

The University of Chicago

**Multi-Level State-Building and Two strategies of Intellectual Subsumption in 1930s
China: Towards a Synthetic Theory for the State-Intellectual Relationship**

By

Di Wu

August 2025

A paper submitted for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts Degree
in the Masters of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

Faculty Advisor: Yueran Zhang

Preceptor: Deirdre Lyons

Abstract

In the 1930s China, a nationwide social movement named the Rural Reconstruction Movement was thriving. The movement was initiated and participated in by multiple groups of intellectuals, who dedicated themselves to China's modernization project by improving rural populations' economic situation and civil consciousness in an independent-from-state stance. However, most of the intellectuals changed their attitudes in 1932, becoming a part of the political reform initiated by the central state. By conducting a comparative analysis between two most influential projects in the movement, respectively held in Hebei Province and Shandong Province, this article explains (1) How did the co-optation become possible, and why in 1932? (2) Why did different strategies of subsumption bring divergent outcomes for intellectuals (some of them gained more financial support and authorization from the provincial state, while others failed to)? In doing so, this article synthesizes two conventional theoretical models in the sociological studies of state-intellectual relationship, proposing a new theoretical framework that pays equal attention to intellectual's collective agency and structural position. Specifically, this article argues that: (1) Intellectuals' theoretical propositions inform their collective agency in a specific historical moment and shape their strategies of subsumption during the co-optation in 1932. (2) The realization of intellectuals' agency was dependent upon the congruence between their agency and the demands of provincial states. When intellectuals' strategies of subsumption helped them satisfy provincial states' state-building demands, they were more likely to take advantage of the co-optation to realize their agency.

Keywords: multi-level state building, state-intellectual relationship, sociology of intellectual, Nanjing decade, Rural Reconstruction Movement.

1. Introduction

In 1929, Yan Yangchu, a US overseas-educated scholar, relocated the educational institution he led—the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement (CAM)—from the metropolis of Beijing to Zhaicheng Village in Ding County, Hebei Province. This move signaled his assertion that the Mass Education Movement (MEM), which primarily focused on providing affordable literacy education to the urban poor, was formally transitioning into the Rural Reconstruction Movement (RRM). In the same year, the Neo-Confucian theorist Liang Shuming announced his participation in the rural reconstruction project initiated by intellectuals of the Village Governance School (VGS). He quickly rose to become the leader of these intellectuals and, alongside them, transformed this project into one of the two most influential projects within the Rural Reconstruction Movement (the other being that conducted by Yan Yangchu and his comrades). Beyond these two, hundreds of other intellectual groups dedicated to RRM emerged across China during this period.

Despite their different backgrounds, RRM intellectual groups shared two shared similar central features: First, they believed that China’s modernization should unfold around rural populations. By improving rural populations’ economic situation and civil consciousness, the RRM served as a starting point for China’s historical trajectory of modernization¹. Second, RRM intellectuals tended to maintain a political stance of relative independence from the state, rejecting state intervention and co-optation into their work. Liang Shuming vividly articulated this position through an intriguing analogy: “The life of the Chinese people is as fragile as tofu, while the Chinese government is as rigid as an iron hook. Regardless of whether the iron hook genuinely intends to care for the tofu, it will inevitably destroy it upon contact.”² This analogy reflects the fundamental tone of the state-society relationship in China during the 1920s-1930s era: with social crises continuously worsening, the state could only relentlessly extract societal resources through taxation, military mobilization, and other means to maintain its crisis

1. Kristen Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

2. Liang Shuming, “Beiyou Zhi Jilue (Notes on a Northern Journey),” in *Liang Shuming Quanjì (Wu) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 5)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 904.

response capabilities. This constant resource drain imposed severe burdens on the people, especially the total populations. Therefore, RRM intellectuals generally avoided becoming part of the state's bureaucratic apparatus for resource extraction while hoping to alleviate the social burden on peasants. However, a pivotal shift occurred in 1932. The central state, the Nanjing Central Government, initiated the county reform (*xianzheng gaige*), which aimed at strengthening provincial states' capacity for vertically administrating the counties and thus improving the capacities of taxation and military mobilization. Instead of insisting on their political-neutral stance, almost all RRM intellectuals embraced the reform and became incorporated. I defined their action as a strategy of *subsumption*, which means intellectuals voluntarily giving up an independent position and becoming compatible with the state's project. The intellectual groups led by both Yan and Liang established specialized institutes to research and implement the county reform, and their group members directly assumed official positions in the county governments. Moreover, the outcomes of the subsumption depended on the specific strategies they adopted. Intellectuals from CAM (led by Yan Yangchu) adopted a weak-embedding strategy of subsumption, only nominally served for provincial states but never significantly contributed to the reform. As a result, they garnered limited resources and support through subsumption and even damaged their own agenda because of the contingent consequences of the subsumption. In contrast, GVS intellectuals (led by Liang Shuming), who adopted a strong-embedding strategy of subsumption (bringing substantial contribution to the state-building agenda for the provincial state), obtained greater resources and support, allowing them to more effectively benefit from the subsumption, advancing their rural reconstruction agenda.

How did the co-optation occur and why did it occur in 1932? Why did different strategies of subsumption bring divergent outcomes for intellectuals? These are the research questions this paper sets out to answer. As demonstrated in the following sections, two conventional approaches in sociological studies of the state-intellectual relationship fail to address my questions: (1) Dependence-independence model excelled at analyzing the intellectuals' structural position and state-intellectuals interaction, but struggles to explain the shifts in intellectual attitudes and internal distinctions due to its teleological

understanding of intellectuals, its static understanding of the state and the state-intellectual relationship³.

(2) The Intervention model fixes this flaw by focusing more on the intellectuals' theoretical orientations. But it fails to combine the structural interaction between intellectuals and the state as it overly focuses on intellectuals' (and often individual intellectuals') knowledge practices⁴. To leverage the strengths of these two approaches and to answer the research questions, this paper adopts a theoretical perspective that synthesizes both conventional approaches. Specifically, I argue that (1) intellectuals acquire specific theoretical orientations through their interactions and knowledge transmission within the intellectual field, which powerfully shapes their agency and action within a particular historical context⁵. Based on their agency, intellectuals autonomously choose strategies of intervention with other social groups and structures within the historical context⁶. (2) The extent to which intellectuals' strategies can help them achieve their own agency essentially depends on the degree to which their subjective intentions and actions meet the emergent structural demands within the historical context. The more they respond to the broader structure, the more likely they can realize their agency. On the one hand, this framework references the neo-sociology of intellectuals' emphasis on the formation and differentiation of theoretical orientations, but it does not stop there; rather, it uses this as a starting point to explore their reciprocal interaction with the broader social context. On the other hand, while this emphasis on the structural position of intellectuals draws on the approach of classical sociology of intellectuals, it simultaneously rejects that approach's reified understanding or teleological assumptions regarding intellectuals, the state, and their relationship.

3. Edward Shils, "The Intellectuals and the Power: Some Perspectives for Comparative Analysis," in *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 3–22; Lewis A. Coser, *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View* (New York: Free Press, 1965); Talcott Parsons, "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines: The Role of the Social Sciences," *Daedalus* 94, no. 1 (1965): 39–65; Zygmunt Bauman, "Love in Adversity: On the State the Intellectuals, and the State of the Intellectuals," *Thesis Eleven* 31, no. 1 (1992): 81–104; Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Belknap Press, 1998).

4. Michèle Lamont, "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida," *American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 3 (1987): 584–622; Robert J. Brym, "Structural Location and Ideological Divergence: Jewish Marxist Intellectuals in Turn-of-the-Century Russia," in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by B. Wellman and S. D. Berkowitz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 359–379; Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, "Politics, Institutional Structures, and the Rise of Economics: A Comparative Study," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 397–447; Neil Gross, "Becoming a Pragmatist Philosopher: Status, Self-Concept, and Intellectual Choice," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2002): 52–86.

5. Patrick Baert, *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

6. Pierre Bourdieu, "Intellectual Field and Creative Project," *Social Science Information* 8, no. 2 (1969): 89–119; Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* (Stanford University Press, 1991).

As the rest of this paper will show, the co-optation in 1932 was a negotiated incorporation driven by the severe military crises, specifically the Japanese invasion. The crisis compelled both central and provincial states to seek increased fiscal revenue and enhanced military mobilization capacity through the county reform. The reformist tendencies of rural reconstruction intellectuals and their agenda for rural economic development made them suitable partners for the state's goals. In turn, intellectuals recognized the need for state support to achieve their agencies of "saving the nation through their RRM projects" and thus actively participated in the co-optation process. Applying the synthetic theoretical framework proposed in this paper, which emphasizes the interplay between intellectuals' collective agency and emergent structural demands, we can understand the divergent fates of the CAM and VGS intellectuals. The CAM intellectuals, whose theoretical proposition was rooted in a commitment to political neutrality and a "saving the nation through education" agenda, adopted the strategy of *formal subsumption*, maintaining a certain distance from the Hebei provincial state. Despite taking administrative control of Ding County, their actions did not align with the Hebei provincial state's structural demands for increased fiscal revenue and military mobilization. Consequently, their agency realization failed: they received negligible financial support or administrative authorization, leading to conflicts with local elites and ultimately their withdrawal from the co-optation. In contrast, the VGS intellectuals, led by Liang Shuming in Shandong, adopted a *substantial subsumption* strategy. Their theoretical proposition, centered on national salvation through rural reconstruction and the restoration of cultural rule by virtuous intellectuals, informed an intervention strategy that proactively addressed the local state's needs. Specifically, they skillfully integrated military training and self-defense into Peasants Schools, directly contributing to the Shandong provincial state's capacity for military mobilization. This congruence between their intervention strategy and the structural demands in that historical context led to significant agency realization: they secured substantial financial support and administrative authorization, enabling them to expand their rural reconstruction agenda across the province.

