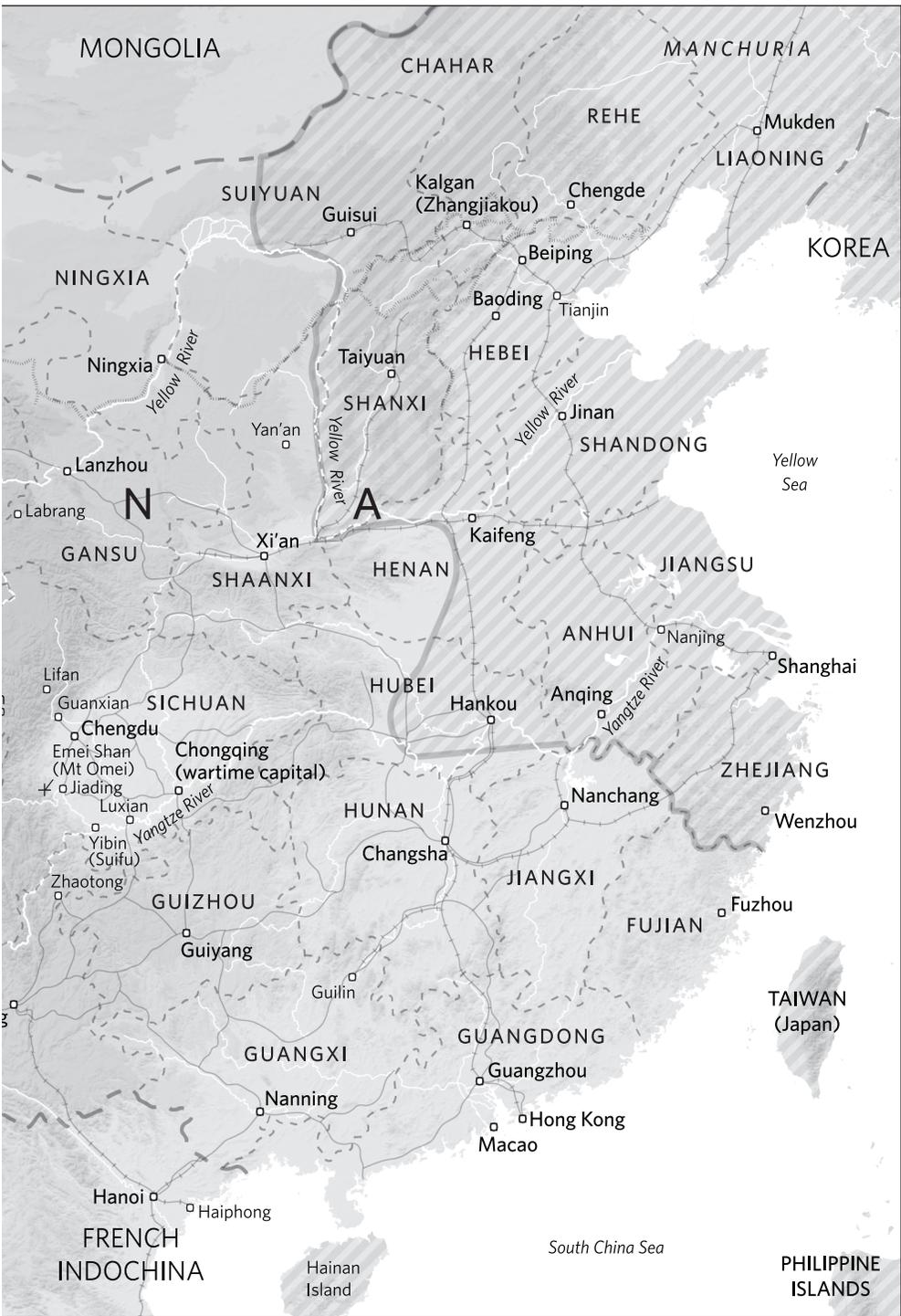


Frontier Fieldwork

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China during the Second World War (1942). | “West China and Adjacent Regions,”
in Yi-Fang Wu, *China Rediscovered Her West* (Allen & Unwin, 1942). *Adapted by Eric
Leinberger*

