which people live.

This environment is not merely a new environment for its inhabitants to navigate, but a new *type* of environment: one where space functions in a novel manner, where the pace of circulation accelerates so radically that it constitutes a qualitatively new thing, necessitating a new set of skills of perception, understanding and navigation.

94. Vance, Capturing the Horizon, 220.

95. Ibid., 198; 234.

Two absolutely novel spaces emerged from the railroad: the carriage and the station. While each took pre-existing structures as their model, it took a long period of mutual adjustment and learning before they and their occupants settled into mutual accommodation. In addition to these absolutely novel spaces, the rail transformed the relation between existing places in profound and profoundly disorienting ways: speed and enclosure conspired to isolate the train passenger from the spaces she traveled through, presenting the space in-between origin and destination as a dreamscape, a panorama, or as nothing at all. All of these changes necessitated learning new ways of seeing, and new skills of navigation.

The physical design of the rail carriage began, as the name would suggest, with the stage coach that formed the backbone of the contemporary English overland transportation system. This design immediately encountered problems both technical and psychological. The small enclosure of the stage coach proved unsuitable when transposed to the rail: the inability to move or communicate easily between cars, access hygienic facilities, or see or control any aspect of the train's movement inspired in many passengers a feeling of helplessness and anxiety. A good part of the general anxiety and boredom of train travel can be traced to the forced passivity in the face of vast and terrible forces: despite the pleasant aspects of the journey, there remained the "close possibility of an accident, and the inability to exercise any influence on the running of the cars."[96]

96. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 130. See also Nicholas Daly, "Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity," Victorian Studies 42, no. 1 (October 1, 1998): 47–76, doi:10.2307/3829126.

The technical and psychological aspects here are not separate, but closely joined. The mode of sociality that had emerged in the environment of the stage couch, which consisted of intense sociability, vanished with the arrival of the train.[97] Some combination of shorter travel times, greater variety of people, more rapid speed, or other, subtler factors rendered this sociability a thing of the past. Instead, the necessity of sharing a compartment with a stranger inspired, among first- and second-class passengers, intense social discomfort to be escaped as quickly as possible, most often through reading. This highlights a key point: an essential element of these new landscapes—of any human landscape—was the people within it, requiring as much skill to navigate as a complicated station layout. The forced intimacy of the carriage provoked a crisis of how to be, in this new space:

> Before the development of buses, trains, and streetcars in the nineteenth century, people were quite unable to look at each other for minutes or hours at a time, or to be forced to do so, without talking to each other.[98]

Schivelbusch documents repeated complaints over the boredom and awkward atmosphere of the carriage as well as the concurrent rise of train station book stalls. Reading quickly emerged as the foremost method of avoiding both social discomfort and boredom. The uncertain social landscape of the train can be seen most clearly in the hysteria generated by a pair of murders on board several years apart; these incidents sparked a hunt for a carriage design that allowed for movement without sacrificing privacy that only after several decades yielded the passage/compartment design used in Europe today. Watts suggests that the passenger's actions, while seemingly meaningless

97. Itself decried as the ruination of the virtue of an earlier mode of transportation, and later accepted as normal and benign.

98. Georg Simmel, Soziologie (Duncker & Humblot, 1908); quoted in Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 75.

and passive, nonetheless are an active “crafting” of the rail experience, paralleling my own focus on skill as a productive element of travel.[99]

If carriages posed a problem of being, stations posed a problem of navigation. Stations served as a point of transition between two very different spaces: the established space of city street traffic, and the industrialized space of the railroad, wherein rules of conduct were largely yet to be established. Like airports today, rail stations were spaces of transition between travel on different scales, catapulting people and things into global relationships.[100] Schivelbusch shows that this transitional character was reflected in the architecture of the buildings themselves: “half-factory, half-palace;” one end consisted of train platforms covered with glass and steel, and the other end built of traditional stone or brick, facing the city[101]. One end was located in the city or town whose name the station bore; but the other existed as a standardized node in a network whose purpose was the homogenization of space. Upon arrival, one was greeted with a structure eerily like the one just departed; to travelers, stations became synecdoche for their respective places yet at the same time, were perforce far more self-similar than the places they represented.[102] The local character, thus, was symbolized foremost in the name written on the station wall: geography became abstract, homogenized, and legible only to the literate.

There is a great deal of implicit knowledge in the navigation of the rail station: station layouts, the meaning of signage, cultural norms of flow and conduct are here another example of the homogenization of structure and skill railroads produced. In the

99. Watts, “The Art and Craft of Train Travel.”

100. Mark Gottdiener, Life in the Air: Surviving the New Culture of Air Travel (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 10–11.

101. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 70.

102. Ibid., 40, 55.

initial period of rail expansion, the transitional space of the station was tightly regulated due to a concern that passengers would be unable to safely or successfully navigate an industrial space: passengers had to gather in waiting rooms, and were only allowed to board immediately before departure. As trains became integrated into everyday life, competent railway navigation became part of the average, assumed social skill set and regulations eased—though these skills were unevenly distributed; the fumbling country bumpkin remained a staple trope of railway scenes. Rail stations were and have remained a space where a remarkable cross-section of society interacts.[103]

Stations, with an emphasis on the plural, also became sites where rival lines competed and, in many cases, eventually merged. Each company entering a city had its own terminus, offering confusion and inconvenience to through traffic; Chicago in the 1890s had seven separate stations.[104] In some places these were replaced by union stations; in others, complex local networks managed the interchange of passengers and freight.

Rail thus produced a new set of spaces with their own dangers and challenges, requiring a new set of skills to successfully inhabit and navigate. These new skills were not universally endowed, however: the spaces of the rail were always shared between experienced travelers and inexperienced, foreign and/or rural first-timers, between cosmopolitan elites and the poor. Even as standardization produces a homogeneity of space, new heterogeneities of skill and affect are produced as well.

---

103. Orvar Löfgren, "Motion and Emotion: Learning to Be a Railway Traveller," Mobilities 3, no. 3 (2008): 340, doi:10.1080/17450100802376696.

104. Meinig, The Shaping of America, 3: 247.

Discussions of the impact of technology on culture, particularly one with as strong standardizing and centralizing tendencies as rail, can often veer into or be mistaken for technological determinism: rail required such and so forth changes in culture, and humanity could not help but oblige. This is not my argument: rather, technological change creates conditions to which humans must adapt, but the manner of the adaptation is undetermined, and the change itself is the product of human action. Two examples highlight the contingency inherent to the process of techno-cultural change and the heterogeneity which inevitably results: the different modes of sociality that emerged among different classes in European rail cars, and the differences between the American rail culture—and its subtly different technological complement—and that which emerged in Europe.

The challenge that the rail car environment posed to travelers was discussed above, along with the strategies—reading, careful avoidance of social contact—with which riders responded. However, this was incomplete: these norms developed only among the first- and second-class passengers. In third-class, an entirely different mode of sociality, characterized by constant conversation and mutual entertainment, prevailed. "How often...I have..., while traveling alone or with people with whom it was impossible to start a conversation, envied the travelers of the third or fourth class, from whose heavily populated carriages merry conversation and laughter rang all the way into the boredom of my isolation cell."[105] Schivelbusch gives several possible reasons for this difference: the lack of reading habits, no prior expectations of travel, and the denser population of the lower class compartments. All of these seem reasonable enough—yet in

105. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 67.

a different section, it is the density of population that drives the development of social avoidance strategies such as reading. In any case, the reasons why the development of rail car sociality took such a different direction among the lower classes is less important than the bare fact that it did: whatever problems rail posed to previous forms of sociality were amenable to multiple solutions. Even as the infrastructural environment around society was homogenized, heterogenous responses emerged.

Across the sea, American carriage design took a very different path than that in Europe. Rather than multiple small compartments based on stage coaches, Schivelbusch argues American carriages were modeled after steamboat saloons and canal packet boat cabins, preferring open, shared spaces to confined, private ones. This was undergirded, literally, by a technical innovation called the bogie, which allowed the front and rear axles of the carriage to rotate independently without derailing. This in turn permitted the construction of longer compartments despite the curves of American rail lines. American carriages, even the luxurious Pullman cars, were therefore more like third-class European rail cars in spatial layout than first. A different technical precedent led to a different design, avoiding the crisis of sociality and hysteria that has such a profound impact on the European experience: no doubt the American rails had their own issues, but Schivelbusch does not say.

Rail functions to create homogenous territories and standardizes behavior, machinery and culture over unprecedentedly broad spaces; yet even as it does so, it produces new forms of heterogeneity within and between. Acknowledging its centralizing tendencies does not mean ignoring its heterogenous impacts; indeed, each is necessary context for understanding the other.

Rail's impact was not limited to the new spaces it had produced. It also radically reworked the pre-existing geographies of travel and trade, producing something which appeared to contemporary commentators as "the annihilation of space and time." While doubtlessly hyperbolic, this sentiment does demonstrate the shocking impact the railroad had on perceptions of space and time. The sheer speed of rail travel, as well as cutting transit time, also cut travelers off from their surroundings. Numerous writers complained that the scenery simply flew by too fast to be taken in: the same phenomenon that presented as a safety risk to the train's crew was here a less dire but nonetheless unsettling disconnection from the traveler's environment. Schivelbusch documents many bitter complaints of the difficulty early travelers had seeing out of the train: their habits of perception were simply unsuited to rail. One text explicitly recommends that passengers focus their eyes on more distant objects: that such advice needed giving reinforces the sheer novelty of rail's speed, and necessity of cultivating new visual skills.[106] The fatigue engendered by the effort to track one's surroundings no doubt played, for some, a role in the rise of the habit of travel reading. Other eyes, perhaps younger, found the panorama of rail thrilling, presenting "in a few hours...all of France...a vast succession of charming tableaux."[107] The minute study of landscape allowed (and enforced) by stage coach or foot travel, which joined the traveler to the landscape, gave way to a constantly changing, necessarily impressionistic, evanescent panorama. The space between origin and destination did not vanish, but rail changed it from an unavoidable element of the travel experience to one that could be escaped, and often was: nineteenth-century Parisians heading to the Mediterranean coast paid "no attention to the invisible landscapes of the

106. Ibid., 56.

107. Ibid., 61.

journey. To leave Paris and to get to where the sky is clear, that is their desire."[108] What came in between was irrelevant; the journey took place not in the landscape but on the train. These factors combine to shrink not just the time of the journey, but also the perceptual distance, the imaginary distance.

