

INTRODUCTION

CONSTRUCTING SUIYUAN

The geographer Roger Brunet has argued that “the organization of geographical space—and thus of place—by society constitutes its means of representation and development.”¹ Other geographers, homing in on the institutionalized power of state formations, see the state as having a fundamental role as a “differentiating agent of the earth’s surface.”² The quest for political integration, argue these geographers, plays a determining influence upon a state’s spatial thinking:

Territorial-administrative areas from the national down to the local area are one part of the complex ecosystem comprising man, society, and environment, and although such areas are not the sole vehicles whereby political integration of states is achieved, they do play an important role in the process.³

Administrative geography—the way a state divides space—can also tell us much about conceptions of political community and its modes of inclusion and exclusion. In the case of the Suiyuan area in the twentieth century, different versions of a modernising Chinese state have revised names and rearranged boundaries according to different principles.

On March 6 1954, the province of Suiyuan was formally abolished and its territory made a part of the People’s Republic of China’s first autonomous region, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR). Later in the same year Guisui, the provincial capital of the former province, officially reverted to its Mongolian name of Hohhot.⁴

¹ Quoted in Vincent Berdoulay, “Place, Meaning, and Discourse in French Language Geography,” in J. Agnew and J. Duncan (eds), *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 129.

² Joseph B.R. Whitney, *China: Area Administration, and Nation Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Department of Geography, 1970), p. 2.

³ Whitney, *China: Area Administration, and Nation Building*, p. 7.

⁴ Hao Weimin (ed.), *Nei Menggu zizhiqu shi* (Huhehaote: University of Inner Mongolia Press, 1991), pp. 132-134. The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region or, more accurately, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Government, was established in

These changes were part of the Chinese Communist administrative re-ordering of territory and re-writing of place in accordance with its policy of “nationality district autonomy” (*minzu quyu zizhi*).⁵ Looking back from the vantage point of post-1949 China and such greatly changed circumstances, the former Suiyuan official, literatus and local historian Rong Xiang provides this description of an earlier remaking of his native place within the new Chinese Republic:

After the Revolution of 1911, what the Qing had established was gradually changed. First to change was the system of civil administration under Shanxi jurisdiction. In the first year of the Chinese Republic [i.e. 1912] the Guisui Military Circuit yamen became the office of the Guisui Surveillance Commissioner, Guihua Sub-Prefecture became Guisui County, and study halls (*xuetang*) became schools (*xuexiao*). In 1914 the district of [what was formerly] the Guisui Circuit became the Suiyuan Special Administrative Region, and a Military Governor replaced the Suiyuan General as the chief official of the Region. [With this, jurisdiction of the area] passed directly into the hands of the [central government’s] Northern Warlord administration... Under the Military Governor two departments of finance and industry, and two bureaus of general affairs and justice were established. Next the old street patrol and Prison Superintendency were abolished and a Police Affairs Bureau set up. Also educational affairs was hived off from the [old] Circuit office and a Regional Student Affairs Bureau was established. All this gradually gave this seat of government of the Special Administrative Region [i.e. Guisui] the embryonic features of a provincial capital.⁶

Rong plots here the essential features of the administrative evolution of the Suiyuan area in the early Republic. In early 1914 an area of roughly 260,000 square kilometres of southwestern Mongolia became the Suiyuan Special Administrative Region (*Suiyuan tebie xingzheng qu*, or SSAR). With the establishment of the SSAR, sections of the area

1947 following a CCP-backed conference at Ulanhot. The actual territorial delimitation of this government’s jurisdiction only became clear in 1954.