This paper unfolds as follows. It first discusses the shortcomings of conventional approaches in the studies of the state-intellectual relationship vis-à-vis my empirical cases and presents a theoretical framework that synthesizes them. It then introduced necessary background information, data and

methodology. Thereafter, the empirical analysis will be presented in three sections. Finally, it ends with a discussion of the thesis' implications for the studies of the state-intellectual relationship, and historical sociology.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Two models of state-intellectual relationship

Current literature offers two conventional models to understand state-intellectual relationship. The first one unfolds around the definition of intellectuals, answering the question of “who they are”, whereas the second one focuses more on intellectuals' propositions and actions, and answers the question of “what they do”. However, it is impossible for either of them to explain the research questions raised by this paper independently.

The core debate within the literature of the Dependence-Independence model is defining the concept of intellectual by addressing the nature of the intellectual-state relationship. Some literature describes intellectuals as scholars whose work involves the expression of abstract symbols⁷, or managers who earn a living in the market through financial knowledge⁸. Their profession situates them as independent individuals not subject to state control, which ultimately makes intellectuals radical critics of official state values and social order^{9,10}, leading them to assume leadership roles in social movements and even revolutionary activities opposing the ruling power. Conversely, other literature contend that intellectuals are fellow travelers with the state, either by undertaking political administration within the bureaucracy or by helping the state maintain its legitimacy through cultural institutions like schools and newspapers¹¹. Since most related debates position intellectuals along a

7. Shils, “Intellectuals and the Power,” 3–22.

8. Daniel Bell, “The New Class: A Muddled Concept,” in *The Winding Passage: Sociological Essays and Journeys* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 144–164.

9. Bauman, “Love in Adversity,” 81–104.

10. Gil Eyal, “Anti-Politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists and the Czech Transition to Capitalism,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 49–92; Alvin W. Gouldner, “The New Class Project, I: A Frame of Reference, Theses, Conjectures, Arguments, and an Historical Perspective on the Role of Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in the International Class Contest of the Modern Era,” *Theory and Society* 6 (1978): 153–203.

11. Collins, *Sociology of Philosophies*; Antonio Gramsci, “Intellectuals and Education,” in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, edited by D. Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 300–322.

continuum of dependence and independence, I summarize this approach as the Dependence-Independence Model¹².

However, as my empirical story will demonstrate, the attitude of rural reconstruction intellectuals toward the state underwent a drastic shift in 1932. Intellectuals broadly abandoned their previous claims of political neutrality and adopted a stance of subsumption. Furthermore, there were differences in the specific strategies of subsumption among intellectual groups. This dynamic change and internal differentiation of intellectual action cannot be explained by the Dependence-Independence Model for two reasons: (1) An implicit premise of this model is that intellectuals live in a stable bourgeois society, which possesses a tradition of free speech and sufficiently stable non-state employers (such as churches, private universities, and the church). This assumption is clearly untenable in 1930s China (and indeed in most non-Western contexts). (2) The model imposes teleological presumptions on intellectuals (e.g., intellectuals' mission to lead revolutions, or their social function to maintain cultural orthodoxy), understands the state as a clearly bounded entity, and fundamentally defines the state-intellectual relationship in a very essentialized and static way¹³. These limitations make it difficult to capture and analyze the subtle interactions of actors in a specific historical context.

The second model emerged and flourished after the "cultural turn" in sociology of intellectual in the 21st century¹⁴. Compared to the Dependence-Independence Model, it does not adopt a mechanical determinism regarding the state and intellectuals, rejecting the notion that intellectuals' actions are determined by objective, external factors like class, power, or financial resources. Instead, it fully considers the role of intellectuals' subjective will. Increasingly, scholars have shifted the core of their debates from how intellectuals exist as an objective category to the generation and impact of intellectuals' creative agency¹⁵. In doing so, their research focuses more on the intellectual's knowledge

12. Merton, Robert K. "Priorities in Scientific Discovery: A Chapter in the Sociology of Science." *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 6 (1957): 635-659; Coser, Lewis A. *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View*. New York: Free Press, 1965; Gramsci, Antonio. [1932] 2000. "Intellectuals and Education." Pp. 300-322 in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected 2000 Writings 1916-1935*, edited by D. Forgacs. New York: New York University Press.; Randall Collins. 1998. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

13. Daniel Bell. [1979] 1991. "The New Class: A Muddled Concept." Pp. 144-164 in *The Winding Passage: Sociological Essays and Journeys*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers

14. Želinský, Dominik. "The sociology of intellectuals in the 20th and 21st century." *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 4 (2020): e12775.

15. Eyal and Buchholz, "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions," 117-37.

practices, such as how their theoretical claims are generated within a historical context¹⁶, and how these claims intervene in a historical context through symbolic expression¹⁷. Following Eyal, I refer to this as the Intervention Model¹⁸.

The problems with this model are: (1) It overly emphasizes the biographical experiences of individual intellectuals, making it difficult to understand intellectuals as collectives. This often leads the analysis into a predicament of being overly specific, even relying on biographical analysis. (2) It excessively emphasizes the contingency of social processes, thereby neglecting the responses (or decisive influence) of macro-social structures and historical contexts on the effectiveness of intellectual intervention. Given these characteristics, this model can adequately answer the first question posed by this paper (Why did rural reconstruction intellectuals accept political co-optation in 1932, and why did they adopt different subsumption strategies?). However, as this paper will show, it cannot address the more crucial second question (Why did intellectuals in Shandong receive more support from the provincial state during co-optation and more effectively achieve the agenda of using political co-optation to serve the rural reconstruction project than intellectuals in Hebei?), due to its missing focus on the broader historical structure.

To sum up, neither the Dependence-Independence Model nor the Intervention Model could solely answer the research questions raised by this article. Therefore, this paper tries to propose a synthetic theoretical framework to provide a complete and accurate answer to the questions. In building up the synthetic framework, I need to extract useful theoretical components from both models as theoretical pillars. First, the Dependence-Independence model provides a rationalistic perspective by studying state-intellectual relationship through the interaction between the intellectuals and state actors. Such

16. Michèle Lamont, "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida," *American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 3 (1987): 584–622; Robert J. Brym, "Structural Location and Ideological Divergence: Jewish Marxist Intellectuals in Turn-of-the-Century Russia," in *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by B. Wellman and S. D. Berkowitz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 359–379; Marion Fourcade-Gourinchas, "Politics, Institutional Structures, and the Rise of Economics: A Comparative Study," *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 397–447; Neil Gross, "Becoming a Pragmatist Philosopher: Status, Self-Concept, and Intellectual Choice," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2002): 52–86.

17. T. Leperlier, "Literary and Political Strategies in a Literary Field: The Case of Tahar Ouettar," *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1032–1048; M. Hauchecorne, "The Spatial Logics of Intellectual Strategies: The Case of the Reception of Rawlsian and Post-Rawlsian Theories of Justice in France," *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1049–1069; Mohamed Amine Brahim and Thomas Brisson, "Strategies of a Transnational Intellectual: Tariq Ramadan and the Project of a European Islam," *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1015–1031.

18. Eyal, Gil, and Larissa Buchholz. "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 117–37

perspective is conducive to the analysis of intellectuals' structural position in a particular historical context. However, this model often falls into a static understanding of state-intellectual relationship for its teleological assumption. Bourdieu's theory on the intellectual field presents perfect example of the model, as it captures intellectuals' structural position both within the intellectual fields and in the interaction between the intellectual field and the political field (the state), while holding the assumption that the state's nature of centralization the intellectual field's inherent insistence on maintaining academic freedom inevitably lead to a struggle for autonomy in the state-intellectual relationship¹⁹. Second, the Intervention model provides a focus on subjectivity and agency, which allows us to precisely depict how intellectuals' theoretical claims and strategies of action intervene in historical events. However, it pays more attention to the knowledge practices of individual intellectuals and at times fails to capture intellectuals' collective agency and structural positions. Baert's positioning theory is a typical representative of this model²⁰. Below, I will illustrate these two theorists' propositions and explain how I extract valuable theoretical elements from them while avoiding their flaws to construct the theoretical framework of this paper.

2.2 Towards a synthetic theoretical framework.

The epistemological cornerstone of Positioning Theory is constituted by speech-act theorists' philosophical discourse upon the "performativity" of language. This philosophical view does not regard language as a mere representation or mirroring of the external world, but rather as something that can actually exert real influence on the external world²¹. Building on that, Baert points out that when intellectuals express their views through the production of books, articles, public speeches, and other intellectual products, they are essentially engaged in "positioning": by expressing their similarities and differences with others, such as other intellectuals, the media, and the state, intellectuals position themselves at a specific position within the social world, and their intervention with the social world occurs simultaneously²². Specifically, Positioning can take two ideal-typical forms: intellectual positioning and politico-ethical positioning. Intellectual positioning primarily situates an agent within

19. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 299–302.

20. Baert, *Existentialist Moment*.

21. *Ibid.*, 163.