In the eyes of contemporary observers, rail if not annihilated then at least condensed geography, as if

> ...the whole population of the country [would]...at once advance *en masse*, and place their chairs nearer to the fireside of their metropolis by two thirds....As distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city.[109]

Yet even within the confines of this metaphor geography reasserts itself in the face of annihilation: the rail's influence manifests as pulling the hinterlands in *towards* the nucleus of the metropole; geography condenses unevenly.[110] In reality the process was far less even: rail shrank distance only where lines ran, incorporating some hinterlands earlier and more thoroughly than others. Transport between hinterlands was more difficult than between hinterland and metropole: "So secondary were [services between cities other than London], and so difficult access to them, that a whole literature of the horrors incident to boarding them...became a special genre for nineteenth-century British writers."[111] The rail produced a new hierarchy of distance, more chronologically compact but no less differentiated.

---

108. Ibid., 38.

109. Quoted in ibid., 34.

110. It is worth noting that this condensation did not, ultimately, empower the metropole: the Age of Rail was dominated by nation-states, not the great cities that defined the political geography of earlier centuries. Tilly, Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990.

111. Vance, Capturing the Horizon, 222.

The hinterland was not only brought into closer contact with the metropole in a perceptual sense, but in a material sense as well. Rail carried individuals and commodities more quickly and cheaply over a wider area than ever before: while this change began as qualitative, it became a quantitative one when a commodity lost "the context of the original locality of its place of production" and instead was "seen as products of the market, just as Normandy seemed to be a product of the rail road that takes you there."[112] Schivelbusch follows Marx in emphasizing the role of transportation in the production of commodities. "This locational movement—the bringing of product to market...could more precisely be regarded as the transformation of *the product into a commodity*."[113] It is intriguing that Marx isolates this moment as the point at which commodities are produced as such: marketplaces play a necessary role in the creation of commodities. Yet it is not entirely clear whether the market Marx refers to is a concrete or an abstract marketplace: it is precisely this ambiguity which it is the market's function to create. Commodities enter the market not by appearing at a particular location, but by entering the sphere of circulation: a place characterized by its placelessness. Tremendous work goes into producing this sphere: the construction of roads, rails, shipping lines, warehouses, distribution centers: the marketplace which product must enter in order to become commodities thus only functions as an abstract, placeless place within the context of the transportation network within which it is bound and upon which it is

112. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 41.

113. Karl Marx, Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (rough Draft) (Harmondsworth London: Penguin "New Left Review," 1973), 534; quoted in Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 40.

dependent. The scale, speed, and ubiquity of rail render it indispensable in the creation and maintenance of a homogenous, country-wide market.[114]

Yet it is not only goods that circulate within the rail network, but people as well, and Schivelbusch argues that on the train that individuals—particularly bourgeois individuals—had their closest contact with the industrial production process. As an industrial process, Schivelbusch and Marx argue, transportation is unique in that the act of production and the act of consumption are simultaneous, thus forcing the productive and consumptive uses into unusually close proximity. The consumer, accustomed to enjoying the products of industry at a remove from their manufacture is in traveling via rail forced to participate directly in the industrial process. This reality is reflected in the perceptions of the rail traveler: "It transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel," complained one critic, echoing a common refrain.[115] In contrast to the individualistic "artisan" travel on foot, horse-back, or carriage, rail brought industrial scale to travel. People, not just goods, circulate through this network; just as goods appear to be a product of the market in which they are sold, and locations a product of the transport on which it is reached, so too do populations appear as an aspect of the industrial transportation network they circulate within.

Yet, markets are themselves still bound by the limits of the transportation infrastructure which produces them, and reproduce both its external boundaries and its internal differences. When rail is a state project, which to some extent it always is, the boundaries and differences being reproduced take on a state character—or perhaps it would be equally accurate to say that the state takes on those boundaries. State space is

114. Meinig, The Shaping of America, 3: 265.

115. Schivelbusch, The railway journey, 54.

thus produced anew by rail as the substance through which social life is navigated. This is not entirely novel: roads and waterways also shaped territory and its navigation. Yet rail, because of the precise joining of engine and track and the necessity of centralized coordination, brings centralized administration into the core of the structure; because of its ease, cheapness, and reliability, it expands and quickens circulation to an unprecedented degree. Paradoxically, the extent to which the territory within the rail network is rendered homogenous and standardized does not appear within the network: there, homogeneity and standardization appear normal. Rather it appears at the boundaries of that network, as a stark contrast between within and without. As station and carriage are standardized, and the behavioral norms of rail travel are established, one journey within the network becomes increasingly like another: without traveling to any given location, it becomes possible to imagine the journey there, or the journey to anywhere the rail connects, producing an imaginary territory—imaginary, but based on a very material reality. The gaps in that reality, where circulation is not as easy as imagined, where political, cultural, or infrastructural barriers hinder free circulation of goods and populations appear as problems to be solved, creating a political impetus for the perfection of the national territorial network. The production of a national territory and the production of a national consciousness thus constitute mutually-reinforcing processes.

State impact at a slant

By reworking the relation between state, population, and territory through the lens of infrastructure, and rail in particular, a theoretical framework for analyzing the

emergence and constitution of Chinese nationalism that is not confined to the rhetorical realm has been assembled. This theory enables a way of talking about nationalism that encompasses not just what people say but how they live. Critically, it provides an entry into the relation between state and nationalism that doesn't reduce either to a direct function of the other: they can interact in complex and non-determinative ways. State action can now be understood as producing nationalism even when producing nationalism is not the intent; nationalism can be seen as making demands on the state which are not in harmony with the state's interests. The impact of rail on the development of nationalism is therefore undeniably state influenced, but that does not mean that the nationalism thereby instilled was either the goal of the state nor made nationalists the state's creatures. The state's impact, though considerable, is at a slant.

Rail encompasses aspects of language, material culture, social interaction, and perception; thus it can mediate between material and discursive definitions of national consciousness. What remains, now, is to take this theoretical apparatus and turn it on the actual history of Chinese nationalism and see what insights it yields. In examining the early history of Chinese rail, however, what is seen is not primarily a unitary Chinese state creating the conditions for the development of a singular national identity, but the failure of such a centralized project. Any theory attempting to explain why a phenomenon arose should be just as capable of explaining why, in another context, it did not. In the case of early Chinese rail, the parallel development of identity, state institutions and rail took place in a manner that failed to create a singular sphere of circulation of people and goods—but nonetheless illustrates their interdependence.

CHAPTER IV

THE FRACTURED GEOGRAPHIES AND IDENTITIES OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA

Taking rail seriously as a meaningful site for the creation of state effects and territorial identities entails understanding not just when it leads towards the creation of a centralized nation-state, but also addressing the conditions where the entanglement of these processes leads to an altogether different outcome. Such is the situation with Chinese rail development in the first half of the twentieth century. Successive waves of devolution, first as a deliberate policy of the Qing government, then as a consequence of revolution and the emergence of warlordism, led to a distinctive history of political and economic development where even as the notion of a singular Chinese nation emerged, the central state's ability and responsibility to manage the country's infrastructure shrank drastically.

The theoretical structure assembled in the previous chapters argues that governmental power, territorial identity, and capital-intensive, state-affiliated projects have strong, mutually constitutive effects, and predicts that they will therefore tend to manifest at the same scale. This pattern is indeed evident—yet counter-intuitively, the scale for these phenomenon was not China as a whole. Rather from the late Qing until the Japanese invasion provincial or regional movements, companies, and governments increasingly dominated political and economic life. In China prior to the Japanese invasion, the legitimacy of provincial identities and governments versus their country-wide equivalents was hotly debated: the very existence of such debate demonstrates the diversity and complexity of identity and governance during the period. It is the

prevalence of regional, largely provincial identities, even in the face of a powerful nationalist movement that demands an explanation, and that an examination of rail can help illuminate.

Early development of rail in China was scattered and fragmentary: foreign interference, war, and technical and social challenges to rail construction prevented the development of a coherent country-wide rail network. Rail's impact on China during the pre-war period was nonetheless dramatic, causing new cities to rise, old cities to decline or be transformed, creating new centers and new hinterlands, spurring the commercialization of agricultural production and the rise of new industries. Rail produced fine-scale heterogeneity between rail-adjacent and suddenly isolated and peripheral areas: rail brought changes in clothing and hairstyles, senses of time, and social mores. The experience of journeying by rail caused re-evaluation of certain social norms: carriage design led to the increased interaction between gender and social classes.

Rail superseded previous transportation networks in speed, price and reliability, which led to a radical reorganization of China's economic geography. Harbin did not exist prior to the arrival of the Eastern China Railway by Russia; Shijiazhuang also arose as a metropolis only after it became the junction of two major lines. As part of the same movement, traditional economic centers were suddenly pushed to the periphery; prominent regions along the Grand Canal found themselves transformed into hinterlands in a matter of decades. While a common sphere of circulation gradually accreted during the pre-war period, it remained partial, with sharp boundaries between localities and vast difference between regions.

These large but diffuse social shifts were not the only impact rail had in the development of national consciousness. Rail, and the control of rail, became central issues in two of the largest protest movements in the late Qing, the Rights Recovery Movement and the Railway Protection Movement.[116] Rail became a proxy for intense conflicts over the proper scale for territorial identity and state legitimacy: some argued that the province was only a momentary proxy for a weak and corrupt Qing China, while others argued for a genuine province-first mentality. [117]

Due to the devolution of state power over the course of the early nineteen hundreds, centralized administration and funding of infrastructure projects fell into the hands of the provincial governments; accordingly different provinces exhibited very different trajectories of rail development. Generally, the more commercially developed provinces, such as Guangzhou or Zhejiang, had merchant-led rail lines, and had far more success in actually building rail and turning a profit than those in predominantly agricultural provinces. This exacerbated existing differences between provinces; agricultural provinces fell further behind the economic powerhouses, rendering China a more heterogeneous, not a more cohesive, space.

In Shanxi, where rail wasn't built until the warlord era, both the physical structure of the railway and its administration evidence an autarkic regional identity. Sichuan's history of rail development is perhaps the strangest: despite being the center of the railway protests that led to the downfall of the Qing, no rail was built until after World War II. In Manchuria, Russian and Japanese rail lines tied the region into spheres of

116. 收回利权运动 (shōuhuí lìquán yùndòng) and 保路运动 (bǎo lù yùndòng), respectively.

117. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation; Liu, “Wan Qing ‘sheng’ yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian.”

circulation outside China, developing a regional economy and identity distinct from the rest of China and hindering economic integration.

The course of China's rail development exhibited a strong regional or provincial impact in the early nineteen hundreds, influenced by and influencing political consciousness and economic change. During this period, regional identities challenged the legitimacy of Chinese nationalism as the primary political identity, often on the basis of the (mis)management of large-scale infrastructure such as railroads. This historical period provides an interesting case for studying the role played by infrastructure in mediating the relationship between identity, territory, and governance.

Social histories of rail

Chinese scholarship on the social history of modern Chinese rail has been limited. Practical limitations, such as the destruction of materials during the war and lack of applicable expertise, has hindered research, and a "revolutionary view of history"[118] confined discussions of rail's impact to subjects such as foreign loans, international relations, and politics. However, in the last thirty years, along with the broader rise of interest in social history, studies of rail's social impacts have drawn more attention from the Chinese scholarly community.[119] In this chapter I draw on both Western scholarship and the small but growing group of Chinese scholars researching the economic and social changes engendered by rail.

118. 革命史观，or "gémìng shǐ guān"

119. Pei Jiang, "Zhongguo jindai tielushi yanjiu zongshu ji zhanwang: 1979 ~ 2009 [中国近代铁路史研究综述及展望:1979～2009]," 过去的经验与未来的可能走向——中国近代史研究三十年（1979-2009) (2009): 22; Quanyou Su, "Jin shinian lai woguo jindai tielu shi yanjiu zongshu [近十年来我国近代铁路史研究综述]," Journal of University of Science and Technology of Suzhou 苏州科技学院学报(社会科学版) no. 02 (2005): 110–114+127.

Prior to the appearance of railroads, Chinese inland transportation consisted of a wide-spread but minimally maintained road network designed for use with the distinctive Chinese wheelbarrows,[120] and a complex water transport system utilizing both natural rivers and human-built canals. While these transport systems did not integrate space to the extent that rail later did, they nonetheless supported a certain degree of economic integration at a macro scale.[121]

Rail was initially championed in China by foreign powers interested in penetrating the Chinese economy, and as such drew ire both from court elites and populist rebels. The first major rail projects in the Northeast were spearheaded and controlled by foreign governments, and were oriented towards incorporating those areas into Russian or Japanese economic and political spheres. In the Yangtze river basin and in Guangdong, early railroads were primarily built by Western commercial interests to facilitate import and export, and thus were designed to integrate the hinterlands into the trade concessions of Shanghai and Hong Kong.[122]

Even domestic efforts to build rail were focused on building local connections rather than forming a single national network. Chinese domestic railroads encountered frequent difficulties raising capital, avoiding corruption and meeting the technical requirements of rail construction: the success of engineer Zhan Tianyou stands in stark contrast to the general state of affairs. During the period of warlordism following the establishment of the Republic of China, some provincial warlords pursued rail projects

120. Joseph Needham et al., Science and Civilisation in China (Taipei, Taiwan: Caves Books, 1986).

121. G. William Skinner, The City in Late Imperial China (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), 275–288.

122. James Zheng Gao, Meeting Technology's Advance: Social Change in China and Zimbabwe in the Railway Age (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997).

limited to their own sphere of influence, in some cases deliberately building rail of a gauge incompatible with the rest of China.[123]

In the period leading up to 1911, less than ten thousand kilometers of track had been built, primarily in the Lower Yangtze and around Beijing. In the next decades, the transport in these areas was quickly transformed, though construction proceeded unevenly throughout the pre-war period and came to a standstill during the war. Wang Jiao'e et al. divide the development of Chinese rail into four periods: preliminary construction, before 1911; network skeleton, from 1911 to 1949; corridor building, from 1950 to early 1990s; and deep intensification, from mid-1990s to present (Figure 1). At the end of the "network skeleton" period, there were no lines into Sichuan or Fujian, and Yunnan was connected to French Indochina but not to the Chinese network.[124] Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang were more accessible from outside of China than from within.[125]

As a consequence of these myriad competing agendas, prior to 1949 rail infrastructure had only begun the process of forming a cohesive Chinese sphere of circulation. The peripheries were poorly integrated into the rail network, and in some areas were more tightly integrated into foreign spheres than Chinese ones. The differentials in access and incorporation created by these disconnected railroads exacerbated existing social disparities, widening the gap between integrated and isolated areas. While the social and economic consequences of rail development over the first half

---

123. Zhankui Jing, "Yan Xishan yu Tongpu tielu [阎锡山与同蒲铁路]," Vicissitudes 沧桑 no. 03 (1993): 26–29.

124. Jiaoe Wang et al., "Spatiotemporal Evolution of China's Railway Network in the 20th Century: An Accessibility Approach," Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice 43, no. 8 (October 2009): 765–778.

125. Prasenjit Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 188.

of the twentieth century were considerable, but profoundly different in character and degree in different localities, cities, and regions.

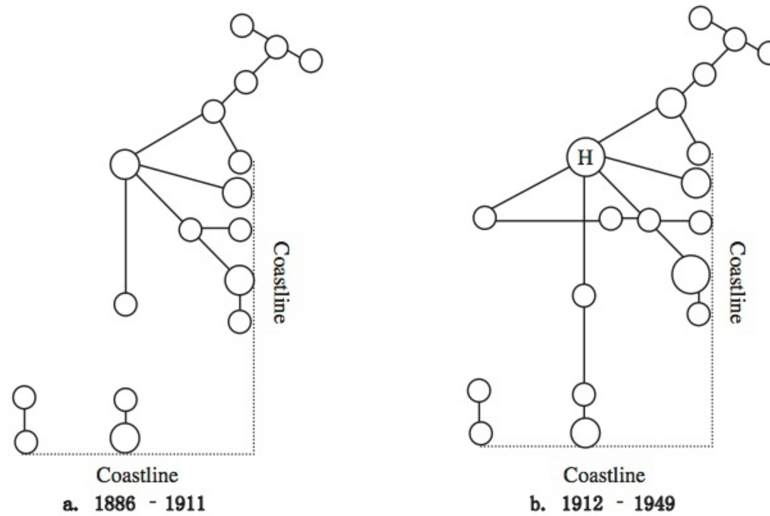

Figure 1: Schematic of Chinese rail, 1911 & 1949. Note the northern bias and disconnectedness. Source; Wang et al. 2009.

Rail and the transformation of Chinese society

Rail enabled the transmission of goods and populations on an unprecedented scale, transporting novel commodities and ideas deep into the countryside. This spread also had a specific geography, producing a fine-scale heterogeneity between rail-adjacent and more isolated areas. Counties adjacent to rail lines went through changes in various aspects of everyday life and social customs earlier than neighboring counties not along the track. Rail served as the mechanism for the dispersal of western-style clothing and hairstyles: for example, the county gazette of Xushui County, which was adjacent to the Ping-Han line, records that by the nineteen-thirties machine-woven cloth had replaced hand-made; in neighboring but not railway-adjacent Mancheng County, machine-woven

cloth was too expensive for common use.[126] Hairstyles and housing followed similar patterns: men stopped wearing queues and women cut their hair short sooner where the rail ran; earthen houses endured longer the further they stood from the rails. This was also the moment the bicycle became a common mode of transport.

Along the rail lines, social shifts occurred sooner and penetrated more deeply. This was no simple process of Westernization or modernization: the circulation of commercial commodities adapted to local markets even when the commodities in question had foreign origins. Wearing Western clothes, riding bicycles, living in Western-style houses all entailed learning new skills related to but distinct from their European analogues.

The changes that accompanied rail were not limited to the superficial or the material: profound social shifts are also incurred when changing material culture. The train, as in Europe, also altered the perceptions of time; while watches had been known in China long before as a rich dandy's plaything, with the train's increasing importance and its inflexible, exacting schedule, understanding and using clock time became an everyday skill for those Chinese who interacted with the railways.

The number of people who had such contact increased steadily. In 1931, government-owned rail lines carried 180,000 passenger trips; by 1934 that number had increased to over two million.[127] Much like in Europe, the experience of riding the train posed certain problems for existing social mores. One such more was the principle of

---

126. Zhancai Li, “Tielu yu Zhongguo jindai de minsu shanbian [铁路与中国近代的民俗嬗变],” Shixue Yuekan 史学月刊 no. 01 (1996): 57.

127. Li, “Tielu yu Zhongguo jindai de minsu shanbian.”

men and women avoiding contact.[128] While it would not have been unimaginable to designate men-only and women-only cars, Chinese passenger rail by and large followed the spatial layout of European carriages and offered only mixed-gender seating.[129] Those who rode the rails perforce learned a new norm of social interaction, and the importance of gender segregation declined.

With easy, frequent travel the cultural bias against traveling away from one's parents—"while your parents are alive, don't go far"[130]—also weakened. With people traveling for business, to seek work, to go to school, to visit relatives, or simply for the sake of traveling, the traditional adage lost its force. When a journey from Nanjing to Shanghai that via traditional water transport took thirteen or fourteen hours could be completed in two, the costs and risks of travel greatly diminished. It was possible even to leave in the morning for Shanghai and return the same night: long-distance commuting, with its associated habits and skills, became possible.[131]

Rail not only affected the lives of rail travelers and inhabitants of the transformed landscape, but produced a new workplace as well. By 1937, the railways collectively employed over three hundred thousand workers.[132] This necessitated the development of entirely new methods of workforce management, employee training and worker retention.

---

128. "男女授受不亲"，or "nánnǚ shòushòu bù qīn"

129. Jie Zhang, "Huocheshang de shehui dengji [火车上的社会等级]," Art Museum 美术馆 no. 01 (2010): 166–177.

130. "父母在，不远游"，or "fùmǔ zài, bù yuǎn yóu"

131. Zhancai Li, "Tielu yu jindai Zhongguo chengzhen bianqian [铁路与近代中国城镇变迁]," Journal of Suzhou Railway Teachers College 铁道师院学报 no. 05 (1996): 34–38.

132. Stephen L. Morgan, "Personnel Discipline and Industrial Relations on the Railways of Republican China," Australian Journal of Politics & History 47, no. 1 (March 2001): 24. Morgan does not distinguish clearly between the rails administered by the Republican government, imperial powers, and regional warlords, blurring the complexity of this period.