Introduction

During the early twentieth century, the world was transformed as old empires crumbled and new nation-states took their place. In China, the shattered pieces of the Qing empire posed a series of dilemmas to those seeking to build a new nation out of its ruins. The 1911 Xinhai Revolution, which brought down the Qing Dynasty, had introduced a new language of Han Chinese ethnonationalism that promised to banish all vestiges of Manchu rule. But as Tibet and Mongolia began to reconsider their ties with the nascent Republic of China, the euphoria of this newfound nationalism soon dissipated. The hoisting of the new flag of the republic, which officially embraced the “union of five races” (*wuzu gonghe*), came across to many as a futile attempt to “rescue the Empire” in the early twentieth century.¹ For those ruling China, holding on to its former imperial borders had indeed become a major source of anxiety, especially in light of Western and Japanese imperialism. Powerless Chinese diplomats faced further humiliation at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 after failing to secure the return of the Shandong Peninsula. Opportunistic Japanese forces had seized the German concessions in 1914 and, with the complicity of other powers, refused to hand them over to China. Despite the return of these territories in 1922, the danger of a wider territorial dismemberment on all China’s borders appeared imminent.

Responding to this growing threat, a new generation of scholars took it upon themselves to find urgent solutions. The challenge was to reintegrate those outlying pieces, the frontier territories, into the new nation-state puzzle that now lay before them. In their eyes, the frontier question

(*bianjiang wenti*), which would haunt Chinese politics for most of the early twentieth century, could be met only by engaging with the frontier and its inhabitants directly. It was time for scholars and enthusiasts to leap from their armchairs and take to the field.

This book is about those who took to the field on China's frontiers. Starting in the 1920s, this group of people came from very different backgrounds: they were students, photographers, travellers, social scientists, agriculturalists, and missionaries. They pursued different agendas but converged as one in issuing a rallying call to place China's margins at the centre of the nation's race to modernity. Their work in the field raised critical questions about the very meaning of "China" at a time when border areas and their inhabitants were far removed from the minds of the vast majority of China's population. Whereas governments in other nations extended their authority using railways or military power, policy makers in China over time would recognize the limitations of central power and claim that the key to nation building on the frontier lay in being in the field. By proposing a new approach to the understanding and transformation of China's frontiers, proponents of fieldwork redefined the meaning of the nation. Those working in the field saw themselves as a vanguard force, building a new relationship for China's disparate multi-ethnic population through a scientific approach grounded in both *method* and *empathy* vis-à-vis its object of study. Choosing to deploy scholars rather than soldiers, they saw China's frontier as a different sort of battlefield, foreshadowing the policies of social development and intervention that would be pursued decades later, during the Cold War.

The question of how to transform these remote areas and secure the survival of the Chinese nation produced a battle of ideas in which frontier and nation were intertwined. Newly established ideas of sovereignty and territoriality stemming from colonial expansion and mapping techniques from around the world made their way into local intellectual debates and government policies. Those in the field took these debates further, calling for a form of modernity that would take the human and geographical particularities of China's frontier as foundations for the political and economic life of the new nation. Fieldwork in China's border areas was thus an integral part of this vision of modernity, transforming the region from an adventurous playground into an experimental social laboratory. In turn, ideas of citizenship and development that had begun to shape China's cities and countryside alike were also directed toward the frontier areas. The mobilization of fieldworkers on China's frontiers reached its peak during the Second World War and lay the groundwork for the mass science

movements that became the norm during the early People's Republic of China (PRC) period. Building revolution and the nation in the field would remain an important part of the political landscape for most of China's twentieth century.