22. *Ibid.*, 166.

the intellectual sphere, where they might identify with, defend, and elaborate upon a specific intellectual orientation. Asserting the importance of this orientation often hinge on its originality or intellectual power. This type of positioning can also place the agent and their work within a broader intellectual tradition, connecting them to significant figures in the field, including potential mentors. In contrast, politico-ethical positioning refers to a broader political or ethical stance that extends beyond the strict boundaries of the intellectual realm²³. What is important to my framework is that these two types of positioning are often intertwined and inseparable—especially for intellectuals engaged in humanities and social sciences research who also participate in public intervention. Intellectual activities such as speeches and publications are neither detached from the macro socio-political structure nor unilaterally determined by it. Instead, they are autonomously generated by the intellectuals, reflecting their political stance and ultimately act as intrinsic drivers, powerful tools, and integral components of intellectuals' political actions. In summary, the first theoretical pillar of my framework emerges: in specific historical contexts, intellectuals' theoretical claims and their agency constitute each other and fundamentally shape their action strategies.

In my empirical story, the theoretical proposition of the two groups of intellectuals, determined their reformist approach of political intervention, as well as specific strategies of intervention. To begin with, the reformist political tendency held by both groups of intellectuals made them legitimately qualified to be incorporated by the co-optation, while their fundamental desire of responding to the social crisis through the RRM resulted in their subsumption to the state. Furthermore, the proposition of universal humanitarianism of Yan's group led to it being situated as a politically neutral academic group who dedicated to promoting literacy education, avoiding participating in complicated and vicious political competition. As a result, they showed no passion for becoming part of Hebei provincial state's bureaucratic apparatus, adopting a subsumption strategy which I call *formal subsumption*, only nominally pledged allegiance to the provincial state. The Neo-Confucianist proposition shaped Liang's group's agenda of cultivating well-rounded intellectuals to exert comprehensive paternalistic protection over rural populations. To achieve this agenda, mastering (and utilizing) the state's bureaucratic

23.Ibid., 169.

apparatus became the only path for them to realize their agency. Consequently, they adopted a strong-embedded strategy which I call *substantial subsumption* during the co-optation, contributing significantly to the provincial state's state-building efforts.

Bourdieu's theoretical arguments on intellectuals originate from his theory of *capital* and *field*. Firstly, in his theories, intellectuals' actions are driven by competitions within intellectual fields, such as universities. These competitions involve accumulating various types of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) within the field and transforming them into power²⁴. Secondly, beyond the intellectual field, there exist more interactive fields (economic, political, and other). When intellectuals interact with actors in other fields, their actions are mediated by their position within their own field (i.e., their accumulation of capital). Notably, the above two arguments fundamentally define intellectuals as self-interested and describe their actions as interest-driven, which is contradictory to the first theoretical pillar as I put it before. Thus, they will NOT be adopted by this paper. Finally, what truly constitutes the second pillar of this paper's theoretical framework is that, at specific historical moments (especially moments of crisis that disrupt conventional social order), fields may generate *synchronization* due to their responses to the crisis. When synchronization occurs in a specific manner, it can amplify the effects of actions by actors within different fields, rapidly intensifying the crisis response actions of intellectuals and other actors in a resonant way, thereby producing a series of contingent results. This argument emphasizes crisis as a historical context and the conditions under which intellectuals' actions in such crises exert maximum effect, which leads to the second theoretical pillar of my theoretical framework: in a specific historical context, different fields, due to their external environment and internal structure, generate certain structural demands. For intellectuals' actions to have a profound impact, they must resonate with the structural demands that existed in the social context, thereby mobilizing all potential resources to realize their agency²⁵.

To situate this pillar in the empirical section, I will show how the fortunes of two intellectual groups developed divergently. As mentioned before, Yan's group adopted the strategy of formal subsumption. The problem with this strategy was that it positioned intellectuals structurally external to multi-level

24. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 82–83.

25. Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, 162.

state-building. This manifested in CAM intellectuals' lack of passion for enhancing the military mobilization and fiscal capacity of the Hebei provincial state. Instead, they publicly called for state actors to withdraw military department stationed in Ding County and to reduce local taxation, all in the name of promoting public welfare and local autonomy. In contrast, Liang's group (the GVS) consciously situated their project as part of the state-building process of the Shandong provincial state by adopting the strategy of substantial subsumption. While they also requested tax reductions as well as administrative appropriations, they utilized the organizational networks established by their RRM project to conduct large-scale militia training. This significantly enhanced the provincial state's military mobilization capabilities, providing considerable assistance to multi-level state-building. As a result, CAM intellectuals received very limited support from the provincial state in this co-optation and finally excluded themselves from the co-optation by the Hebei provincial state due to some contingent events and their lukewarm cooperative attitude. GVS intellectuals, on the other hand, benefited from their proactive strategy, receiving sufficient financial support and administrative authorization in co-optation to fully develop their RRM agenda and promote their projects throughout Shandong Province. In conclusion, the ultimate realization of intellectuals' agency, which was promoting China's modernization through the RRM, depended on whether their strategies aligned with the structural demands caused by the intensifying military crisis of the time. In other words, after the moment of crisis intensification in 1932, multi-level state-building had become the most prominent structural demand that overshadowed everything in 1930s China. For intellectuals to gain sufficient social support (especially from the state) to achieve their reformist agency, they had to make a substantial response to this structural demand. In sum, this paper proposes a synthetic theoretical framework that integrates the strengths of both the conventional models about state-intellectual relationship while overcoming their inherent limitations. This framework (which is visualized as Figure 1) rests on two pillars: (1) Intellectuals' theoretical claims and agency are mutually constitutive, fundamentally shaping their action strategies within specific historical contexts. (2) The ultimate effectiveness of intellectuals' agency depends crucially on whether their strategies resonate with the prevailing structural demands of their social environment. By analyzing how intellectuals' chosen strategies either aligned with or diverged from the dominant structural demand of multi-level state-building in 1930s China, this synthetic approach offers a more complete and accurate explanation for the co-optation of RRM

intellectuals, its timing, and the divergent outcomes they experienced. The power of this framework that combines insights into intellectual agency and structural demands will be thoroughly demonstrated in the empirical analysis that follows.

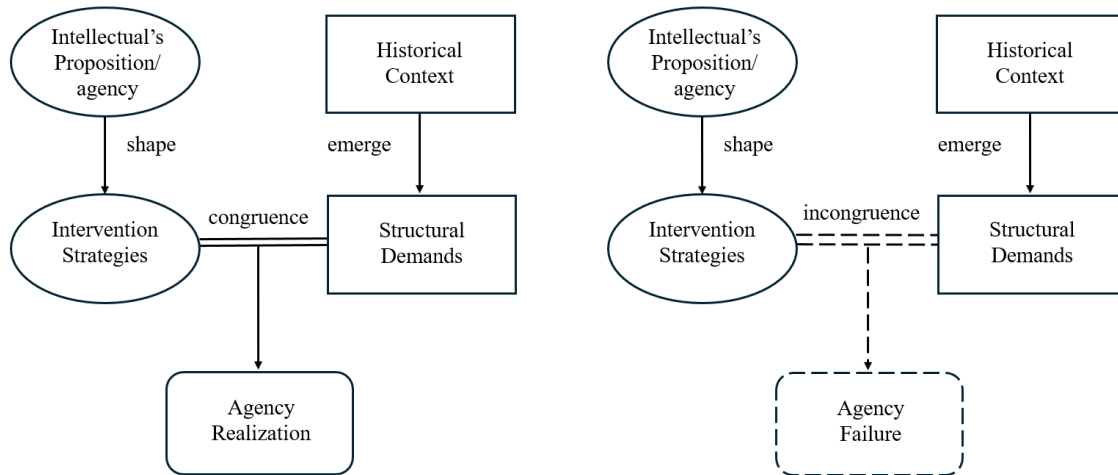


Figure 1

3. Sources and Methods

The sources used in this paper can be categorized as follows:

First, digitized Chinese newspapers of the Republican era. This category includes periodicals organized by rural reconstruction intellectuals, articles written by them, commentaries upon the rural reconstruction movement at that time, and news coverage on wars and other critical political events. These materials are downloaded from three databases, all purchased by the Joseph Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago: (1) Modern Newspapers in China, 1940-1949 近代报纸数据库; (2) Chinese Newspapers and Periodicals, 1833-1949 全国报刊索引; (3) Dacheng Chinese Pre-1949 Periodicals 大成老旧刊全文数据库. They provide insights into public discourse, intellectual debates, and the unfolding of events as perceived at the time.

Second, digitized published books and archives of China's Republican era. Published books primarily comprise works self-published by rural reconstruction intellectuals, including their tax surveys, large-scale social sampling investigation reports, meeting minutes, and general work reports.

Archival materials refer to fiscal archives from Shandong and Hebei provinces, as well as meeting minutes from the Nanjing central government. Access to these materials was obtained from the official website of the National Library of China. These documents offer direct evidence of the intellectuals' empirical work, the financial realities of the period, and the decision-making processes within the central and provincial governments.

Third, works and memoirs of key historical actors. These sources primarily include the published complete works of leading figures among intellectuals, such as Yan Yangchu and Liang Shuming. It also encompasses oral histories and memoirs from other historical actors, such as Huang Shaoxiong, then Minister of Internal Affairs; Han Zihua, son of the provincial elite Han Fujun; and other intellectuals who held various lower-level positions in their rural reconstruction projects. These primary materials provide invaluable firsthand perspectives, motivations, and reflections of the individuals directly involved in the historical events.

Fourth, digital archives from the Rockefeller Archive Center. These archives contain correspondence between the intellectual leader Yan Yangchu and the Rockefeller Foundation, assessment reports by the Rockefeller Foundation on the rural reconstruction movement in Hebei Province, and lists of aid funds provided by the foundation to the RRM. This category of sources uniquely reveals the funding sources and political positioning of the intellectual group in Hebei Province, as well as their strong connections with overseas foundations, offering particularly interesting, clear, and robust support for the conclusions of this study.