While labor was plentiful, managers were challenged to find workers with the skills and attitudes necessary to function within a complex technical bureaucracy, and the early railroad departments were an important site for the pioneering of modern management techniques for the modern Chinese state. In order to produce the sort of skilled, complaint workers necessary to run a railroad, the ministries developed a comprehensive system of Foucauldian "micropenalties" to regulate the punishment and reward of workers, while a complex system for awarding raises and pensions provided incentive for workers to stay with the railroad long-term.[133] The regulatory apparatus and the work force emerged in tandem.

Within the rail network, heterogeneities were produced as well. As mentioned earlier, the Chinese rail carriages were modeled after European carriages: including their system of three separate classes. Initial ridership of trains skewed heavily towards the upper classes: a first-class roundtrip ticket on the Wusong Line cost the equivalent of 100 liters of rice; a third class ticket cost one sixth that.[134] While ticket prices declined as rail became more common, the internal distinctions inherent to the three tier system remained: a new set of social distinctions for Chinese people to learn to navigate.

The social shifts that accompanied the spread of rail were multifarious and complex, and produced new forms of heterogeneity even as they produced homogeneity in others. In addition to changes on an individual level, the coming of the railroads also altered China's economic geography at the level of city and region.

---

133. Ibid., 31.

134. Zhang, "Huocheshang de shehui dengji."

New cities, new hinterlands

The new transportation economy engendered by rail had tremendous impact on China's urban geography. Some of the China's largest metropolises trace their genesis back to this period. Early railways were torn between the sometimes competing and sometimes complementary imperatives of foreign powers and the Qing court (later, the warlords and the Republican government.) None were interested in preserving the traditional hierarchy of Chinese cities.

The greatest transfers of population took place where the railways were most developed: in Manchuria and in Jiangbei. The city of Harbin didn't exist prior to the arrival of the Russian-owned China Eastern Railway in 1897; after Harbin's future location was designated as the railway's administrative headquarters and the juncture of the Dalian-bound southern spur, the area rapidly urbanized, developing a substantial industrial sector and reaching a population of one hundred thousand by 1905.[135]

In the Jiangbei region, the rail-driven urbanization was quite significant: in much the same way that the juncture of the Eastern Railway and its spur line gave rise to Harbin, the junction of the Beijing-Hankou line and the Taiyuan-Shijiazhuang line[136] spurred massive industrialization and urbanization in Shijiazhuang.[137] Railway towns also became the site of new manufacturing hubs. Zhengzhou, at the intersection of the Ping-Han and Longhai rail lines,[138] became the linchpin of a regional cotton industry,

---

135. Li, "Tielu yu jindai Zhongguo chengzhen bianqian."

136. 京汉铁路 (Jīng hàn tiělù) and 正太线 (zhèngtài xiàn), respectively.

137. Pei Jiang and Yaping Xiong, "Tielu yu Shijiazhuang chengshi de jueqi [铁路与石家庄城市的崛起:1905—1937 年]," Modern Chinese History Studies 近代史研究 no. 03 (2005): 170–197.

138. 平汉铁路 (Píng hàn tiělù) and 陇海铁路 (Lǒng hǎi tiělù), respectively.

accelerating the integration of the surrounding agricultural area into commercial production.[139]

On other cities, however, rail's impact was detrimental or simply negligible. Zhenjiang, once a major hub along the Yangtze river trade, was gradually eclipsed by Nanjing after the Shanghai-Nanjing Railway's construction at the end of the 19th century, particularly after the completion of the Tianjin-Pukou Railway in 1912.[140] Pomeranz's *The Making of a Hinterland* also demonstrates the deeply uneven impacts of rail: the region of his study, centered on the once-vital lifeline of the Grand Canal, was bypassed by rail and subsequently became a backwater.[141] Pomeranz uses this example to illustrate the contingency of political economic geography: it was the state's decision to relinquish canal maintenance to local authorities unequal to the task that pushed the region into economic decline, and varying social structures in different counties produced different outcomes. One city, Jining, was able to lobby successfully for a spur line: it stands out, in the region, for its relatively security and prosperity.[142] It is a lonely exception in a region delineated by its lack of railroads.

Further from the coast, rails were few and far between. Despite the existence of a Sichuan Railway Company beginning in 1905, there was no line connecting Sichuan to the rest of China until after World War Two. French-owned lines connected Kunming in Yunnan province to Hanoi in 1910, but the province did not connect to the Chinese

---

139. Hui Liu, “Tielu yu jindai Zhengzhou mianye de fazhan [铁路与近代郑州棉业的发展],” Shixue Yuekan 史学月刊 no. 07 (2008): 102–109.

140. Li, “Tielu yu jindai Zhongguo chengzhen bianqian.”

141. Kenneth Pomeranz, The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

142. Ibid., 147–149.

network until after the war. The French line was also built on a narrow-gauge track—different national standards and nomenclatures, brought by the various imperial powers, hindered the consolidation of the rail network even after nationalization.[143]

Thus, the circulation of goods and populations through developing rail network in China was highly uneven: mutually constitutive of increased economic development and social mobility in the northeast, the North China Plain, the Yangtze river basin, and the southern coast, but leaving the geography of the interior relatively unchanged. This uneven assimilation of provinces and regions into the emerging rail network meant that the sharp transitions between interior homogeneity and external heterogeneity didn't fall on the country's borders but instead divided China internally. This had important ramifications for the development of Chinese national identity: residents of the modernized and westernized coastal cities whose lives were most conducive to nationalism were at the same time seen as the least authentically Chinese.[144]

Altogether, rail produced a radically different economic and social geography in China at the regional, county, and individual level. The preconditions for expanded circulation of populations and commodities were created, though the sharp boundaries of that circulation are as important to remember as the relatively homogenous territory within. The circulation is deeply entwined with the new forms of regional consciousness that emerged during the same period: as larger portions of the population began to travel more frequently over a wider area, and interacting commercially and socially with a wider sphere, traditional local identities no longer fit people's everyday experience. It is

143. Bruce A Elleman, Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 107.

144. Pye, “How China’s Nationalism Was Shanghaied.”

no surprise that gaining control over the rails that mediated that circulation became a focus of popular consciousness. The weakness of the central government and the consequent fractured political landscape made a conception of China as a whole difficult to imagine. Instead, it was at the provincial level, where governmental authority, railroad development, and political identity were strongest, that the political ramifications of rail are most apparent. Beginning in the late Qing, a historical shift in the balance of power between the central and provincial governments gave provincial governments an unprecedented amount of autonomy.

The provincial state and provincial identity

Prior to the devolution of the late Qing, reaching its apex during the warlord period, China typically had a highly centralized government with minimal autonomy given to the provinces. This high degree of centralization can be seen in the management of major infrastructure, which was traditionally funded directly by the imperial court.

The premier example of the state's role in infrastructure construction and maintenance is undoubtedly the Grand Canal: began in earnest in the Sui dynasty, was gradually expanded, until in the Yuan dynasty it reached from Hangzhou to Beijing. The maintenance requirements for this structure—constant dredging, the rebuilding of levies, the construction of dams and locks—was enormous, and its decline and rejuvenation tracked the fall and rise of dynasties. The Grand Canal was certainly the greatest piece of hydraulic infrastructure of its age, but it was first among many: imperial projects also maintained coastline and levies along the Yellow River. Government involvement in these projects varied, occasionally playing little more than a coordinating role; when it

became more involved, it was often as a result of petitioning by local communities unable to deal with increasing maintenance costs.[145] In the late Qing, Kenneth Pomeranz argues, the state began to refocus its priorities away from maintaining the hydrological infrastructure, long considered a key state obligation, leaving provincial or local government in charge.[146] This was part of a larger devolution of state prerogative and obligation towards local levels, understood by some as a weakening of the imperial government, and by others as a triage of less vital projects in favor of those crucial to resisting imperialism.[147]

In the wake of the first Sino-Japanese war, the Qing government began devolving unprecedented powers to the provincial level, including the power to levy taxes and raise armies.[148] Previously the balance of power between the central government and local government had been tilted firmly and resolutely in favor of the central government. After their decisive defeat by the Japanese, the court became aware of the urgent need to spur the development of China's domestic economy stave off imperialist invasion, and empowering the provinces to pursue such development soon became central to that goal.

Accordingly, along with increased power came increased responsibilities: the provincial governments were required to develop industry, open schools, print money, and open mines.[149] As many of these projects were quite profitable, the provincial

145. Mark Elvin, The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

146. Pomeranz, The Making of a Hinterland.

147. Ibid., 21–22.

148. Liu, "Wan Qing 'sheng' yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian."

149. While I do not touch on the role of educational institutions in the formation of regional consciousness it is clearly an important site as well. See Zheng Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

officials were happy to oblige, though non-compliance with imperial orders became more and more of a problem.[150] Provincial officials were often personally involved with the establishment of manufacturing and other commercial concerns and used their power to forward their interests; the expansion of commercial and industrial circulation happened largely under the aegis of the province. Thus, a great deal of the infrastructure mediating the relation between state, territory and people was being constructed and maintained at the provincial level—not at the imperial level.

Railroads were among the most prominent of these provincial economic development projects. Along with mines, they became an important symbol of provincial identity as much as a factor in their economic development. The Rights Recovery Movement refers to a series of protest movements across China beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century aimed at recovering mining and rail-building rights from the foreign companies that had purchased them from the Qing government. The history of the Rights Recovery Movement demonstrates how rail reflects and embodies the interconnections between territory, identity and governance: as provincial governments gained power relative to the central government, not only did provincial identities become more prominent (often in direct opposition to country-wide identities), provinces also become the primary scale for state projects such as rail lines. This relationship was both material and symbolic: capital was raised and rail companies were organized at the provincial scale, and the construction of rail lines was seen as a matter of provincial pride and inter-provincial rivalry.[151]

---

150. Liu, "Wan Qing 'sheng' yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian."

151. Rankin, "Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics."

They were most prominent in the lower Yangtze basin and Guangdong, though mining rights recovery movements were significant in Shanxi and Shandong.[152] These movements were driven at the provincial scale, even when the rights being recovered—to build a Guangdong-Hankou rail line, for example—were not so neatly delineated. They also ran directly counter to the central government: they sought to recover rights the central government had (in their view) cavalierly sold off to foreign concerns.