⁵ Hao Weimin argues that the abolition of Suiyuan had been a longstanding item of CCP policy dating from Mao Zedong’s call for the abolition of the three provinces of Suiyuan, Rehe, and Chahar in December 1935. See Hao Weimin (ed.) *Nei Menggu zizhiqu shi* pp. 131-132. For the text of Mao’s proclamation, see “Zhonggong suwei’ai zhongyang zhengfu dui Menggu renmin xuanyan,” in Zhonggong Nei Menggu zizhiqu weiyuanhui tongzhan bu/Nei Menggu zizhiqu dang’anguan (ed.), *Nei Menggu tongzhan shi dang’an shiliao xuanbian* (Internal Circulation Publication, 1987), vol. 1, pp. 97-98.

⁶ Rong Xiang, “Huhehaote shi yan’ge jiyao,” in Rong Xiang, Rong Genglin, *Tumote yan’ge*, part 1 (Huhehaote: No publisher given, 1981), p. 40. Rong Xiang (1894-1978) was probably the most locally renowned Tumed Mongol of the period. For a detailed biography see Rong Genglin, “Xianfu Rong Xiang xiansheng shengping shilüe,” *Huhehaote shiliao* nos. 4 & 5 and also Yang Lingde, *Sai shang yiwang – Yang Lingde huiyi lu*, *Nei Menggu wenshi ziliao*, vol. 30, pp. 221-223.

passed from Shanxi jurisdiction to central government control and there was a growth in modern administrative organs. In 1929 Suiyuan became a fully fledged province.

Some of these changes represented the increased penetration of a modernising central state into the local world as mirrored generally throughout the new Republic. Whether successful or not, this created the framework, institutions, and political culture of the “local Republic” in Suiyuan and other places.⁷ Yet Rong was a Mongol and the new administrative unit encompassed areas which had been sharply differentiated from China Proper under the Qing. The SSAR included the territory of the two western Inner Mongolian leagues of Yeke-juu and Ulaanchab as well as the Guihua Town Tumed Banner and the co-extensive administrative areas of what, by the end of the Qing, had grown to twelve sub-prefectures administered by Shanxi Province.⁸ The creation of the SSAR was an expression of a new way of thinking about the division of territory which emphasised the political integration of border space into a new polity, the Chinese nation-state.

THE NATION-STATE

The concept of the nation-state, a product of European political thought, has been particularly dependent upon the precise delimitation of sovereign national territory and the rigid distinction between national and extra-national spaces. Outside the state is the domain of other nation-states. Space here is occupied by an international society of similar, and theoretically equal, sovereign territorial units. Internally “state sovereignty is fully, flatly and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory.”⁹ This has not always been the case, as one theorist reminds us, “once upon a time the world was not as it is. The patterns of inclusion and exclusion we now take for granted are historical innovations. The principle of state sovereignty is the classic expression of these patterns.”¹⁰ Similarly, Morris-Suzuki in

⁷ Chauncey uses the concept of the local Republic profitably in her examination of Republican local educational circles in central and northern Jiangsu. See Helen R. Chauncey, *Schoolhouse Politicians: Locality and State During the Chinese Republic* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1992).

⁸ Strictly speaking, as is discussed in Chapter One, the Guihua Town Tumed Banner was actually two banners which fell under one administration.

⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 1991), p. 19.

¹⁰ R.B.J. Walker, “State Sovereignty and the Articulation of Political Space/Time,”

her examination of the creation of a Japanese nation-state points out:

From several thousand years ago until very recent times, a wide variety of socio-political structures existed side by side. These ranged from empires, through state-organised societies of various shapes and forms, to small societies which operated without elaborate political structures.... It is only in the past fifty years since the breakup of the European empires that the nation state has emerged as the universal and uniform vessel for the management of human affairs.¹¹

The Qing empire made rigid distinctions between different territories and peoples within the imperial realm. Qing imperial space could be described as heterogeneous rather than homogenous, and imperial legitimacy derived from a variety of divine and semi-divine sources—not from the various peoples under Qing rule, who were subjects rather than citizens.¹² The contrast with the idea of a nation-state is stark.