This study employs a historical sociological approach, methodologically relying on: (1) Qualitative Content Analysis. The vast collection of textual sources will be subjected to systematic qualitative content analysis, which involves thematic coding, discourse analysis, and event reconstruction. (2) Comparative Historical Analysis. The study adopts a cross-case comparison strategy by examining two distinct empirical cases: the interactions between CAM intellectuals and the Hebei provincial state, and the interactions between VGS intellectuals and Shandong provincial state. By integrating these methods, this research seeks to provide a nuanced and empirically rich account of political co-optation during a critical period of Chinese state-building, illuminating the complex interplay between intellectual agency and historical context.

4. China's Multi-Level State-Building in the 1930s and the Moment of 1932

The process of modern China's state-building began with the advent of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911. As Li Huaiyin suggests in his theory of "regional state-building", China's state-building from 1912-1928 followed a multi-centered path, in which multiple coexisting provincial states simultaneously conducted state-building within their own territory²⁶. Li's theory directly supplements Tilly's theory of fiscal-military state-building, arguing that China's state-building was not predominated by one strong central state as in most Western European states.

This paper basically accepts this theory, seeing modern China's state-building as a process that contains multiple state actors in a competitive relationship. However, it moves beyond by articulating that the two fundamental features of China's state-building in the 1930s are: (1) While it was promoted by multiple provincial states jointly, a relatively dominant central state (the Nanjing central government) took the leading influence. (2) It contains two major dimensions, the fiscal-military dimension and the legitimacy dimension. After going through these features in the following section, I will show that in the moment of 1932, the county reform occurred in 1932 and became a co-optation channel to incorporate the intellectuals.

4.1 The Structure of the Multi-Level State-Building in 1930s China

In 1930, after defeating the rebellious warlord coalition in the Central Plains War, the Nanjing Central Government solidified its ruling position, establishing its relative leadership in the 1930s China's state-building trajectory. Though a loose political alliance has formed state actors kept coexisting in a competitive and nervous condition, because of the multiple military threats they faced: the possibility of a new civil war, the threats of Revolution created by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), as well as the Japanese Army's hostile ambition following the Mukden Incident in 1931. Consequently, both provincial states and the central state continuously built up their military and fiscal capacities for crisis response. Nanjing demonstrated clear advantages in both military-fiscal and legitimacy-building dimensions. Its military-fiscal dominance was evident in its significantly

26. Li Huaiyin, *The Making of the Modern Chinese State: 1600–1950* (Routledge, 2020).

higher military expenditures. For example, in 1932, the central government's fiscal expenditure amounted to 644.8 million yuan, with military spending consuming 320.7 million yuan (49.7% of the total)²⁷. In contrast, while provincial military expenditures were also substantial, they represented a smaller proportion of their respective budgets: Shandong Province's military expenses were 7.2 million yuan (29.7% of its 24.5-million-yuan budget), and Hebei's were 5.4 million yuan (21.7% of its 24.8-million-yuan budget)²⁸. With this series of figures, I articulate that: (1) both provincial and central states allocated an extremely high proportion of their fiscal revenue to military construction to ensure their survival in a highly competitive arms race environment (for reference, the military expenditure of the US only accounted for less than 15% of the federal expenditure). (2) The central state maintained its advantageous position and leadership in this competitive environment through overwhelmingly higher military expenditures compared to the provinces.

Simultaneously, the Nanjing Central State asserted its legitimacy advantage by effectively monopolizing and promoting the revolutionary discourse. It vigorously embraced The Fundamentals of National Reconstruction (*guomin zhengfu Jianguo dagang*), Sun Yat-sen's political manifesto outlining a three-stage theory of state development: military rule (*junzheng*), political tutelage (*xunzheng*), and constitutional governance (*xianzheng*)²⁹. By 1928, Nanjing declared the end of military rule. In May 1931, it promulgated the Provisional Constitution of the Tutelage Period, defining the central government's role in facilitating local self-governance³⁰. This strategic adoption and institutionalization of Sun's principles provided Nanjing with a powerful symbolic framework to assert its leadership. Provincial state actors, who acknowledged Nanjing's leadership after their defeat in the Central Plains War, adopted pragmatic participation in this legitimacy game to maintain their

27 . Jiao Jianhua, *Zhongguo Caizheng Tongshi (Di Ba Juan): Zhonghua Minguo Caizheng Shi (A General History of Chinese Finance, Vol. 8: Fiscal History of the Republic of China)* (Hunan People's Publishing House, 2015), 548.

28 Zhang Lianhong, *Zhenghe Yu Hudong: Minguo Shiqi Zhongyang Yu Difang Caizheng Guanxi Yanjiu (Integration and Interaction: A Study of Central-Local Fiscal Relations during the Republican Period)* (Nanjing Normal University Press, 1999), 202.

29 . Sun Wen, *Guomin Zhengfu Jianguo Dagang (Outline for National Reconstruction by the Nationalist Government)* (Chinese Kuomintang Taiwan Province Executive Committee, 1947).

30 . Party History Research Office of the CPC Central Party School, ed., *Zhongguo Guomindang Shi Wenxian Xuanbian (1894-1949) (Selected Documents on the History of the Chinese Kuomintang, 1894-1949)* (Research and Office of the CPC Central Party School, 1985), 179.

regional control. They took advantage of Sun's definition on the transition from political tutelage to constitutional governance, which centered on the facilitation of local self-governance³¹.

4.2 The moment of 1932 and the county reform

As mentioned before, the fiscal-military building unfolded under the threats of multiple military crises. However, in March 1932, one of the crises rapidly intensified as Japanese and Chinese troops clashed in Shanghai (which is called the Battle of Shanghai). Japanese forces advanced along the Yangtze River, directly threatening the nearby capital of Nanjing. The central state even temporarily relocated the capital to Luoyang in Henan Province to evade the threat of Japanese troops³². In May 1932, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the Nanjing government and the Japanese army. This humiliating military defeat triggered the *county reform*, in which a series of measures were included.

In his speech at the Second National Internal Affairs Conference (1932), which started the county reform, Jiang Jieshi, head of the Nanjing central state, defined the objective of the conference as “strengthening military force through promoting internal affairs.” An important document approved by this conference, The County Reform Act, shows how the reform responded to Jiang's expectations and contributed to the state-building project in two areas: First, county-level fiscal system regulation. The reform mandated the establishment of county government budgets and accounting systems, codified legal revenue sources like agricultural surtax, significantly promoting local governments' ability to expand fiscal revenue from the rural population³³. Second, the strengthening of vertical administrative authority. The Act integrated specialized county-level stations (e.g., police, education bureaus) into direct county government control, consolidating power under the county magistrate³⁴. It also enhanced provincial supervision, as magistrates were directly appointed by the provincial government, with financial support further boosting oversight³⁵. This

31. Sun Wen, *Guomin Zhengfu Jianguo Dagang*, 179.

32. “Queding Xingdu Yu Peidu Didian An (Proposal on Determining the Provisional and Auxiliary Capitals),” in *Zhongguo Guomindang Licix Daibiao Dahui Ji Zhongyang Quan Hui Ziliao (Di Er Bian) (Materials on the Congresses and Plenary Sessions of the Chinese Kuomintang, Vol. 2)*, ed. Rong Mengyuan (Guangming Daily Press, 1985), 156.

33. “Xianzheng Gaihe An (Si) (County Reform Act, Part 4),” *Xin Jiangsu Bao*, December 13, 1932, 5.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

“two-level authorization” model (Figure 2) enabled the central state to strategically empower provincial authorities, granting political autonomy to potential rivals in exchange for cooperation against military threats.

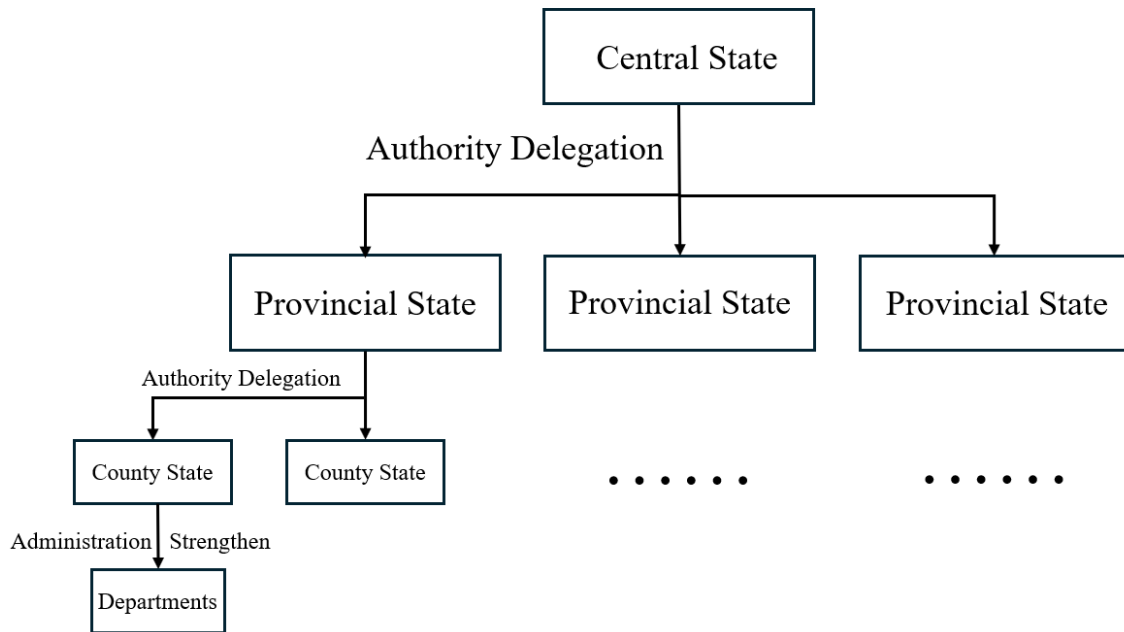


Figure 2, The logic of authorization of the county reform

4.3 Incorporating the Rural Reconstruction Movement

As the reform unfolded in 1932, a channel of political co-optation occurred.