As part of their bid to recover railway rights, the provinces set up rail companies to raise capital in order to buy back rights and to construct rails. While the ultimate fate of all these rail companies was the same—nationalization—their trajectories beforehand were quite diverse: some raised sufficient capital to build and operate lines that seemed on their way to profitability and self-sustainability; others foundered under the weight of corruption and incompetence. Two interlinked factors seemed to play the strongest role in determining their success or failure: the companies where merchants provided most of the capital and exerted the most influence on the running of the company did well, while those that relied on capital collected via taxes and other coercive means and where officials controlled the management tended to fare poorly. The relative balance of power between officials and merchants in turn depended on the economic strength of the province in question. Provinces like Zhejiang or Jiangsu with strong commercial and industrial sectors invested a great deal of merchant capital in their respective companies, which then fared relatively well; provinces like Sichuan with largely agricultural

152. Roger R. Thompson, "'If Shanxi's Coal Is Lost, Then Shanxi Is Lost!': Shanxi's Coal and an Emerging National Movement in Provincial China, 1898–1908," Modern Asian Studies 45, no. 05 (2011): 1261–1288, doi:10.1017/S0026749X10000119.

economies depended on official taxes to fund its company and tended to fare poorly.[153] In the end, the impact of the provincial rail companies was to cause the economic conditions of their respective provinces to diverge more widely over time in a self-reinforcing cycle.

The discourse of provincial consciousness rang true to many ears in the early twentieth century in China. Its relationship with nationalist consciousness was complex: some held that it was only nationalism on a temporarily smaller scale, necessary when the national state was too weak or corrupt to stand up for its people. “To preserve Yunnan is to also preserve China. If Yunnan is lost then a number of Southeastern provinces will be lost; if a number of Southeastern provinces are lost, then China is lost.”[154] Here the provincial level is a necessary element in a larger struggle. Yet others believed that the province truly was a appropriate scale for political identity and autonomous rule. “Guangdong is the Guangdong of Guangdong people!” went one rallying cry, demonstrating with remarkable brevity the triple coincidence of territory, people, and governance characteristic of the nationalist imperative.[155] In the late Qing and early Republican period, implicit contradictions between these positions could remain dormant: in the face of foreign aggression and central government impotence, nationalists and provincial loyalists shared enough goals to make cooperation possible.

It is undoubtedly true that provincial consciousness developed to a large extent because of the lack of leadership from the central government. It would be a mistake to paint this as a purely rhetorical lack, however: the lack of leadership also had tangible,

153. Shixuan Jin, “Ershi shijiechu gesheng shangban tielu jiqi jieju [二十世纪初各省商办铁路及其结局],” Journal of Beijing Jiaotong University 北方交通大学学报 no. 02 (1977): 80–99.

154. Liu, “Wan Qing ‘sheng’ yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian.” Translation mine.

155. Ibid. Translation mine.

physical impacts on the development of China's internal coherence. While national identity is often analyzed purely as a discourse, it is also intimately involved in the production of a set of structures, structures that regulate the circulation of populations, commodities and ideas within. Prasenjit Duara's *Rescuing History from the Nation* lays out the diversity of opinions within the debate on Chinese nationhood which were retroactively sidelined by teleological narratives of nation-building.[156] However, his analysis remains confined to the realm of discourse; here I am interested in exploring the material aspect of these conceptions of nation alongside the rhetoric and examining their complex interplay.

Despite their loose alliance against the Qing government, these provincial movements exhibited an idiosyncratic mix of supporters, goals, and resources, and engaged in a certain amount of inter-provincial competition: during the warlord period, this rivalry extended to all-out war. In different provinces, merchants, intellectuals, and government officials exerted a different amount of influence and pursued different goals. In the following, three different provinces with very different histories of rail development will be examined.

Shanxi

The development of Shanxi provides an especially interesting case. Early attempts by British companies to develop the province's mineral resources were met with a strong and ultimately successful Rights Recovery Movement. While connections with country-wide protests were undeniably present, the organization of the protests was done at the provincial level by provincial elites and new-school students, supported in Beijing by

156. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation.

fellow provincials. The rhetoric of the movement reflected this: criticisms of the officials responsible for selling the concessions and rationales for protecting Shanxi's coal both emphasized provincial identities and provincial needs.[157]

Shanxi's provincial trajectory continued to follow its own path after the Xinhai Revolution. Under the leadership of Yan Xishan, Shanxi maintained political independence from the nascent Republic and pursued its own course of economic development. Along with the opening of mines and factories, a rail project also enjoyed a prominent role in the province's development. Directed by Yan himself, the Datong-Puzhou railroad[158] had several unique characteristics: first, it avoided foreign ownership entirely. Second, Yan worked to manufacture construction supplies, from concrete to hammers, within Shanxi as much as possible. Most intriguingly, Yan deliberately chose a different gauge than that which predominated in the rest of China. This was partially an economic decision, as the narrower gauge was cheaper, and also partially military: the gauge difference prevented any invaders (at this point almost certainly rival warlords or Chiang Kaishek's Nationalists) from using rail in Shanxi. Yan Xishan's engines, however, could be adapted to the wider rail quite easily, leaving his aggressive capabilities unchecked.[159]

The example of Shanxi shows how rail development is entangled with broader issues of economic development. It also exemplifies the role the state plays in shaping the scale that rail and economic change manifests on and the boundaries of the circulation

157. Thompson, "'If Shanxi's Coal Is Lost, Then Shanxi Is Lost!'."

158. 同蒲铁路 (tóng pú tiělù)

159. Jing, "Yan Xishan yu Tongpu tielu."

they enable; in Shanxi the scale that dominated all these aspects was the provincial, not the national.

Sichuan

The 1911 Railway Protection Movement erupted in response to the Qing government's unilateral decision to nationalize the provincial rail companies: the edict transformed associations assembled to raise consciousness and capital into nascent revolutionary cells.[160] Often seen as part of the nationalist push that culminated in the Xinhai Uprising and the establishment of the Republic of China, the theoretical approach laid out in the previous chapter suggests a re-evaluation of the Railway Protection movement in Sichuan.

In Sichuan, the protests against the Qing dynasty's move to nationalize the railways was fierce, forcing the Qing government to divert an army to put down the uprising, inadvertently leaving Xinhai vulnerable. Yet unlike other provinces such as Zhejiang or Guangdong where the rail company had received substantial popular, voluntary support, Sichuan's rail company had been funded largely via coercive, feudal means, including taxes on basic foodstuffs that caused widespread hardship.[161]

Despite having raised a considerable amount of capital this way, the company had succeeded in building only seventeen kilometers of rail line, as officials were busy investing the money elsewhere for personal profit. The best most Sichuanese hoped for was that the rail wouldn't lead to disaster.[162] Far from being the place where rail had the

---

160. Rankin, "Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics."

161. Jin, "Ershi shijiechu gesheng shangban tielu jiqi jieju," 94.

162. Jin, "Ershi shijiechu gesheng shangban tielu jiqi jieju."

most nationalist support, it was the place with the least. There is another interpretation of the uprising: less a fervent nationalism than a more traditional anger at the exploitative excesses of feudal overlords: it was bad enough that their harvests were taxed to build a railway, but then they took even the railway!

The problem of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement is symptomatic of many discussions of political movements: are they motivated by nationalist or provincial consciousness, or by simple self-interest? In other instances, nationalist rhetoric was used to attract investment from scattered, minor shareholders, or used as a palliative to quiet unrest when rail companies found it difficult to pay interest. It can easily be argued that officials and business people in charge were simply taking advantage of nationalist ideology or provincial consciousness to forward their own interests. That is ultimately a trivial observation. The more interesting question is: why did that particular rhetorical strategy appeal, and why did it succeed in persuading its audience? What part of it rang true to its listener's experience?

Manchuria

Manchuria in the first half of the twentieth century was a region of complex loyalties. Chinese nationalists were a vocal, but not particularly powerful contingent; powerful elites in the region preferred a status quo of relative autonomy, and were as interested in strengthening ties with Japan or devolving power to the individual provinces as they were with integrating with greater China; and a great number of peasants, soldiers and bandits were loyal to little beyond their immediate community. Nor did external powers, including the KMT, necessarily regard Manchuria as of a piece with China;

Japan and Russia, rather strategically, viewed Manchuria's connection with Beijing or Nanjing as somewhat ambiguous.

Politically and economically, this connection was in fact tenuous: governed by an independent warlord and foreign railroad companies, selling its exports to Japan and the world, only populated by Han Chinese in the late Qing, Manchuria was a distinct space. Manchuria was also fractured internally: in the first half of the twentieth century, Manchuria was home to China's most cosmopolitan and its most isolated communities. In *The Manchurian Myth*, Rana Mitter argues that it was only in the wake of the Japanese invasion that Manchuria came to be largely seen by Chinese within the region and without as an unalienable part of China. While the narrative of nationalist resistance is what has been remembered, the reality consisted as much of collaboration and co-existence as resistance, and much of the resistance was less than strictly nationalist in ideology.[163]

The form and function of Manchuria's railroads worked against political and economic integration, widening divisions between Manchuria and the rest of China and tying the region into separate spheres of circulation. The fastest growth of Chinese rail infrastructure happened in the Northeast, which by 1949 had over 40% of China's entire track length.[164] The Japanese-run South Manchuria Rail was designed to tie its associated territories into the Japanese imperial economy in the south, and the Russian-operated China Eastern Rail made Harbin into a unique melting pot of Russian, Chinese and other cultures. Rail construction had a dramatic impact on economic and social structure,

163. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth.

164. Wang et al., “Spatiotemporal Evolution of China’s Railway Network in the 20th Century.”

giving rise to rapid urban and economic growth in what had previously been a pastoral, sparsely populated region.[165]

Manchuria was not, under the Qing, a typical region of the Chinese empire. Rather, as the homeland of the ruling Manchus, it was closed off to settlement by Han farmers and kept as a preserve of Manchu culture.[166] In the late nineteenth century, this policy was relaxed and eventually abandoned in an attempt to counter Russian and Japanese designs on the region; over the next five decades millions of migrants from Shandong and Hebei poured into the region. Many of these migrants were temporary sojourners, returning home after several years of work, but enough settled to increase the population of Manchuria by 8 million by 1942.[167] While the influx of Han population rendered the society of the Northeast increasingly like that of Northern China, in some key respects the pattern was quite different: in contrast to the clear delineation of economy and politics of the North China plain, in Manchuria the economic and political were far more integrated, giving county seats an unusual level of power.[168]

The Manchurian labor market was therefore relatively well-integrated into China, but the commodities produced had a very different sphere of circulation: the railroads necessitated both a large industrial sector, to service their own needs, and an export-driven economy, to justify their existence to their imperial masters. Not only did this give rise to the urban centers of Harbin and Dalian, but a number of depot towns sprung up as

---

165. Elleman, Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China.

166. Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 41.