Fieldwork on China's frontier was shaped by practices derived from social surveys and anthropological fieldwork developed in Western social sciences. Yet during this period the terms "fieldwork" (*tianye gongzuo*) and "survey" (*diaocha*) in China went beyond the jealously guarded realms of the social sciences and were deployed by a wide range of people and professions. Despite the influence of science (*kexue*) as an undisputed banner of modernity in China during this period, methodological innovations in the field went well beyond its scientific remit. Over time, many of these practices were reimaged and rearticulated to meet the specific demands of China's nation-building project. Fieldworkers became "frontier workers," while the objects of their study and intervention were cast as "border people" (*bianmin*), both terms revealing the intimate links between research, intervention, and the unravelling of the Chinese geobody. Chinese scholars argued for the creation of a new discipline of "frontier administration studies," a discipline they considered unique to China even while it incorporated the experience of British and American mandates and Soviet minority policies. As those in the field reached out to their non-Han Chinese counterparts, seeking to foster the growth of new citizens on China's frontier, fieldwork itself became an act of civic duty.

RECENTRING MODERN CHINA'S FRONTIER

Fieldworkers and their experiences on the frontier challenge many of our assumptions about nation building in China. Many scholars have tied ideas of race and anti-colonial struggle, instrumental in creating and mobilizing new forms of Chinese identity, to an understanding of the nation mediated by experiences of modernity in cities. While Peter Zarrow focuses on the new forms of citizenship and sociability emphasized in textbooks and Eugenia Lean emphasizes public emotions, both ultimately imagine China through an urban lens.² Scholars who shift away from this urban focus have noted the importance of rural China to visions of the nation: Margherita Zanasi, for example, examines a vision of modernity that sought to reorient China's economy away from the treaty ports by integrating the rural world into a unified industrialized nation.³ More recently, Kate Merkel-Hess has argued that the ideas of social reformers venturing

into China's countryside contributed to a distinct form of rural modernity.⁴ It requires another leap of understanding to move beyond cities and villages to see the frontier in its own right as a cornerstone of Chinese modernity. But it is important to recognize, as did scholars at the time, that the frontier was a key piece in China's nation-building puzzle, closely interconnected with other modernities in urban and rural settings.

A second group of scholars takes a different tack, critically examining the degree of influence of the centre over China's border areas.⁵ Victor Zatzepine's study of the Amur River frontier between Russia and China focuses on the local dynamics between indigenous groups and settlers and the hybrid society that emerged.⁶ On the other hand, Joseph Lawson's study of the Liangshan mountainous region in China's southwest presents us with a complex picture of frontier violence, with the state as a constant disrupting factor in a precarious order upheld by Han settlers and Nuosu communities.⁷

This book owes much to such studies, but by no means seeks to remove China's political centre from the picture. Although fieldworkers were characterized by their long stays in the region, they were not settlers but intermediaries. As they moved between the frontier and the centre, both their work in the field and their visions of the nation they sought to build were shaped and mediated by their experience in both worlds.

Scholars who have examined nation building on China's frontier tend to approach it from both a state and a party perspective, emphasizing the ideological exchanges between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (GMD). James Leibold focuses on the discursive strategies produced by Chinese intellectuals and party officials striving to incorporate borderland territories into a new Chinese geobody. Xiaoyuan Liu, Hsiao-ting Lin, and Justin Jacobs also deal with official CCP and GMD policies and shed light on the similarities between both parties in their respective frontier policies.⁸ This book seeks to question the monolithic nature of the state-sponsored project by underlining the complexities and identities of those actors working in the field, such as Christian missionaries, social scientists, and students. While some of these worked hand in hand with the state, others directly challenged official policies, seeking to further their own imaginings of the nation. Their ambiguous position was a direct consequence of a weak political centre that felt obliged to devolve power to those in the field, with little control over how (or for whom) it was exerted.