For state actors, it consisted of two fundamental factors: (1) The general reformist tendencies of rural reconstruction intellectuals provided them with a legitimate qualification for co-optation. CAM intellectuals articulated the goal of their RRM project as enhancing the civil consciousness of the Chinese peasantry³⁶. Similarly, VGS intellectuals strove to foster a Chinese-originated, civilized social form by cultivating neo-Confucian intellectuals in organizations like peasant schools³⁷. Though not fully conforming, the reformist rhetoric of intellectuals’ agenda was largely compatible with

36. Yan Yangchu, “Pingmin Jiaoyu de Zongzhi Mudi He Zuihou de Shiming (The Aims, Objectives, and Ultimate Mission of Mass Education),” in *Yan Yangchu Quanji (Yi) (The Complete Works of Yan Yangchu, Vol. 1)* (Tianjin Education Press, 2013), 118.

37. Liang Shuming, “Qing Ban Xiangzhi Jiangxishuo Jianyi Shu (Proposal for Establishing Village Governance Training Institutes),” in *Liang Shuming Quanji (Si) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 4)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 2005), 825.

Nanjing's legitimacy-building demand, forming a basis for the co-optation. (2) The common agenda of rural economic construction advocated by both groups directly met the state's urgent military-fiscal building needs. Before the Internal Affairs Conference in 1932, Huang Shaoxiong, minister of the Ministry of Interior actively reached out to Yan and Liang, seeking their assistance on the reform as autonomous social force³⁸. Later, in his memoirs, Huang admitted that RRM projects, represented by Liang's and Yan's, constituted a considerable constructive force that the government was eager to utilize through the co-optation³⁹.

For the intellectuals, the county reform offered a crucial avenue to leverage state structures and resources, thereby helping to alleviate China's deepening social crises and accelerate its modernization. Despite their prior emphasis on political neutrality or autonomy, intellectuals understood that sustained, large-scale rural reconstruction efforts, aimed at social transformation, required substantial, stable support that only the state could provide. By integrating their projects into the framework of county reform, they sought to access financial backing, administrative authorization, and institutional legitimacy. This allowed them to expand their reach and more effectively implement their agendas—from literacy and civic education to agricultural improvement and local organization—which they believed were essential for strengthening the nation and improving peasant livelihoods⁴⁰. Essentially, the co-optation was perceived as a pragmatic means to achieve their long-held goals of fundamentally improving Chinese society.

In sum, the 1932 county reform represents a triadic political incorporation involving the central state, provincial states, and intellectuals. This argument constitutes a significant historiographic contribution, as it debunks the conventional notion that this was merely a unilateral state-led bureaucratization. As subsequent sections will demonstrate, this co-optation was far from smooth,

38. Liang Shuming, "Women Zai Shandong de Gongzuo (Our Work in Shandong)," in *Liang Shuming Quanji (Wu) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 5)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 2005), 1013.

39. Huang Shaohong, *Huang Shaohong Huiyilu (Memoirs of Huang Shaohong)* (Dongfang Chubanshe, 2011), 234.

40. Yan Yangchu, "Zai Quantu Zhiren Huiyi Shang de Jianghua (Speech at the All-Staff Meeting)," in *Yan Yangchu Quanji (Di Yi Juan) (The Complete Works of Yan Yangchu, Vol. 1)*, ed. Song Enrong (Tianjin Education Press, 2013), 216; Xu Shuren, "Wo Danren Zouping Shiyan Xian Xianzhang de Qianqian Houhou (My Experiences as County Magistrate of Zouping Experimental County)," in *Liang Shuming Yu Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Liang Shuming and Shandong Rural Reconstruction)*, ed. Shandong Sheng Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui (Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991), 97.

marked instead by conflicts, compromises, and contestations, through which we can see the intricate process and divergent outcomes of state-intellectual interaction.

5. Embedding intellectual projects in the state

5.1 The case of Hebei

A Private Academic Organization : The origin of the formal subsumption

After the co-optation moment in December 1932, the Hebei Provincial State established the Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute (HCRRI) in the spring of 1933, serving as an administrative institution integrating the county reform with the RRM. One of its departments, the Experimental Section, was tasked with “testing and revising the plan of county reform by conducting rigorous research on the functions and procedures of county administration⁴¹.” Notably, the head of the Experimental Section concurrently held the position of magistrate of Ding County. In the following three years following the foundation of HCRRI, the position was consistently held by CAM intellectuals. In this sense, since the spring of 1933, CAM intellectuals had effectively taken administrative control over the county government. However, instead of serving as committed bureaucrats, CAM intellectuals maintained a distancing attitude towards the provincial state. In work reports submitted to overseas sponsors, Yan Yangchu repeatedly emphasized the nature of CAM as a “private academic organization,” stressing its cooperative yet non-subordinate relationship with the Ding County government and the provincial state⁴². Based on such claims, I define the strategy of CAM intellectuals in co-optation as *formal subsumption*: intellectuals offered only nominal obedience to the provincial state, lacking substantial alignment with its fundamental structural demands (in this case, provincial-level fiscal-military building).

According to conventional explanations, the root cause of this strategy lies in their activities being primarily dependent on foreign donations⁴³. While CAM indeed raised a considerable sum from the

41. Yan Yangchu, “Ding County’s Rural Reconstruction Experiment,” in Yan Yangchu Quanjì (Yì) (The Complete Works of Yan Yangchu, Vol. 1), ed. Song Enrong (Tianjin Education Press, 2013), 278.

42. Chinese Mass Education Movement, 1927-1932, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records, Educational Interests, Series G, Rockefeller Archive Center, <https://dimes.rockarch.org/objects/LQsRu87HFuvK4NjfEnBts3>.

43. Li Weizhong, *20 Shiji 30 Niandai Xianzheng Jianshe Shiyan Yanjiu (A Study of County Administration Construction Experiments in the 1930s)* (Renmin Chubanshe, 2009), 164.

United States (totaling \$460,000 USD for the project from 1930–1934)⁴⁴, I challenge this explanation because: (1) This substantial donation, disbursed annually under the supervision of the Rockefeller Foundation, ceased in 1934, giving intellectuals ample motivation to seek more stable financial support by serving provincial state-building; (2) Even if the donation had no time limit, utilizing foreign aid is not inherently contradictory to obtaining more stable state financial support. Therefore, I argue that the adoption of the formal subsumption strategy stemmed from CAM intellectuals' training in modern social sciences and their Western educational backgrounds.

Instead, I argue that their reverence for modern social sciences imbued CAM's RRM project with a mission of national salvation through knowledge. Beyond its leader, Yan Yangchu, who held a master's degree from Columbia University, 69 more members who participated in the Ding County RRM project were returned students⁴⁵. The training from the modern academic system led CAM intellectuals to believe that the theoretical categories and academic tools they had acquired in the West were effective means to help (if not save) their rural compatriots. This notion was reflected in the process of the Ding County RRM project: They first conducted a household sampling survey under the direction of Li Jinghan (a sociologist with dual master's degrees from Columbia University and the University of California), gaining a general understanding of the economic and demographic conditions of Ding County peasants⁴⁶. Based on this, they diagnosed four major causes for the lagging rural development in Ding County: ignorance, poverty, weakness, and selfishness (*yu, pin, ruo, si*). The panacea for these issues was education, which CAM had always been committed to. From mere literacy education in 1926, it expanded to three types of education (livelihood, social, and school) by 1933, aiming to improve rural populations' qualities across production skills, civic consciousness, and literacy levels, respectively⁴⁷. Finally, and most importantly, in their design, this RRM project, which centered on

44. Chinese Mass Education Movement, 1927-1932, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records, Educational Interests, Series G, Rockefeller Archive Center, <https://dimes.rockarch.org/objects/LQsRu87HFuvK4NjfEnBts3>.

45. Xue Weiqiang, "Dingxian Shiyān Liuxuēshēng Kaolue (A Study of Returned Students in Dingxian Experiment)," *Xinan Jiaotong Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban)* (Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University: Social Sciences Edition) 21, no. 5 (2020): 54–75.

46. Li Jinghan, *Dingxian Shehui Gaikuang Diaocha (Survey of Dingxian Social Conditions)* (Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005).

47. Yan Yangchu, "Zhonghua Pingmin Jiaoyu Cujinhui Dingxian Gongzuo Dagai (Overview of the Chinese Mass Education Movement's Work in Dingxian)," in *Xiangcun Jianshe Shiyān Diyī Ji (Rural Reconstruction Experiment Collection I)*, ed. Qian Jiaju and Li Zixiang (Zhonghua Book Company, 1935).

establishing an effective knowledge transmission network to enhance the overall quality of the population and fundamentally transform the stagnation of rural areas and even China's modernization process. Notably, the aforementioned agenda was primarily to be carried out by CAM intellectuals and the graduates of these educational programs, which means cooperating with the provincial state was never an indispensable part of the RRM blueprint of CAM intellectuals, not to mention contributing significantly to the structural demand⁴⁸.