167. Thomas R. Gottschang, “Economic Change, Disasters, and Migration: The Historical Case of Manchuria,” Economic Development and Cultural Change 35, no. 3 (April 1, 1987): 461–490, doi:10.2307/1153926.

168. Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 44.

well. The South Manchuria Railway (SMR)'s own need for iron and steel drove the development of the largest ironworks in East Asia in Anshan, which then served as a nucleus for further industrialization. The demands of the SMR also served to catalyze a timber industry that became one of the world's top exporters.[169] The SMR also expanded into glass, ceramics, and other industries, driving out Chinese competition and monopolizing the industrial sector as a whole.[170] The SMR played nearly as important a role in the Japanese economy as in Manchuria: in the 1920s, the SMR provided a quarter of the Japanese government's tax revenue.[171]

The single largest sector of the Manchurian economy, however, was the growth and export of soya—an endeavor in which the SMR was deeply involved. Despite a continuing use of traditional agricultural methods, the presence of rail transport nonetheless radically transformed Manchurian agriculture, stimulating increased specialization in and dependence upon a single crop. This had impacts both global—tying the fates of farmers into changes in global commodity prices—and local—farmers were dependent on county soya merchants.[172] Soya-based commodities represented 80 percent of Manchuria's exports, and provided 59 percent of the global supply in the late twenties.[173]

Manchuria was thus already an important part of the economy of the Japanese empire long before it was politically assimilated. Manchuria's economics were controlled

---

169. Ibid., 172.

170. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 67.

171. Louise Young, Japan’s Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 32.

172. Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 46.

173. Ibid., 48.

by Japanese interests, backed by Japanese capital, and sold to Japanese markets. Other than the remittances sent home by workers, very little of Manchuria's economy had any relation to the rest of China. In the late 1920s, Zhang Xueliang attempted to re-orient Manchuria's economy towards China and away from Japan by building an alternate deep-sea port, refused to sell land to Japanese citizens, and developing alternate rail lines.[174] This substantive economic re-orientation, as contrasted with the largely nominal political re-orientation towards Nanjing, posed a significant threat to Japanese interests, and set the stage for the occupation—an attempt to reconcile the economic and political spheres.

Manchuria's separation from the rest of China was not only economic, however. Politically, early twentieth century Manchuria also had a distinctly regional sphere. As will be discussed later in more detail, the government of the late Qing, unable to manage needed military and economic reforms, devolved substantial power to provincial officials. The assortment of provincial and local movements that precipitated the collapse of the Qing dynasty retained a great deal of autonomy under the Republic, and after Yuan Shikai's death, the central government dissolved into a shifting series of regional warlords. Manchuria was no different: from 1916 to 1928, it was ruled by the military and civil governor Zhang Zuolin, and then by his son, Zhang Xueliang. Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT fought through the twenties to bring the warlords under his control, but Chiang was forced to rely on co-option as much as conquest.

Manchuria was by no means a uniform or internally homogenous space. Zhang's control of the region was not only compromised by the autonomy of the SMR and CER zones, but challenged from within by provincial elites, banditry, and self-interested

---

174. Ibid., 51; Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 67.

localities. Provincial elites in Heilongjiang and Jilin were dissatisfied with and regularly challenged Liaoning-based rule—fracture lines eagerly exploited by the Japanese in 1931.[175] Zhang Zuolin's multiple failed attempts to seize Beijing, and the tax burden imposed for this purpose, inspired a strategic disinterest in Chinese affairs among Northeastern elites.[176] Even within the military, the Zhangs' base of support, the lines of loyalty were blurry: Mitter documents the long history of banditry in Manchuria and the circulation of soldiers through banditry and back again.[177] Soldiers were often more loyal to their individual commander—or former bandit leader—than to the chain of command. Similarly, Shenyang's control over local-level polities was limited, often no more than formalizing existing authority, and tapered off sharply with distance.[178] In Harbin, where the currents of social transformation ran strong, the foreign presence served as a catalyst for the emergence of active student- and merchant-led nationalist movements—not always with quite the same strategies and goals.[179]

Local, provincial, and regional identities thus provided nationalism with stiff competition. Competing loyalties did not only come from within: the influential role played by the Japanese inclined some elites to consider Japan as a rational alternative to the KMT. The most prominent such politician was Yu Chonghan, who had long been an advocate of separatism and had long-standing Japanese connections.[180] Mitter argues that his allegiance to Japan was both the product of personal financial benefit and of genuine

175. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 37–38; 79–81.

176. Duara, Sovereignty and Authenticity, 50; Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 36.

177. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 38–41.

178. Ibid., 63.

179. Carter, Creating a Chinese Harbin.

180. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 36.

belief in the preferability of Japanese rule: disillusioned with corruption, taxes, and military-centric policies under warlordism, he advocated alliance with Japan for the purpose of governmental reform and infrastructural development.[181] The potency of Japanese reputation for governmental efficiency should not be underestimated. Mitter repeats an anecdote showing even those who cheerfully cursed the Japanese occupation were forced to admit, once across the border into China proper, that it had some advantages. Upon hitting a savage bump: "Aiya, if this was still in Manchoukuo [sic], it would be a proper road. They are not allowed to steal the road-making money there!" The Japanese government of Manchuria enjoyed very little legitimacy. What little it did accumulate, however, was largely the result of its good governance and infrastructure —"good roads as propaganda."[182]

This is the situation under which Zhang allied himself with the KMT. Rana Mitter argues that when Zhang agreed to join forces in 1928, the relationship was more of an alliance between powers than the re-union of a nation.[183] Zhang continued to enjoy near-complete autonomy in governing the Northeast as well as in pursuing his own foreign policy. The CER Incident illustrates the degree of both his freedom and his isolation. In 1929, the Chinese governor of Harbin made a play to bring the Chinese Eastern Railroad, the Russian-operated line in northern Manchuria, under his (and therefore Zhang's) control. This plan backfired when the Soviets retaliated with surprising force, deploying aircraft to back their claim to the CER. Mitter documents that the KMT government in

181. Ibid., 95, 109.

182. Ibid., 123–24.

183. Ibid., 52–53.

Nanjing paid little interest to this minor debacle: "even an international conflict such as the CER incident registered as only a regional problem."[184]

The complexities of identity in pre-occupation Manchuria can be seen clearly in the work that went into producing resistance as a nationalist endeavor. Mitter shows that a sense of Manchuria as an inextricable part of China, and therefore the invasion as a violation of Chinese territorial integrity, had to be actively produced. We should therefore understand "the move to nationalism among the resistance as a dynamic process and not a preexisting situation."[185] One center for this process was, unsurprisingly, the armies of national resistance in Manchuria. The other location of anti-Japanese agitation was Shanghai. In Shanghai, public opposition to Japanese aggression solidified as their own struggles with Japan deepened and a corps of dedicated propagandists worked to construct a discourse of pan-Chinese anti-Japanese resistance. Resistance fighters against the Japanese such as Ma Zhanshan initially pursued the prevalent bandit-soldier strategy of patronage-seeking to maximize their own power, but as the struggle wore on, increasingly understood themselves in a nationalist sense.

Initial responses to Japanese aggression were subdued both in the KMT government and the Chinese public. Chiang Kai-shek's reasons for adopting a strategy of non-resistance, and Zhang Xueliang's reasons for going along, are impossible to know for certain.[186] It was enabled, however, by the general disinterest in the Manchurian Incident on the part of the Chinese public at large. This changed, however, both because of

---

184. Ibid., 50.

185. Ibid., 201.

186. Chiang's reasoning may be illuminated by his interpretation of the Goujian story discussed in Chapter II. See Cohen, Speaking to History, 71.

dedicated efforts by Manchurian partisans to link the Manchurian situation into the larger nationalist narrative and due to the expansion of Japanese aggression into the larger Chinese sphere. The Shanghai Incident, where the Japanese Navy attacked Shanghai, gives an example of how relatively small groups of nationalized elites spread their ideas into general circulation. A boycott of Japanese goods, organized by nationalists, provoked the Japanese navy into an attack on Japan. This assault, quickly linked with the Manchurian Incident by the pro-Manchurian propagandists, spurred an increase of public support for the Manchurian resistance, with whom Shanghainese had had little sympathy.[187]

Mitter picks out the example of Ma Zhanshan to illustrate shifting ideology among the resistance fighters. Ma's initial resistance to the Japanese was self-interested rather than principled: he resisted in order to extract concessions from the Japanese and preserve his own power. He was nevertheless represented as a nationalist, and consequently attracted considerable support from anti-Japanese nationalist organizations.[188] Ma is here quite representative: despite propaganda to the contrary, only five percent of the resistance armies were committed nationalists. The bulk was made up of landless peasants and soldier-bandits; many "resistance armies" were more interested in plunder than in fighting the Japanese.[189] Nonetheless, his perception outside Manchuria made Ma's 1932 decision to join the Japanese a powerful symbol of betrayal.[190] Mitter

187. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth, 140.

188. Ma, Mitter explains, was illiterate and therefore his communications were written by more educated advisors—typically quite nationalist themselves. There is thus an ambiguity to what extent Ma intended to represent himself in such nationalistic terms, much less how he viewed his own actions. See Ibid., 204.

189. Ibid., 197, 199 .

190. Ibid., chap. 7.

argues that this blowback forced Ma to reconsider his strategy: it was no longer tenable to switch sides in pursuit of the most advantageous patron; instead he had to choose between nationalism and treason.[191] While he ultimately chose the former, many chose the latter: only about one percent of the local population engaged in anti-Japanese resistance.[192]

The work that went into creating a perception of Manchuria as a part of China, and the spaces where it failed, ought to be as notable as its successes. While nationalism was far from powerless, its pull was tempered by political and economic realities that pulled Manchuria into the Japanese sphere, Russian sphere, or divided it into yet smaller circulations. The Manchurian rail system, the most developed in China, played no small part in shaping this reality: Manchuria was populated by Chinese but incorporated into the Japanese and Russian economies, and its power brokers had much to lose by adhering to a strict nationalism. Rail created spheres of circulation that cut against the cultural and linguistic characteristics that form such important parts of nationalism, putting into conflict different nationalizing processes. The resolution of this conflict did not take place until after 1949.