Fieldwork in China, and specifically in its borderlands, has also become the focus of a number of works in recent years. Many of these works have

examined the tensions between Western scholars and their Chinese collaborators that were played out in the field.⁹ Others have persuasively shown how particular disciplines entering China during the Republican period led to the creation of new ideas of the nation and the emergence of an indigenized science.¹⁰ Yet no single discipline can encompass the complexities that China's frontier posed to those who ventured into the field. This book seeks to tell another story: one that examines how scholars built their own understanding of the frontier by creating new bodies of knowledge and field methods mediated by their own beliefs in scientism, religion, and (inter)nationalism.

It is also important to consider scholarship in the PRC that is designated as a distinct field under the name of "frontier studies" (*bianjiangxue*). *Bianjiangxue* is characterized by its nationalist approach and strict adherence to a teleological process describing the formation of the country's present multi-ethnic nation-state. Emma Teng has even argued that it serves "as a pre-emptive defence against both internal and external pressures for decolonization of the former Qing territories by promoting the ideology of 'national unification' at home and abroad."¹¹ Despite their nationalist overtone, recent works focusing on frontier history have provided important contributions to our understanding of the Republican period (1912–49). Wen Chunlai's ethnographic account of non-Han indigenism in China's southwest provinces during this period provides new voices to a story that is usually dominated by the Han.¹² On the other hand, Wang Hongliang's work on the emergence of "frontier administration studies" enables us to understand how particular bodies of frontier knowledge and politics interacted as a result of the Manchurian crisis of 1931.¹³ Both works account for the particularities of the period this book focuses on, characterized by a sense of impending crisis and massive transformations.

CHINA'S FRONTIER QUESTION: 1919–45

The period between 1919 and 1945 was critical to the shaping of China's frontiers. This is not to deny the impact of earlier global forces; during the late nineteenth century, "nationalism and imperialist commercial interests" certainly left an enduring mark on policies and identities in China's border regions.¹⁴ Yet the intensity of change in the early twentieth century was remarkable. In the space of a mere quarter of a century, China faced an unprecedented number of crises that prompted its citizens to seek a radical reunderstanding of its frontier areas. Conflicts and war during this

period enabled a series of “frontier passages” for each of the actors studied in this book, setting them on the path to a concrete, unique encounter with China’s border regions.¹⁵

The starting point of this story lies, inevitably, in the aftermath of 1919 and the intellectual outburst of the May Fourth Movement. Smarting at the humiliation of Chinese diplomats at the Paris Peace Conference, and by the failure of the United States to defend Wilsonian principles or China’s right to self-determination, student protesters denounced the Allied betrayal of China and the spinelessness of the Chinese government. A wave of protest movements across Asia sought to redress the injustices and asymmetries of a Eurocentric world system by proposing radical alternatives that envisaged a new regional order.¹⁶ The May Fourth Movement “helped inform the emergent post-First World War global environment of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist political and cultural revolutions.”¹⁷ Inside China, it prompted deeper questions about national identity and culture that would shape the language and methods of political action for decades.¹⁸

China’s frontier question was intimately bound up with the injustices denounced so vehemently at home and on the international stage. The ongoing sense of crisis was intensified by the Japanese annexation of Manchuria in 1931. Facing imperial aggression at its borders, China instituted a number of campaigns that sought to both mobilize and educate society about the dangers posed by the weakening of its frontiers.¹⁹ But those who turned their attention to the frontier had many different motivations. Young students keen to address injustice and inequality tackled the geographical and cultural chasms between the modern city and its peripheries by venturing into the field and engaging with the “masses” inhabiting these regions. During the 1920s and ’30s, “Going to the people” would in effect become a popular slogan that shaped new practices in the field and the emergence of folklore and community studies.²⁰ As David Faure reminds us, the young students who ventured into villages were “never only on a fact finding mission.”²¹