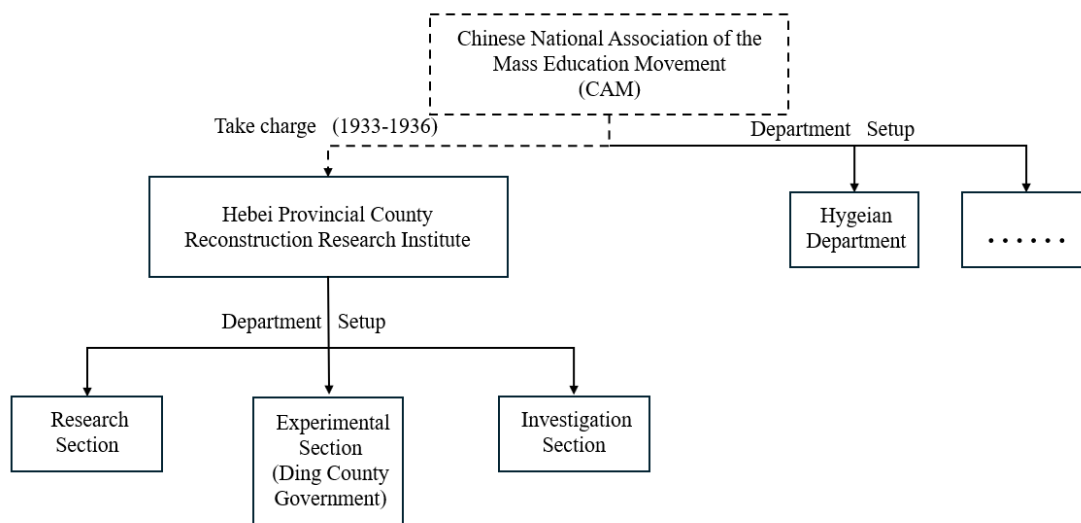


Figure 3, Institutional Settings of CAM intellectuals' project

The formal subsumption

As mentioned, the formal subsumption strategy of CAM intellectuals was characterized by their minimal contribution to military-fiscal state-building and their disregard for provincial administrative tasks when they evaluated them as diverging from their own agenda. This approach positioned them as only nominally aligned with the provincial state's fundamental structural demands. The following two examples enable me to present the tension between CAM and Hebei provincial state vividly.

The first example enables me to present the tension between CAM and the Hebei provincial state vividly. At the founding ceremony of the HCRRI, a representative of the Ding County populace publicly demanded that the Hebei Provincial Garrison, the 51st Army of the National Revolutionary Army,

48. Yan Yangchu, "You Wenhua de Zhongguo Xin Nongmin (The Cultured New Chinese Farmer)," in *Yan Yangchu Quanjī (Dì Yī Juān) (The Complete Works of Yan Yangchu, Vol. 1)* (Tianjin Education Press, 2013), 153.

dismantle its local tax collection branch in Ding County to alleviate financial burdens on the local communities. At the same event, the sitting county magistrate, CAM member Huo Liuding, openly requested that the province allocate the entire future fiscal revenue of Ding County directly to the county government to expand its experimental authority and administrative capacity⁴⁹. These two explicit challenges to the provincial state's taxation-capacity-building agenda immediately created considerable obstacles for the newborn institute in securing the support of the provincial state.

The multiple conflicts witnessed in the scene set the tone for the divergence between CAM intellectuals and the Hebei provincial state regarding fiscal-military building. As mentioned, serving as a crisis-response means, the county reform placed strong emphasis on clarifying tax sources and establishing a modern budgeting system to expand tax revenue. Despite CAM intellectuals' rigorous social surveys on lands and taxes, Ding County's remittances to the provincial treasury did not increase. Taking land tax (*tianfu*), the most important component of provincial revenue contributed by counties, as an example, there was no significant change before and after the CAM formally took over the Ding County government after 1932 (see Figure 4). An obvious yet indisputable fact is that the amount of land tax depends primarily on the total amount of land reported locally and has little relation to whether the county magistrate is a local elite or a foreign-educated intellectual. Moreover, although Ding County's land surtax (*tianshui fujia*) showed greater flexibility in its rate, it was primarily used to feed the operational expenses of the county government and had no direct contribution to the fiscal-military building of the provincial state. What's more, beginning in July 1933, following the start of county reform, funding for the local militia was officially included as part of the surtax on land tax. This led to an almost twofold increase in the surtax burden on Ding County residents, reaching 79,000 yuan on paper. Prior to this change, annual surtax collections in Ding County ranged from 36,000 to 39,000 yuan⁵⁰. Whether tax collection after the increase met expectations remains unclear due to the lack of sources. What is certain, however, is that the tax burden on Ding County's people was extremely heavy, and the political co-optation of the CAM did not result in any significant change in either provincial or

49. Liang Rongruo, "Hebei Dingxian Cangan Ji (A Visit to Dingxian, Hebei)," *Shandong Minzhong Jiaoyu Yuekan (Shandong Mass Education Monthly)* 4, no. 9 (1933).

50. Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, *Dingxian Fushui Diaocha Baogao Shu (Report on Dingxian Taxation Survey)* (1934), 27–37.

county-level taxation. As Huo Liuding, a member of the CAM who was appointed to serve as the county magistrate at the time, recalled in his memoirs, the provincial government did not permit Ding County to impose additional local taxes for implementing reforms, for fear that an excessive tax burden would hinder the collection of standard land taxes to be remitted to the province⁵¹.

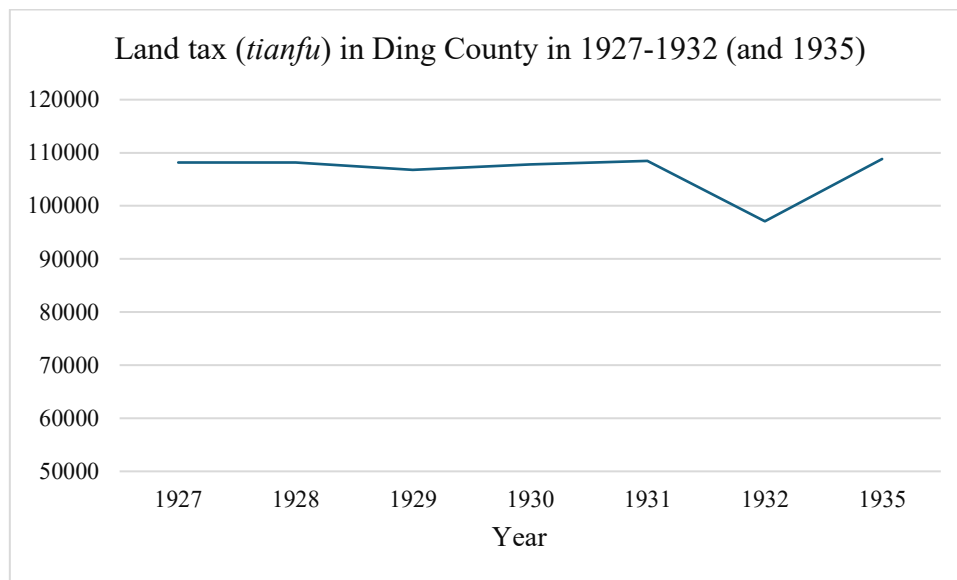


Figure 4⁵²

The second example reveals CAM intellectuals’ resistance to provincial administrative directives. Despite opposing communist ideology, Huo Liuding, motivated by principles of political neutrality and protection of freedom of speech, neither prohibited nor suppressed the communist activities that existed within Ding County. Two CAM staff members who eventually confirmed to have been members of the CCP once used CAM’s propaganda newspapers and lecturing platforms to promote communist revolutionary thoughts. Huo merely offered verbal admonitions during debates with them and did not

51. Huo Liuding, “My Recollections as Experimental County Magistrate of Dingxian,” in *Hebei Wenshi Ziliao Xuanji (Selected Historical Materials on Hebei Cultural History)* (Hebei People's Publishing House, 1983), 50.

52. Data for 1927, 1928, 1929 are cited from Li Jinghan, *Dingxian Shehui Gaikuang Diaocha (Survey of Dingxian Social Conditions)* (Shanghai People’s Press, 2005), 479; Data for 1930, 1931 are cited from Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Institute, *Dingxian Fushui Diaocha Baogao Shu (Report on Dingxian Taxation Survey)* (1934), 27–37; Data for 1932 are cited from Li Jinghan et al., *Dingxian Jingji Diaocha Yibufen Baogao (Partial Report on Dingxian Economic Survey)* (Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Institute, 1934), 415; Data for 1935 are cited from Saito Yasuo, “Hebei Sheng Dingxian de Caizheng (Dingxian’s Finance in Hebei Province),” in *Dongya Tongwen Shuyuan Zhongguo Diaocha Ziliao Xuanyi (Zhong) (Selected Translations of China Survey Materials from Toa Dobun Shoin, Vol. 2)*, ed. Feng Tianyu et al. (Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012), 1144.

resort to any administrative or military measures to curtail their activities⁵³. In 1933, when the provincial state ordered Huo Liuding to arrest Zhang Shengsan, the head of Ding County Vocational School and a key Communist Party leader in Ding County, Huo secretly dispatched a CAM staff to warn Zhang in advance, encouraging him to flee, and finally reported back to the provincial government that the arrest attempt had “failed⁵⁴.” This stance ultimately led to Ding County becoming a center of communist organizing and being classified by the provincial policing authorities as a “Red Zone⁵⁵.”