An infrastructural lens

As can be seen from the above, an understanding of the role played by large-scale infrastructure projects in mediating the relation between governance, territory, and popular consciousness is essential to understanding the political terrain of early twentieth century China. In this period, the lack of central government power led to the devolution

191. Ibid., 218–19.

192. Mitter, The Manchurian Myth.

of considerable state power to provincial governments; these governments then played an influential role in pushing local economic change. This economic change had profound social consequences, radically altering the cultural and political geography of China and creating spheres of circulation on a much wider scale than previously possible. The power exerted by provincial governments, on the one hand, and foreign powers on the other, produced an incredibly uneven, fractured geography: the impacts of increased circulation were as negligible in some places as they were profound in others. Rail projects in particular took on symbolic and practical importance, producing a conception of the province as the legitimate and effective guarantor of rights even as it became a mechanism for the centralization of capital and political power.

Understanding the relation between state infrastructure and political consciousness can clarify the ways in which the fractured transportation network and the diverse scales of political consciousness in early twentieth century China were mutually reinforcing, each serving as the preconditions to the reproduction of the other. The relation between changing social and economic realities and the evolving political rhetoric is also clarified by this approach: nationalist and provincial rhetoric was both responding to and shaping the nature of social and political participation. This theoretical approach is not limited to explaining heterogenous political environments but can also be applied to analyze the impacts of consolidation under the CCP and the boom in mobility in the wake of the 1978 reforms. This approach, by highlighting the impact of different geographies of circulation have on political consciousness, provides a valuable lens through which to analyze the relationship between economic and social change and the emergence of nationalism.

CHAPTER V

BUILDING BEYOND THE NATION

This thesis re-centers the discussion of Chinese nationalism around the question of material social transformation and moves it away from a focus on discourse and the impact of state power. Where other scholarship dwells on intellectual work done by prominent nationalist thinkers and explicitly nationalist social movements, this work shifts the emphasis in the direction of the transformation in the everyday experiences of the Chinese populace. Where other scholarship emphasizes the role of state power in manufacturing or controlling nationalism, this work highlights the character of nationalism as an unintended, capricious by-product of state power, with its own logics and drives separate from, and often at odds with, the state.

Rather than being a unitary whole, this thesis treats nationalism as a nationalizing project, composed of many different mechanisms with different scopes and impacts. These mechanisms emerge out of capitalism and industrialization: as work and society are transformed, so too are cultures and identities. Homogenization of work and environment deepens the role of culture in mediating between people and the human environment, thereby increasing the scale at which populations can circulate from the local to the regional, or national—but differences between national cultures are therefore drawn all the more plainly. The impacts of increasing scale and deepening cultural dependency can be seen clearly in the development of transportation infrastructure, particularly rail. A sophisticated understanding of rail travel and how to navigate it frees individuals to travel quickly and easily over a wide swath of the earth—but only that

swath which has been transformed by massive infusions of capital and labor. The imagined territories thus defined play a critical role in shaping the national geo-body.

Rail's tendencies towards the creation of wider spheres of circulation produced a fractured geography of political consciousness in China. The devolution of state power towards provincial governments and foreign colonies during the end of the Qing, and the influence of regional warlords and imperialist powers during the Republican period led to rail primarily being conceived of and executed at regional scales, producing only regional spheres of circulation, reinforcing regional governance and political consciousness. Only after 1949 was a China-wide rail network built.

The overview of Chinese rail development in Chapter IV is necessarily superficial, given the gap between the limited scope of this thesis and the depth of the subject. The impact of rail on developing nationalist consciousness in the northeast would be a particularly fruitful avenue of exploration: the role played by Japanese rail in the development of Chinese identity would benefit greatly from an approach that emphasizes disjuncture between intent and outcome in the nationalization process. Even Japanese rail can be understood as contributing to the formation of Chinese identity, both within Manchuria and without.

The development of the rail network in the post-1949 era, under Mao, is another direction this research agenda could be developed—nationalization did not cease or reach completion at the end of the Chinese Civil War. The development of national identity under Mao is poorly understood: the period's rhetoric was dominated by Party messages on international capitalism and class struggle, and a discourse-focused analysis is necessarily stymied. Rail construction, on the other hand, proceeded steadily, more than

doubling between 1949 and 1974.[193] Can the intensification of the rail network be used as a proxy for an ongoing process of nationalization? Or did the tight controls on travel limit its effect? One advantage of this analytic is its ability to continuously trace some aspects of nationalization through the early Republican period, Mao, and into the post-reform era despite the rhetorical confusion.

Changes in transportation have also played a major role in China's post-reform period, most noticeably in the form of China's floating population. This is not only a huge population traveling long distances regularly, but they are largely drawn from rural populations where other nationalizing projects like standardized language and education had the weakest influence. If the experience of rail travel plays as significant a role in the formation of a sense of national identity as I have argued, it ought to be evident here. Taking seriously the argument that nationalization is a constantly ongoing project, the constitutive moment of Chinese nationalism is as much now as 1911: as more and more Chinese travel regularly, their understandings of themselves as Chinese and China as a territory are undergoing vital changes. The recent spike in nationalism needn't, be due to government manipulation, but to social shifts beyond the government's direct control.

Rail can be a powerful entry into discussions of Chinese nationalism's evolution over the past century. It can also serve as a productive entry into analyses of state power. Given the significant role of the state in instigating and regulating large-scale infrastructure projects like rail and the centrality of those projects in the popular perception of modern society, I am tempted to propose a new definition of the state: the state is that which regulates and even creates the built environment upon which society is

193. Wang et al., "Spatiotemporal Evolution of China's Railway Network in the 20th Century."

dependent for its existence. This definition cuts across other definitions of the state, such as its territorial monopoly on violence, in intriguing ways: a monopoly on violence is one of the preconditions for the function of society, and its territorial scope comes from the the inherently territorial nature of the built environment. Institutions are state-like insofar as they produce and maintain social infrastructure: accountability to popular opinion, distinctions between state and civil society, their unitary or fragmentary nature, are merely characteristics they may or may not exhibit. This approach seems highly compatible with calls to think through the state as a social relation, with an added benefit of focusing attention on its often poorly-conceptualized territorial aspect.[194]

This thesis also suggests ways in which the theory of nationalism can be moved forward. While transportation infrastructure plays a particularly clear role in producing the concept of national territory, a multitude of other large-scale infrastructure projects, including mass communication, mass education, and urban planning can have similar effects. Each of these projects will have different scales at which they operate, different sections of society they impact and will create different senses of national consciousness.

One crucial ramification of disassembling nationalization is the realization that even when the bounds of the nation are agreed upon, not all parts of the nation will have been nationalized by the same mechanisms. To reiterate one example, the working class and the managerial class have very different experiences of industrial work—their conceptions of nation are unlikely to be entirely identical. Foucault discusses the importance of the military in creating modern disciplined subjects; some recent scholarship also suggests that this is an important mechanism for the creation of a

194. Painter, "Prosaic Geographies of Stateness."

national identity—yet one that does not affect every member of the nation equally.[195] Examining the different means by which national identity is instilled in different geographic, ethnic, or socio-economic portions of the population may shed light on certain struggles over the meaning of the nation and how nationalism becomes the unquestioned terrain on which domestic political disputes are fought.

Take, for example, the wage struggle. The group of workers who share the same working language, the same work habits, the same sense of time discipline, who navigate and dwell within the same built environment can be seen as a vast guild: their shared skills are, collectively, a monopoly that may be wielded against capital in the struggle over wages and working conditions—assuming that they can be organized effectively. Quite aside from the bonds of sympathy between members of the same society and culture (though the importance of those bonds cannot be discounted), developing the national group as a self-aware entity is a powerful negotiating strategy in the struggle over wages.

Yet capital cannot comfortably oppose the development of a national consciousness. For even as the skills upon which the national identity is built are the property of the workers, their character and distribution are bespoke by capital. The infrastructure those skills interface with are investments that capital must realize—in a sense, so are the skills themselves. While an inadvertent and contrary consequence, the development of nationalism is inseparable from the drive to realize capital. Thus capital finds itself entangled with particular assemblages of infrastructure, language and people; the same processes that develop its freedom of action within that arena draw the

195. Conversi, “Homogenisation, Nationalism and War.”

boundaries of that arena ever starker. This suggests one explanation as to why class struggle has consistently taken place within the confines of nations, rather than adopting the international character Marxists always insisted it ought.

This angle on nationalism can also be used to analyze differences between as well as within different countries. Just as different groups within the nation are impacted unevenly by nationalizing processes, so too are entire countries nationalized by different mixes of nationalizing processes. One relatively well-examined distinction is between "traditional" nationalisms and post-colonial nationalisms. An aspect of nationalism that has been neglected by this thesis is the crucial role played by the international (more properly but awkwardly termed inter-state) state system in producing and structuring nationalism. As the first nationalisms were coalescing, the lack of precedent meant that internal conditions were the driving force. As the concept of the nation-state was more fully articulated, inter-state rivalry and outright imperialism played a more central role in disseminating ideas of nationhood: particularly in colonial regions, external conceptions of national boundaries and identities shaped domestic understandings. To take China as an example, external conceptions of the Chinese nation as delineated by the boundaries of the Qing empire clashed with domestic conceptions emerging out of pre-existing Han ethnic chauvinism. National identity as mobilizing to resist foreign imperialism is a very different thing than national identity as mobilizing to survive the impacts of industrialization.

Once nationalism's self-representation as a singular object, a historical subject developing along teleological lines is understood as just that—a self-representation—the diverse, uneven, at times self-contradictory field that constitutes the nation is opened as a

vast field of study. Its implications for the understanding of territory, the state, the built environment, and capitalism are immense, and this thesis represents only the first steps towards understanding. Nationalism is thus a vital component of the modern world, and anyone who uses the idea of nation, even to define an unrelated research subject, must take a closer look that this complex, crucial field.