In the late Qing and early Republican periods Chinese officials, soldiers, intellectuals, and students grappled with the problem of remaking the Qing empire in the form of a modern nation-state. In early modern Europe the process of “state making”—the rationalisation, bureaucratisation, and increased penetration and control of local society by central states—occurred separately and prior to that of “nation building” or “the creation of an identification of the citizen with the nation-state.”¹³ As Duara contends, however, state making and nation building occurred at the same time and were interlinked in China. “State making [in China] was proclaimed within the framework of nationalism and related ideas of modernisation.”¹⁴ The task was multi-faceted and involved not only the expansion of the purview of the state but also the moulding or creation anew of everything from personal habits of bodily discipline to language, education, and principles of governance.¹⁵ This book argues that the remaking of

Millennium: Journal of International Studies, vol. 20, no. 3. (1991) p. 460.

¹¹ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “The Frontiers of Japanese Identity,” in Stein Tønnesson and Hans Morlöf (eds), *Asian Forms of the Nation* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1996), p. 43.

¹² This is a modified paraphrase of Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 19. See Chapter One for a discussion of the various sources of Qing imperial legitimacy.

¹³ This argument about state making in Europe is Tilly’s. See the Introduction to Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* as summarised in Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 2.

¹⁴ Duara, *Culture, Power and the State*, p. 2.

¹⁵ On some of these aspects see John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), particularly chapters 3 and 4, pp. 103-179.

administrative geography in line with changing conceptions of territory and political community was another important aspect of the creation of a Chinese nation-state.

One major indicator of the spatial aspects of this project was the growth in the number of China's provinces from the eighteen of the classic Qing order to 29 during the Nanjing decade. In less than fifty years, from the early 1880s to 1929, eleven new provinces appeared in frontier areas that an earlier Qing order had kept outside the system of provincial administration. Five of these were added in the late Qing period: Xinjiang and Taiwan in the 1880s, and in 1907, the three provinces of the northeast (Heilongjiang, Jilin and what eventually became known as Liaoning), all gained provincial administrations.¹⁶ In 1914 the new Chinese Republican government established four Special Administrative Regions (*tebie xingzheng qu*) in frontier areas. Three of these were in Inner Mongolia: Suiyuan, Chahar and Rehe. The fourth initially known as Chuanbian and later as Xikang, occupied the eastern Kham section of Tibet bordering on Sichuan. All four Regions gained provincial status in 1929. At the same time Ningxia and Qinghai also became provinces.

Obviously it takes more than a redrawing of boundaries and the imposition of provincial administration to bring about the re-making of imperial space as national space. How was this frontier territory made a part of the new Chinese nation-state? The answer lies equally in the various decisions made by local and national politicians, administrators, soldiers and elites about physical building and development of these newly plotted units of frontier space, and also in the ways in which these areas were imagined and represented as places within the Republic. Through both of these processes Suiyuan was constructed.

¹⁶ The three northeastern provinces were often referred to as "provinces," most commonly the "three eastern provinces" (*dong san sheng*), before 1907. The main effect of the 1907 reforms was the move from military governorships to civil governorships in these jurisdictions. Some differences with provincial administrations in China Proper also persisted. See Bai Gang (ed.), *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tong shi*, 10 vols (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), vol. 10, Qing dynasty, pp. 310-313, for a summary of the changes.

CONSTRUCTION

This book uses the notion of construction in two senses. First, Construction or *jianshe* (often translated as Reconstruction) was a key term in Chinese Republican nationalist discourse which centred upon the physical building of the infrastructure of the new nation-state. As Kuhn points in his examination of the rural reconstruction movement during the Republican period, *jianshe* could be “considered a modernised extension of the old ‘public works’ rubric in traditional Chinese government.”¹⁷ Various rural reconstruction programs conducted by reformers such as Liang Shuming in the 1920s and 1930s extended to encompass rural mass education and the introduction of communal institutions and other administrative innovations at the local level.¹⁸ Most famously, however, this idea of Construction was enshrined in the *Principles of National Construction* (*jianguo da gang*) drafted by Sun Yat-sen in 1924 and elevated to the guiding principle for the Chinese nation in the 1930s. Sun went beyond the purely material and used the term to apply to “psychological construction” (*xinli jianshe*) and “social construction” (*shehui jianshe*) in the new nation.¹⁹ Construction in Republican China covered the gamut of state and nation building efforts including the development of infrastructure and agriculture, as well as the fostering of education and the spiritual resources of the new nation. How was Suiyuan constructed in this sense? This book examines the multiple facets of Suiyuan’s administrative creation and elaboration, and its developmental program.