These two stark examples collectively underscore the manifestation of CAM intellectuals’ subsumption strategy, and its misalignment with the Hebei provincial state’s pressing demands for fiscal-military strengthening and administrative control. Despite their nominal incorporation, CAM intellectuals’ refusal to actively contribute to these core state-building objectives inevitably constrained their access to crucial state resources and ultimately limited the impact and sustainability of their rural reconstruction agenda. The seeming cooperation soon rotted, and ended up being a broken deal.

A Broken Deal

Given CAM’s relatively detached attitude and its failure to secure tangible gains from this political collaboration, the Hebei provincial state gradually withdrew its commitment to the cooperative arrangement. This was manifested in the fact that several of the most significant projects undertaken by CAM after the co-optation—including government institutional restructuring, social surveys, public health initiatives, agricultural cooperatives, and literacy education—received neither financial support nor political authorization from the provincial government. In other words, the political co-optation itself did not facilitate the implementation of the intellectuals’ agendas; rather, in certain respects, it created additional obstacles for intellectuals’ pursuit of their agendas.

At the time of the HCRRI establishment, the Hebei Provincial State had promised to allocate approximately 100,000 yuan annually to support the Institute’s work in social surveys, administrative

53. Huo Liuding, “My Recollections as Experimental County Magistrate of Dingxian,” in *Hebei Wenshi Ziliao Xuanji (Selected Historical Materials on Hebei Cultural History)*, ed. Hebei Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Hebei People's Publishing House, 1983), 55.

54. Ibid., 59; Zhang Zhen, “Magistrate Huo Liuding and His Relationship with the Communist Party,” in *Hebei Wenshi Ziliao Xuanji (Selected Historical Materials on Hebei Cultural History)*, ed. Hebei Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Hebei People's Publishing House, 1983), 62.

55. Yan Shutang, “The Mass Education Movement and Dingxian,” *Independent Review* no. 73 (1933).

reforms, and personnel training⁵⁶. However, fiscal reports from the Hebei Provincial Department of Finance contain no record of any budgetary increase for the Institute. On the contrary, budget items that could have included funding for the Institute—such as construction expenses, education expenses, and administrative expenses—showed reductions rather than increases⁵⁷. According to an investigation into Ding County's fiscal condition, the total funds disbursed by the Hebei provincial government to the Research Institute amounted to only 1,200 yuan—a mere 1% of the amount initially promised⁵⁸. These facts strongly suggest that the Hebei provincial state's financial support for the Institute never moved beyond verbal commitments and was never substantively implemented.

Consequently, CAM intellectuals were compelled to self-finance their Rural Reconstruction Movement (RRM) initiatives. A closer examination of their specific activities after 1933 reveals this reliance on non-state funding. In literacy education, paramount to CAM, programs primarily used existing village school facilities. Their funding came from private donations raised by CAM, surcharges on local land taxes, and contributions from local gentry⁵⁹. Similarly, in public health, focused on promoting facilities and administering smallpox vaccinations⁶⁰, all expenditures were covered by CAM's own hygiene department, which operated independently and was entirely funded by private donations⁶¹. Finally, for agricultural improvement, CAM-promoted cooperatives were financed through loans from urban commercial banks (such as the Bank of China, Jincheng Bank, and Hebei Bank), donations from local gentry, and occasional subsidies from the central government⁶². The improvement

56. "Xianzheng Jianshe Yuan Shangwei Zhengshi Chengli (The Institute of County Administration Construction Has Not Yet Been Formally Established)," *Yishibao (Tianjin)*, April 18, 1933, 6; Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, *Hebei Sheng Xian Zheng Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Gongzuo Gaikuang (Overview of Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute Work)* (1937), 2.

57. Hebei Provincial Department of Finance, *Hebei Sheng Ershier Niandu Caizheng Baogao Shu (Hebei Provincial Fiscal Report for the 22nd Year of the Republic of China)* (1934), 29–37.

58. Author Unknown, Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, Partial Report on Dingxian Economic Survey (1934).河北省县政建设研究院.定县经济调查一部分报告.1934,

59. Author Unknown, Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, *Dingxian Jingji Diaocha Yibufen Baogao (Partial Report on Dingxian Economic Survey)* (1934); Author Unknown, Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, *Hebei Sheng Xian Danwei Shizi Yundong Shishi Fang'an (Implementation Plan for County-Unit Literacy Campaign in Hebei Province)* (1935); Author Unknown, ed. Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute, *Dingxian Nongcun Jiaoyu Shiye (Dingxian Rural Education Affairs)* (1935).

60. Yu Huanwen, "Dingxian Qinian Zhongdou de Jingguo (Seven Years of Vaccination in Dingxian)," *Minjian* 3, no. 15 (1936).

61. Wang Weixian, "'Mofan Xian' Qi Yu 'Shiyan Qu' Qi de Dingxian Xianzheng ('Model County' Period and 'Experimental Zone' Period of Dingxian County Administration)," *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Bao (Journal of Political Economy)* 5, no. 3 (1936).

62. Li Weizhong, *20 Shiji 30 Niandai Xianzheng Jianshe Shiyan Yanjiu (A Study of County Administration Construction Experiments in the 1930s)* (Renmin Chubanshe, 2009), 164.

and dissemination of livestock breeds (Polish pigs) were managed directly by CAM, facilitating procurement and reselling animals to rural cooperatives at cost price⁶³.

The absence of substantial government financial support and political authorization led to a series of contingent consequences, directly triggering conflicts between the intellectuals and local society, thereby seriously undermining CAM's autonomy and ultimate agency.

Upon assuming control of the county government, CAM member and newly appointed county magistrate Huo Liuding discovered that the county's administrative finances were severely strained, with several government departments already behind on salary payments by two to three months. At the onset of the county reform, the provincial government had ordered the Ding County experimental administration to be financially self-sufficient, providing no additional subsidies. Faced with this fiscal dilemma, CAM intellectuals were caught in a dilemma. Increasing the land tax surcharge to fund county-level administration would have violated their public commitment to reducing the burdens on the rural population and was prohibited by the provincial government for fear it would affect land tax revenues⁶⁴. Under these constraints, Huo Liuding turned to the local drug and gambling industries as alternative revenue sources. He dispatched personnel to raid gambling dens operated by Ding County's wealthiest merchants and several salt traders, confiscating gambling proceeds and imposing fines totaling 3,000 yuan, which he then used to build a small road near the county's railway station⁶⁵. Huo's heavy-handed governance offended local elites, who swiftly organized retaliation. Yan Shutang, a member of one of Ding County's prominent families and himself a local intellectual, published a newspaper attacking CAM members as hypocritical and incompetent, claiming that their work in Ding County brought nothing but burdens and disruptions to local residents⁶⁶. In 1934, tensions escalated into a collective petition by local elites demanding that the County Governance Research Institute be relocated out of Ding County⁶⁷.

63. Tang Qiaoshen, "Dingxian Xiang Zhengfu Dui Yu Chuanzhong Gongzhu Zhi Zhuyi (Dingxian County Government's Attention to Spreading Improved Boar Breeds)," *Minjian Banyuekan (Minjian Bi-weekly)* 2, no. 4 (1935).

64. Huo Liuding, "My Recollections as Experimental County Magistrate of Dingxian," 50.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Yan Shutang, "The Mass Education Movement and Dingxian," *Independent Review* no. 73 (1933).

67. "Dingxian Gejie Qingqiu Xianzheng Yanjiuyuan Yishe Tachu (Dingxian Circles Request Relocation of County Administration Institute)," *Huabei Ribao (Beiping) (North China Daily, Beiping)*, October 5, 1934, 4.

The fierce opposition from local elites severely undermined CAM intellectuals' agenda. In 1934, after serving less than one year, Huo Liuding resigned as county magistrate. His successor, CAM member Lü Fu, also held office for less than a year. In 1935, the final CAM-appointed county magistrate, Huo Libai, assumed office and openly abandoned any radical reform agenda, adopting instead the conciliatory slogan: "Respect public opinion and allow the people to rest." In the same year, the County Governance Research Institute proposed the establishment of a County Governance Committee, intended to allow consultation and joint deliberation between administrative departments (education, finance, public security, etc.) and specially appointed local advisors⁶⁸. In practice, this County Governance Committee, incorporated local elites, including landlords and gentry, fundamentally deviating from CAM's original institutional reform vision of streamlining government organs. It also contradicted the policy intention of the county reform aimed at strengthening vertical administrative control between the province and the county, as previously discussed.

In sum, this entire trajectory reflects CAM intellectuals' passive and constrained position within the political co-optation process. Lacking sufficiently strong and sustained support from the provincial state, they were unable to maintain their autonomy in the face of escalating elite resistance. Consequently, their adopted strategy of formal subsumption, rather than facilitating their ambitious vision, ultimately severely undermined their agency of "saving the nation through education" via the Rural Reconstruction Movement project. The forced compromises, such as the establishment of the County Governance Committee which incorporated local elites and deviated from their original institutional reform vision, signify the profound damage inflicted upon their capacity to enact their core mission of comprehensive rural transformation. Their inability to secure state resources and their subsequent entanglement in local conflicts, as detailed above, fundamentally crippled their ability to autonomously pursue and expand the educational and social reforms they believed were essential for China's modernization.

5.2 The case of Shandong

68. Yan Yangchu and Chen Zhushan, "Dingxian Shiyuan Qu Gongzuo Gailue (Overview of Dingxian Experimental Zone Work)," in *Xiangcun Jianshe Shiyuan Disan Ji (Rural Reconstruction Experiment Collection III)*, ed. Qian Jiaju and Li Zixiang (Zhonghua Book Company, 1938).