The Nationalist Revolution (1925–27) proved to be a pivotal moment in China’s search for national unification, although it was also a harbinger of the civil wars to come. As in 1919, anti-imperialist sentiment was critical, and would play a fundamental role in defining the position of the GMD vis-à-vis the world, as well as its relationship with non-Han communities in its outlying territories. Not only was the old five-colour flag scrapped and replaced with one highlighting the pivotal role of the GMD in bringing about national unification but the GMD’s new attitude was

also enshrined in the term it used to describe oppressed nations under the yoke of imperialism: *ruoxiao minzu* (small and weak races).²² The term helped define the party-state's role in advocating the liberation and support of its own minorities under the threat of foreign powers.²³ Also significant was the ideological legacy of Sun Yat-sen. Although derided by critics for his lack of consistency, his Three Principles of the People (nationalism, democracy, people's livelihood) and support for "racial equality" (*minzu pingdeng*) would become enshrined as a GMD canon, yet remained open to wide interpretation of both their meaning and implementation. In both cases noted above, the term *minzu* would be a central focus of this discourse that attempted to draw common ties between the Han and the non-Han peoples. Although the GMD would for the most part adhere to a biological understanding of the term as "race," over time Chinese scholars would debate its significance and composition on the grounds of culture and self-identity.²⁴ Sun's vision for China's territorial frontiers and its inhabitants was laid out more clearly in his *Outline for National Reconstruction (Jianguo dagang)* in 1924, which called for a paternalistic intervention by the state to foster welfare and development in these regions.²⁵ "Reconstruction" (*jianshe*) arguably became one of the most influential terms in political discourse during the Republican period, a malleable blueprint that touched on every aspect of the nation, ranging from the economy, culture, psychology, and religion to the countryside and, of course, the frontier.

During the Nanjing Decade (1927–37), the GMD party-state launched a series of initiatives in the name of reconstruction, addressing the frontier question.²⁶ It recruited non-Han elites into its bureaucratic apparatus and launched a number of campaigns to develop its border areas, including *Xibei kaifa* (Open and Develop the Northwest).²⁷ While the results were mixed, we should not underestimate the impact and ubiquity of Sun's reconstruction scheme during this period. Remote provinces in China's southwest under the control of regional militarists such as Liu Wenhui would reinterpret Sun's blueprint to suit to their own needs and ends. Those venturing into the field during this period also invoked Sun's principles, seeking to accommodate his principles and values within their own work.

The final cataclysmic event of this period was the War of Resistance against Japan (1937–45), which prompted an unprecedented number of people to forge their own frontier passage from areas occupied by the Japanese into either the GMD's stronghold in the southwest (Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces) or the Chinese Communist Party's base in Yan'an

(Shaanxi Province). Factories and universities were dismantled and re-located to China's interior, exposing workers and scholars to new landscapes and people.²⁸ During this period of crisis, China's frontier regions took on a still more heightened sense of importance, for now they were seen as critical to the survival of the Chinese nation. The training and recruitment of civilians as frontier workers in the field was now underpinned by one driving mission: to harness the resources of the frontier and the loyalties of its peoples to China's war effort. Yet for those in the field who mostly came from China's cities, how to reach out to those living in China's border areas in such a harsh environment would remain a constant problem.

LOCATING THE FIELD

This book focuses on the work carried out by these different actors along particular areas of the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, located along the eastern borders of the Tibetan plateau. The geography and ethnic diversity of these areas contrasted sharply with the agrarian world of the Han Chinese population inhabiting China proper (*neidi*).²⁹ The neat division between these two worlds, however, does not accurately reflect the complex interactions and struggles that took place in these areas. Located on the margins of empires, these regions were historically made up of a number of smaller polities that interacted among themselves at many levels.³⁰ Studies on borderlands in Asia have proposed different frameworks for understanding the spatial and political dynamics shaping these regions. Concepts such as Zomia have sought to emphasize the wider networks connecting highland Asia, with important implications for state-society relations in these regions.³¹ While James Scott has argued that societies here had traditionally subverted the reach of the state until the mid-twentieth century, Mandy Sadan argues that these regions should be seen as pluricentral borderworlds where local, regional, and global relationships shaped the political identities of their inhabitants, such as the Kachin in the case of Burma.³²