The second meaning of construction employed in this study is the more abstract idea of the creation and elaboration of Suiyuan via representational means. Such an approach emphasises the artificial or “constructed” nature of social reality and points to the imaginative capacities of local elites and officials to imbue Suiyuan with a meaning. How was Suiyuan “constructed” in this sense? As well as building Suiyuan’s physical infrastructure, Suiyuan’s many creators had to find a place for Suiyuan within Chinese nationalist discourse. The

¹⁷ Philip Kuhn, “The Development of Local Government,” in John King Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (eds), *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13, Republican China 1912-1949, Part 2 (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 353.

¹⁸ Kuhn, “The Development of Local Government,” p. 353. On Liang Shuming’s work in rural reconstruction see Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*, second edition (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 155-176, 192-278.

¹⁹ Sun Zhongshan, “Jianguo dagang,” in *Guofu quanji*, 6 vols. (Taipei: Zhongguo guomindang zhongyang weiyuanhui dangshi weiyuanhui, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 751-753.

development and rapid elaboration of Chinese nationalist discourse on the nation's Northwest in the 1930s greatly aided in the construction of a durable meaning for Suiyuan. Suiyuan was thus a project of both physical development and nationalist imagining. These two processes of construction were intertwined and fed off one another. It is my argument that the two were really part of the same process—the hardware and the software of what constituted Suiyuan in the Republic.

SOURCES AND LIMITATIONS

This book is based upon a wide reading of what remains of the vanished entity of Suiyuan in libraries and archives. This includes both texts and such as things as maps, collections of statistics, and other “visualising devices.”²⁰ The texts break into several groups. Government documents were an important part of what constituted Suiyuan, and this study makes use of the files and publications of the Suiyuan General Bureau of Land Reclamation for the period from 1915 to the mid-1930s. More generally, the book uses various Suiyuan government periodicals on Construction and educational development and Suiyuan government-sponsored gazetteers including the mammoth *Comprehensive Draft Gazetteer of Suiyuan* (which remains, except for the first eight *juan* or chapters, unpublished and in manuscript form in the Library of Inner Mongolia in Hohhot). This study also draws upon the modest achievements of local journalism for the period including the handful of literary periodicals and journals of social critique and opinion produced in Guisui in the late 1920s and 1930s such as the *Fiery Pit Weekly* and also the important body of Suiyuan student writing contained in such journals as the *Suiyuan Students in Beiping Association Study Journal* (1929-1937) and the agricultural science journal, *Winter Garden*. Unfortunately none of Suiyuan's newspapers from before 1929 survive. For the period from mid-1932 to late 1937 the book uses the official mouthpiece of the Suiyuan provincial government and local *Guomindang* Party branch, the *Suiyuan Daily*. A final important group of sources for Suiyuan in this period is the large array of magazines dedicated to advocating the cause of Northwestern

²⁰ The idea of maps, statistics and surveys as “visualising devices” or “governmental technologies of power” which render territory and populations visible to the state is canvassed in Jouni Häkli, “Discourse and the Production of Political Space: Decolonising the Symbolism of Provinces in Finland,” *Political Geography*, vol. 17, no. 3, (1998) p. 334.

development. This type of publication became legion in China particularly after the loss of Manchuria in late 1931, and remains a valuable source of information and opinion on Suiyuan for the period. In Chapter One and in sections of other chapters the book uses gazetteers, memorials from Qing officials, and other documents of the Qing period.