REFERENCES CITED

Adey, Peter. “If Mobility Is Everything Then It Is Nothing: Towards a Relational Politics of (Im)mobilities.” *Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (2006): 75–94. doi:10.1080/17450100500489080.

Agnew, John. “Still Trapped in Territory?” *Geopolitics* 15, no. 4 (2010): 779–784. doi:10.1080/14650041003717558.

———. “The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory.” *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (April 1, 1994): 53–80. doi:10.2307/4177090.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London [etc.]: Verso, 2006.

Bagwell, Philip Sidney. *The Railway Clearing House in the British Economy 1842-1922,*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1968.

Barnes, Trevor J, and Meric S Gertler. *The New Industrial Geography: Regions, Regulations and Institutions*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999.

Bissell, David. “Vibrating Materialities: Mobility–body–technology Relations.” *Area* 42, no. 4 (2010): 479–486. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00942.x.

Brødsgaard, Kjeld, and David Strand, eds. *Reconstructing Twentieth-Century China : State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Callahan, William A. “History, Identity, and Security: Producing and Consuming Nationalism in China.” *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2006): 179–208. doi:10.1080/14672710600671087.

Carter, James Hugh. *Creating a Chinese Harbin: Nationalism in an International City, 1916-1932*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Chang, Maria Hsia. *Return of the Dragon: China’s Wounded Nationalism*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2001.

Cohen, Paul A. *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

Colley, Linda. “Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830.” *Past & Present* no. 113 (November 1, 1986): 97–117. doi:10.2307/650981.

Collins, Alan. “Chinese Educationalists in Malaysia: Defenders of Chinese Identity.” *Asian Survey* 46, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 298–318. doi:10.1525/as.2006.46.2.298.

Conversi, Daniele. “Homogenisation, Nationalism and War: Should We Still Read Ernest Gellner?” *Nations & Nationalism* 13, no. 3 (July 2007): 371–394. doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.2007.00292.x.

Coole, Diana H, and Samantha Frost. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham [NC]; London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Daly, Nicholas. “Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity.” *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (October 1, 1998): 47–76. doi:10.2307/3829126.

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

———. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Elleman, Bruce A. *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2010.

Elvin, Mark. *The Retreat of the Elephants: An Environmental History of China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Fitzgerald, John. “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism.” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* no. 33 (January 1, 1995): 75–104. doi:10.2307/2950089.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Gao, James Zheng. *Meeting Technology’s Advance: Social Change in China and Zimbabwe in the Railway Age*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997.

Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Gottdiener, Mark. *Life in the Air: Surviving the New Culture of Air Travel*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

Gottschang, Thomas R. “Economic Change, Disasters, and Migration: The Historical Case of Manchuria.” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 35, no. 3 (April 1, 1987): 461–490. doi:10.2307/1153926.

Gries, Peter Hays. *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Hadjimichalis, Costis. “Non-Economic Factors in Economic Geography and in ‘New Regionalism’: A Sympathetic Critique.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30, no. 3 (September 2006): 690–704.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Harman, Graham. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphyics of Objects*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002.

Harvey, David. *The Limits to Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Hess, Martin. "'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness." *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 165–186. doi:10.1191/0309132504ph479oa.

Hsu, Jinn-Yuh, and AnnaLee Saxenian. "The Limits of Guanxi Capitalism: Transnational Collaboration between Taiwan and the USA." *Environment and Planning A* 32, no. 11 (2000): 1991 – 2005. doi:10.1068/a3376.

Jiang, Pei. "Zhongguo jindai tielushi yanjiu zongshu ji zhanwang: 1979 ~ 2009 [中国近代铁路史研究综述及展望:1979～2009]." 过去的经验与未来的可能走向——中国近代史研究三十年（*1979-2009)* (2009): 22.

Jiang, Pei, and Yaping Xiong. "Tielu yu Shijiazhuang chengshi de jueqi [铁路与石家庄城市的崛起:1905—1937 年]." *Modern Chinese History Studies* 近代史研究 no. 03 (2005): 170–197.

Jin, Shixuan. "Ershi shijiechu gesheng shangban tielu jiqi jieju [二十世纪初各省商办铁路及其结局]." *Journal of Beijing Jiaotong University* 北方交通大学学报 no. 02 (1977): 80–99.

Jing, Zhankui. "Yan Xishan yu Tongpu tielu [阎锡山与同蒲铁路]." *Vicissitudes* 沧桑 no. 03 (1993): 26–29.

Jones, Andrew. "Beyond Embeddedness: Economic Practices and the Invisible Dimensions of Transnational Business Activity." *Progress in Human Geography* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 71–88. doi:10.1177/0309132507084817.

Kaika, Maria. *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Ladany, L. *The Communist Party of China and Marxism, 1921-1985: A Self Portrait*. Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1988.

Latour, Bruno. "Trains of Thought: Piaget, Formalism, and the Fifth Dimension." *COMMON KNOWLEDGE* 6, no. 3 (1997): 170.

Lee, Haiyan. *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Li, Zhancai. “Tielu yu jindai Zhongguo chengzhen bianqian [铁路与近代中国城镇变迁].” *Journal of Suzhou Railway Teachers College* 铁道师院学报 no. 05 (1996): 34–38.

———. “Tielu yu Zhongguo jindai de minsu shanbian [铁路与中国近代的民俗嬗变].” *Shixue Yuekan* 史学月刊 no. 01 (1996): 56–61.

Liu, Hui. “Tielu yu jindai Zhengzhou mianye de fazhan [铁路与近代郑州棉业的发展].” *Shixue Yuekan* 史学月刊 no. 07 (2008): 102–109.

Liu, Wei. “Wan Qing ‘sheng’ yishi de bianhua yu shehui bianqian [晚清‘省’意识的变化与社会变迁].” *Shixue Yuekan* 史学月刊 no. 05 (1999): 59–65.

Löfgren, Orvar. “Motion and Emotion: Learning to Be a Railway Traveller.” *Mobilities* 3, no. 3 (2008): 331–351. doi:10.1080/17450100802376696.

Luo, Houli. “Cong sixiang shi guanjiao kan jindai Zhongguo minzu zhuyi [从思想史视角看近代中国民族主义].” *Strategy and Management* 战略与管理 no. 01 (1998): 103–110.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. London; New York, N.Y., USA: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1990.

———. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (rough Draft)*. Harmondsworth London: Penguin “New Left Review,” 1973.

Meehan, Katharine, Ian Graham Ronald Shaw, and Sallie A. Marston. “Political Geographies of the Object.” *Political Geography* 33 (March 2013): 1–10. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2012.11.002.

Meinig, D. W. *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*. Vol. 3. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Mitter, Rana. *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance and Collaboration in Modern China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Morgan, Stephen L. “Personnel Discipline and Industrial Relations on the Railways of Republican China.” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 47, no. 1 (March 2001): 24.

Needham, Joseph, Peng Yoke Ho, Gwei-Djen Lu, and Ling Wang. *Science and Civilisation in China*. Taipei, Taiwan: Caves Books, 1986.

Painter, Joe. “Prosaic Geographies of Stateness.” *Political Geography* 25, no. 7 (September 2006): 752–774. doi:10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.07.004.

Piore, Michael J, and Charles F Sabel. *The Second Industrial Divide: Possibilities for Prosperity*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.

Pomeranz, Kenneth. *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Purcar, Cristina. “Designing the Space of Transportation: Railway Planning Theory in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Treatises.” *Planning Perspectives* 22, no. 3 (2007): 325–352. doi:10.1080/02665430701379142.

Pye, Lucian W. “How China’s Nationalism Was Shanghaied.” *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* no. 29 (January 1, 1993): 107–133. doi:10.2307/2949954.

Rankin, Mary Backus. “Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics: Practice and Rhetoric of Railway-Rights Recovery at the End of the Qing.” *Modern China* 28, no. 3 (2002): 315–361.

Saxenian, AnnaLee. *Regional Advantage: Culture and Competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The railway journey: the industrialization of time and space in the 19th century*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1986.

Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. “The New Mobilities Paradigm.” *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (2006): 207 – 226. doi:10.1068/a37268.

Simmel, Georg. *Soziologie*. Duncker & Humblot, 1908.

Skinner, G. William. *The City in Late Imperial China*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977.

Storper, M. “The Resurgence of Regional Economies, Ten Years Later: The Region as a Nexus of Untraded Interdependencies.” *European Urban and Regional Studies European Urban and Regional Studies* 2, no. 3 (1995): 191–221.

Storper, Michael, and Richard Walker. *The Capitalist Imperative: Territory, Technology, and Industrial Growth*. Oxford, UK; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1989.

Su, Quanyou. “Jin shinian lai woguo jindai tielu shi yanjiu zongshu [近十年来我国近代铁路史研究综述].” *Journal of University of Science and Technology of Suzhou* 苏州科技学院学报(社会科学版) no. 02 (2005): 110–114+127.

Thompson, Roger R. “‘If Shanxi’s Coal Is Lost, Then Shanxi Is Lost!’: Shanxi’s Coal and an Emerging National Movement in Provincial China, 1898–1908.” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 05 (2011): 1261–1288. doi:10.1017/S0026749X10000119.

Tilly, Charles. *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1990*. Cambridge, Mass., USA: B. Blackwell, 1990.

Tsu, Jing. *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010.

Vance, James Elmon. *Capturing the Horizon: The Historical Geography of Transportation since the Transportation Revolution of the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.

Wang, Jiaoe, Fengjun Jin, Huihui Mo, and Fahui Wang. "Spatiotemporal Evolution of China's Railway Network in the 20th Century: An Accessibility Approach." *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 43, no. 8 (October 2009): 765–778.

Wang, Zheng. "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China." *International Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2008): 783–806.

———. *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Watts, Laura. "The Art and Craft of Train Travel." *Social & Cultural Geography* 9, no. 6 (2008): 711–726.

Watts, Laura, and John Urry. "Moving Methods, Travelling Times." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, no. 5 (2008): 860 – 874. doi:10.1068/d6707.

Young, Louise. *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Zhan, Mei. *Other-Worldly Making Chinese Medicine through Transnational Frames*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10350247.

Zhang, Jie. "Huocheshang de shehui dengji [火车上的社会等级]." *Art Museum* 美术馆 no. 01 (2010): 166–177.

Zhao, Suisheng. *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004.

———. "Nationalism's Double Edge." *The Wilson Quarterly (1976-)* 29, no. 4 (2005): 76–82.