Many of these approaches are indeed relevant in understanding the dynamics of the areas studied in this book. The pluricentral nature of these borderlands was important in defining identities along with shifting political loyalties as different imperial centres intervened over time. Labrang Monastery in the Tibetan region of Amdo was a good example of these dynamics, located in a "contested Tibetan environment on a geographic, social, political, ethnic, and religious frontier."³³ Successive regional and

imperial centres, led by Tibetans, Mongols, and Manchus sought to establish their dominance over the Tibetan Buddhist monastery, which was founded in 1709. In spite of these attempts, the moral and legal legitimacy of local lamas was strong enough to consolidate the monastery's control over its vast properties, which expanded into Qinghai Province and northern Sichuan.³⁴

Continuing down the map, we reach the area of northwest Sichuan, another important contact zone caught between expanding Tibetan and Chinese worlds. Border cities here, such as Songpan on the Upper Min River, located 250 kilometres from Chengdu (Sichuan's provincial capital, discussed below), took travellers around eleven days to reach.³⁵ Many Han Chinese settlements here (including Songpan) originally took the form of garrison cities but remained a minority population until the establishment of the PRC.³⁶ The many valleys that shape this region were instrumental in shaping local identities, which did not always have a fixed geographical point.³⁷ In the eyes of the Han Chinese, however, these groups were regarded as mostly Tibetan (*fan*) and in later Qing imperial times as Qiang and Jiarong (Gyalrong).³⁸ The degree of Tibetization or Sinicization would vary according to each group's geographical location in the region.

Further west, the region of Kham, with its many independent polities, presented its own challenges to both Tibetan and Chinese attempts to exert religious and political influence, respectively. The strong cultural influence of Tibet in this area by no means translated into direct control by Lhasa. In 1727, a sandstone stele established by the Qing at a pass in the Ningjing Mountains sought to demarcate those territories, with those east of the stele coming under Sichuan's jurisdiction. This further undermined Tibetan claims to temporal authority in this part of the region.³⁹ Despite the symbolism of Qing rule embedded in the stele, Qing authority over these polities was not direct either. Echoing a similar practice along many other border regions in the southwest, the Qing relied on the indirect rule of "native chieftains" (*tusi*), while Lhasa continued to exert spiritual influence on Kham's monasteries by appointing abbots and training monks.⁴⁰

The limits of Qing authority could also be observed in those frontier areas located between southern Sichuan and northern Yunnan. Here lay the mountain ranges known as Liangshan, where constant warfare took place between Han settlers and the Nuosu inhabitants.⁴¹ As with other areas in China's southwest, the divide between mountains and lowlands was an important signifier of local identity and defined power relations at many levels. The Nuosu living in the Greater Liangshan area were a

dominant presence, leading Western explorers in the nineteenth century to call it “Independent Lololand.”⁴²

Cities also play an important role in this book, as sites of mediation and translation between fieldworkers and their audience. Not only did urban media in Shanghai and Nanjing play a role in disseminating their findings but study societies in many cases emerged from these hubs, seeking out the frontier as a source of debate and action. Central to this work, however, is the city of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. Despite its provincial status and remote location in relation to China’s coastal cities, the city was receptive to the many urbanistic trends reshaping cities across Asia during this period.⁴³ Yet precisely because of its location it was able to keep China’s aspiring political centres at bay for most of the early twentieth century. Chengdu was unique in other respects. In contrast to other cities, it would play a unique role as a gateway city between the two worlds noted above: the Han agricultural world and the Tibetan highlands. The encounter of these two worlds would play out in visible ways for their residents. Nuosu elites, for example, studied at Chengdu’s military academy and the missionary West China Union University.⁴⁴ Trade between farmers and herders took place in the city, and salt and Tibetan medicinal goods made their way to other cities in Sichuan such as Chongqing.⁴⁵ Every winter, Tibetans and those from mountain areas in west Sichuan would visit the city, a constant reminder of its particular frontier status.⁴⁶