Given the nature of the sources and the central object of this study—the making of a modern Chinese province in Inner Mongolia—the book cannot, and does not intend to, represent fully the Inner Mongol counter-discourse on political geography and detailed developments in Inner Mongol politics during the period. At times, in order to contextualise and explain aspects of Suiyuan’s development, I have used secondary sources to venture into such questions, however I have not directly consulted Mongolian language sources. This is an important limitation. Although some of the Chinese language sources used in this study provide tantalising glimpses, a systematic exploration of Mongol discourse on an alternative geographical order to Suiyuan remains an important research task.²¹ A complimentary study which provides added perspectives is Atwood’s *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia’s Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931*, a detailed and exhaustive account of Inner Mongol experiments at nation and state making during roughly the same period as is covered by this book.²²

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One investigates the Qing imperial order in southwestern Mongolia before its remaking. This chapter examines Qing notions of imperial universalism and administration, the administratively differentiated notion of Mongolia under the Qing, and the several parallel systems of administrative geography that existed in the area which was to become Suiyuan.

The following three chapters investigate the most important features of the creation or construction of the SSAR and Suiyuan Province. Chapter Two begins by tracing the administrative and territorial

²¹ Approaches to this may be found in Robert James Miller. *Monasteries and Culture Change in Inner Mongolia* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959).

²² Christopher P. Atwood, *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia’s Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931* (Leiden, Boston, and Koln: Brill, 2002).

elaboration of Suiyuan. It argues that the basis of Suiyuan's development was the growth in the number of Chinese local administrative units which began in the late Qing and continued into the Republic. The second part of this chapter examines two influences which functioned to place and give meaning to, and to shape and limit the possibilities of, Suiyuan as a territory within the Republic—the domination of Shanxi province under Yan Xishan, and the elaboration of Chinese nationalist geographical and developmental discourse on the Northwest. Chapter Three considers in detail the central developmental activity in Suiyuan, the land reclamation enterprise. In the eyes of many of Suiyuan's proponents land reclamation created the pre-conditions for Suiyuan's development in other areas. The chapter first examines the process of land reclamation in Suiyuan—how it was understood, and how it contributed to Suiyuan's substance. The later part of Chapter Three moves to a consideration of discourse on agricultural development and its alternative, pastoralism, in the context of Suiyuan. Chapter Four begins by examining the most commonly-cited attribute of Suiyuan in the Republican period—its abject backwardness—and its link with Chinese nationalist discourse on Northwestern development. The modernising response to this state of affairs was education, and the second part of the chapter looks at the educational enterprise in Suiyuan and assesses its contributions to the area's consolidation.

Suiyuan had been constructed over the top of pre-existing Mongol administrative space. The final two chapters concentrate upon the unresolved tensions and challenges posed by Mongol space for Suiyuan's builders. Chapter Five begins with an analysis of early Republican policy towards Inner Mongolia and its application in the context of Suiyuan. The chapter then moves on to investigate Suiyuan's shadowy relationship with Mongols and Mongol territory in the pre-1928 period and considers four aspects of the question: the explanation of local geography in the first gazetteer of the SSAR, the *Records of Suiyuan*; Suiyuan's administrative dealings with Mongol space; the position of Tumed Banner vis-à-vis Suiyuan authorities; and finally, Suiyuan governmental involvement with Mongol education during this period. The last chapter, Chapter Six, examines the challenge of Mongol space in the Nanjing decade. It discusses the growth of a strong Inner Mongolian autonomy movement based within Suiyuan's territorial boundaries at the important temple complex of Beile-yin sume, the re-emergence of an assertively Mongol nationalist ordering of Suiyuan's territory, and Suiyuan governmental strategies at

subverting and incorporating this challenge. The book concludes with an epilogue which examines the fate of Suiyuan after 1937 and briefly discusses continuing themes.