Chengdu was also important as a gateway for many of those venturing to China’s frontier for the very first time. For those visiting China’s interior, it provided a window into the Tibetan world as travellers from around China and the world flocked to the West China Union University’s museum to enjoy its ethnographic exhibitions.⁴⁷ Missionaries based in Chengdu would leave every summer for west Sichuan and the Xikang region to carry out fieldwork. Wartime refugee students would later follow in the footsteps of the missionaries in what would become a rite of passage as they stepped into the world of exploration and fieldwork.

During the wartime period, refugees escaping the Japanese occupation made their way into southwest China’s provincial cities, such as Chongqing (Sichuan), Kunming (Yunnan), and Guilin (Guangxi). With the influx of refugee students and academics, these cities saw a brief flurry of scholarly activity that transformed them into important intellectual hubs.⁴⁸ Chengdu was no exception, becoming a scholarly hub for Christian missionary colleges that relocated there seeking refuge. Alongside Chongqing, the nation’s wartime capital of the GMD, Chengdu would acquire the status of China’s secondary capital (*peidu*) for the remainder of the war. Given its privileged

geographical and political position, it became a strategic hub for frontier studies, welcoming both Chinese and foreign scholars working in the field.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The five chapters of this book are divided into two main sections, focusing on the prewar and wartime period, respectively. Each chapter takes the reader through the multi-layered lives of those working on this particular region of China's southwest frontier. [Chapter 1](#) introduces the reader to the region of Kham, providing a brief overview of the late Qing efforts to develop and study the region in light of British expansionism in Tibet. It then focuses on the role played by scholars recruited by militarist Liu Wenhui as part of his 24th Chuankang Frontier Defence Battalion. The blueprints laid out by this young generation of Chinese agriculturalists were pivotal to a new understanding of how Chinese citizens should relate to this new space and geography of the frontier.

[Chapter 2](#) discusses the role played by missionary explorers during this same early period by looking at the fieldwork and studies carried out by the West China Border Research Society. Despite being foreigners on Chinese soil in the eyes of many, missionaries claimed a unique attachment and presence in the region, unlike their Han Chinese counterparts. This, they argued, enabled them to be true pioneers in the field. The challenges posed by nationalism after 1927 are then discussed, including how they impacted the missionaries' position in the field.

[Chapter 3](#) takes the reader to the urban centres of Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing, discussing the prominence of the frontier studies as both spectacle and an object of study during the 1920s and 1930s, a phenomenon I call "frontier fever." After portraying the anxieties of many Chinese citizens against the backdrop of the Manchurian (Mukden) Incident of 1931, it discusses the role played by the mass media, and how travel writing emerged as a legitimate genre of fieldwork to help push back against imperialism and build sovereignty in China's frontier areas. Among those discussed is photographer Zhuang Xueben, whose travels into the region of Kham caused a great stir among urban audiences along the coast.

The outbreak of war against Japan in 1937 dominates the rest of the story told in [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#). [Chapter 4](#) starts with an overview of the War of Resistance and the impact of mass mobilization as factories and civilians made their way to the frontier. It then focuses on the wartime mobilization of Chinese social scientists and discusses their accidental new

focus of work in the frontier as a means of serving both the state and their own research agendas. Finally, [Chapter 5](#) examines another experience in the field – that of student volunteers who took part in new modes of fieldwork that incorporated surveys and service as the means of building citizens along the frontier.

By following the journeys of these individuals, this book reveals an intricate network of transnational connections and global parallels with ongoing colonial enterprises shaping the world during this period. In doing so, it challenges the exclusively nationalist rhetoric commonly associated with this period. It is based on a series of archival discoveries from institutions around the world – the British Library, London School of Economics, Rockefeller Foundation, Sichuan Provincial Archives, Smithsonian Institution, and Divinity School Library at Yale University – that expose and reconnect the transnational lives and intersecting networks of missionaries, Chinese institutions, and individuals working on China's southwest frontier. This book ultimately aims to show how their careers echoed the intense process of internationalization that China was undergoing, and in so doing places China's policies toward its non-Han population within a global context of the internationalization of colonial policies supporting the welfare and development of its subjects. Encounters in the field produced networks that linked these actors to both the Chinese state and communities across the world engaged in debates over the future of minorities and contested border areas.

Frontier fieldwork had many different meanings for those taking part in this enterprise. Some saw it as a battlefield against superstition and imperialism, others as a battle against injustice and racism. Regardless of their position (and none of these were mutually exclusive), self-discipline and a new understanding of one's own identity were upheld as desirable outcomes. Fieldwork in this respect was both an intellectual and an affective experience. Empathy, rather than detachment, was encouraged in order to maximize the results of participants' work on China's frontier. Inevitably, these practices led to larger questions of self-identity and to both the questioning and legitimization of asymmetries of power between observer and observed.

Many of the traits described above can be directly attributed to the influence of anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski. Malinowski's fieldwork methods, which encouraged direct engagement with subjects of study over a long period of time, would shape the discipline of anthropology for generations. But fieldwork heroics were also an important part of this

landscape. Here too Malinowski would consistently emphasize the importance of physical endurance and suffering as virtues of the fieldworker.⁴⁹

In the Chinese context, Malinowski was only one among many sources defining the methods and character of fieldwork on the frontier. Underlying the approaches followed by those studied in this book was the embrace of a missionary archetype whose conduct and devotion to their cause were worthy of emulation.⁵⁰ Loathed and praised by many in China, the missionary had much to offer fieldworkers venturing into the Sino-Tibetan borderlands.

Missionaries in China's border areas during this period would be portrayed by local officials as rivals in the field whose example would often put their Chinese counterparts to shame. In the early twentieth century, Zhao Erfeng, the frontier commissioner of Kham, shamed his own subordinates by invoking the missionary model. He chided his officials for their lack of effort in setting up schools:

Even though the military situation is now only beginning to be settled, missionaries from various countries have already been coming to Kham one after another. *If even the foreigners do not fear danger and distance and set themselves the task of quickly establishing missions, how can there be any excuse [for us] to leave [the Khampas], who belong to our country as its children and subjects, abandoned without proper instruction?*⁵¹

But there was more to this that could be gauged from the experience of missionaries for Chinese fieldworkers. Amy DeRogatis has used what she calls “moral geography maps” to describe the missionary experience in the American frontier, noting that for missionaries, the frontier's harsh environment “also provided an arena in which to face physical obstacles that would lead to spiritual gains.”⁵² In China, braving harsh and alien environments in the field would lead to similar rewards – character building and physical strength deemed vital for the existence of the nation.⁵³ In 1922, the China Continuation Committee published its exhaustive survey of Protestant missionary stations in China.⁵⁴ A section devoted to “Work among Tibetans” noted that in Labrang, one of the main difficulties was “the food question” in that “the food of the Tibetans is such that for a foreigner it is very hard to partake of, and still harder to digest. And yet the itinerating missionary in this district has to eat it, for if he does not, he greatly offends his host and gets no opportunity to preach the Gospel.”⁵⁵ Twenty years later in wartime Sichuan, Chinese scholars citing the missionary example

issued the same warnings to their students who were about to venture into the field. Adapting to local customs, long-term permanence in the field, and learning local languages – these were all traits of the missionary enterprise that offered valuable lessons for a new generation of Chinese fieldworkers embarking on their own secular mission of saving the nation (*jiuguo*) on the frontier.

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