Village Governance School and Han Fujū

Unlike the CAM intellectuals who emphasized maintaining political neutrality, intellectuals from the Village Governance School (VGS) were not at all hesitant and were fully aware of the importance of support from local authority. Liang Shuming, who later became the most important leader of the school, had already fully recognized this before resolutely devoting himself to the rural reconstruction movement. He originally hoped to conduct his RRM project in Guangdong with the support of the military-political elite Li Jishen. The plan was abandoned when Li Jishen suffered defeat in the internal party struggle and was arrested⁶⁹. In 1929, Liang joined the VGS, which had close ties with Han Fujū, the warlord who then controlled Henan province. With Han's support, they founded the Henan Village Governance Institute (HVGI) to promote the rural reconstruction movement in Henan Province⁷⁰. In 1931, as Han Fujū betrayed his superior Feng Yuxiang during the Central Plains War and aligned himself with the Nanjing central government—thereby gaining Shandong as his sphere of influence—the intellectuals of the Village Governance School also relocated their rural reconstruction fieldwork to Shandong. In a discussion with visiting guests, Liang Shuming clarified that the development of the rural reconstruction movement in Shandong could not rely solely on the attitudes of support from Han Fujū himself, while simultaneously arguing that as long as intellectuals proposed reasonable plans for reconstruction, they would be able to obtain increased support from local governments and even the central government⁷¹.

In the process of the co-optation, GVS intellectuals not only established institutional ties with the provincial state nominally but also forged deeper bonds of shared interests. Liang Shuming once responded to a puzzled assistant's question about the necessity of GVS's cooperation with warlord Han Fujū: "Apart from Shandong, where else in China would our project be allowed to exist in its current form⁷²?" "Liang's compromising attitude suggests he viewed co-optation as a strategic trade-off: VGS

69. Liang Shuming, "Beiyou Zhi Jilue (Notes on a Northern Journey)," in *Liang Shuming Quanji (Wu) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 5)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 904.

70. Liang Shuming, "Henan Cunzhi Xueyuan Zhicai Shu (Statement of Purpose for Henan Village Governance Academy)," *Cunzhi (Village Governance)* 1, no. 9 (November 15, 1929).

71. "Da Hubei Zhengwu Yanjiuyuan Canguantuan Wen (Response to Hubei Political Affairs Research Institute Visiting Group)," *Xiangcun Jianshe Xunkan (Rural Reconstruction Ten-Day Journal)* 4, no. 26 (May 11, 1935).

72. Xu Shuren, "Wo Danren Zouping Shiyan Xian Xianzhang de Qianqian Houhou (My Experiences as County Magistrate of Zouping Experimental County)," in *Liang Shuming Yu Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Liang Shuming and*

intellectuals would consciously contribute to provincial-level fiscal-military building in exchange for financial support and administrative authorization from the Shandong provincial state."

The substantial subsumption

Based on the aforementioned consciousness, VGS intellectuals developed their strategy of *substantial subsumption*, which I define as a strategy where intellectuals, through co-optation, demonstrate a profound and active alignment with the fundamental structural demands of the provincial state. It involves a deep integration of their efforts and goals with the state's core objectives, such as provincial-level fiscal-military building.

Likewise, the strategy of VGS intellectuals unfolded around their theoretical proposition, namely Liang Shuming's theory on rural reconstruction. Liang believed that the root cause of China's rural (and overall) crisis lay in cultural bankruptcy and the absence of organization. He argued that Chinese intellectuals, like their Confucian predecessors during imperial times, should assume the role of omnipotent leaders within rural society—acting as intermediaries between villagers and the state, while exercising moral guidance and cultural education over the villagers. To realize this restorationist ideal, it was necessary to promote, within the territory, an all-encompassing institution that integrated administrative, judicial, educational, propaganda, and military training powers (or functions) at the sub-county level—Peasant School. The primary aim of the institution was to reconstruct the harmonious rural culture and prosperous rural life envisioned by Liang Shuming and his colleagues, led by Confucian intellectuals⁷³. Beyond this main agenda, the Peasant Schools also helped to promote other rural reconstruction projects, such as economic cooperatives, public health services, and agricultural improvement programs.

The implementation of this substantial subsumption strategy by VGS intellectuals became particularly evident after their incorporation into county reform and their authorization to conduct

Shandong Rural Reconstruction), ed. Shandong Sheng Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui (Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991), 97.

73. Liang Shuming, "Xiangcun Jianshe Dayi (General Idea of Rural Reconstruction)," in *Liang Shuming Quanji (Yi) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 1)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 658; Liang Shuming, "Xiangcun Jianshe Lilun (Theory of Rural Reconstruction)," in *Liang Shuming Quanji (Er) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 2)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 345, 363.

construction experiments in Zouping and Heze counties in July 1933⁷⁴. Appointed as county magistrates of both counties, VGS demonstrated great commitment and enthusiasm, suspending activities in two of its three originally parallel rural reconstruction sections (the Research section and the Training section) for one year and sending all available personnel to Zouping and Heze to cooperate with the Peasants Schools in promoting and organizing the reconstruction work in these experimental counties.

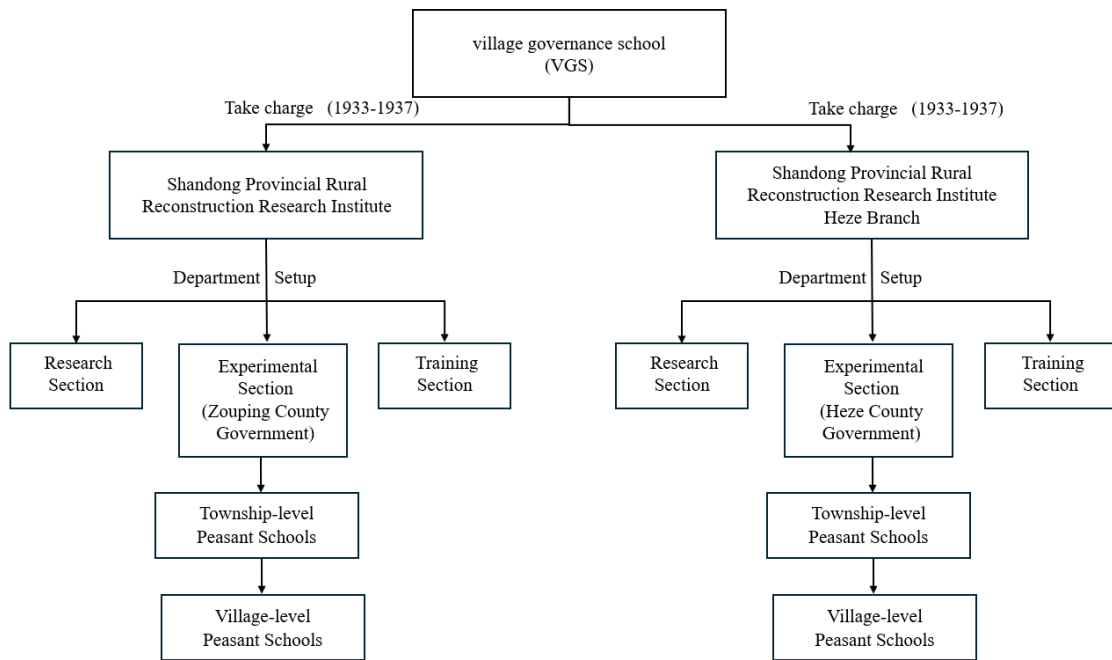


Figure 5 Institutional settings for VGS intellectuals

The work carried out by VGS intellectuals in Heze particularly highlights the distinction from the activities of CAM intellectuals. Heze, an experimental county managed by the VGS intellectuals, provided critical opportunities for alignment between intellectuals and the provincial state, especially during the severe floods in 1933 and 1935⁷⁵. During these two floods, VGS intellectuals transformed the rural reconstruction organizations scattered across townships and villages into effective social mobilization entities. They contributed considerable effort to maintaining water conservancy facilities,

74. Liang Shuming, "Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Gongzuo Baogao (Work Report of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute)," in *Xiangcun Jianshe Shiyang Diyi Ji (Rural Reconstruction Experiment Collection I)*, ed. Qian Jiayu and Li Zixiang (Zhonghua Book Company, 1935).

75. Wang Lin and Yuan Yingying, "1933 Nian Shandong Huanghe Shuizai Yu Jiuji (The 1933 Yellow River Flood and Relief in Shandong)," *Shandong Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehui Kexue Ban) (Journal of Shandong Normal University: Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)* 50, no. 6 (2005): 93–96; Wang Lin, "Zaihuang Jiuji Yu Xinxi Gongkai: Lun 1935 Nian Shandong Huanghe Shuizai Jiuji Zhong de Zhenkuan Shouzhi (Disaster Relief and Information Disclosure: On the Income and Expenditure of Relief Funds in the 1935 Shandong Yellow River Flood Relief)," *Shandong Shehui Kexue (Shandong Social Sciences)*, no. 4 (2023): 124–34.

aiding and providing relief to disaster victims, and preventing bandits from pillaging in the aftermath⁷⁶. These two floods in Heze, as contingent events, provided VGS intellectuals with a perfect opportunity to proactively share the pressures of the Shandong provincial state and to help—or even substitute—for it in fulfilling the national function of providing public goods. Unsurprisingly, this also set the stage for a win-win cooperation between the state and intellectuals.

After approval was granted to conduct county reform in Heze in July 1933, GVS intellectual Sun Zerang was appointed as the county magistrate of Heze, responsible for overseeing the construction and promotion work of the Peasants Schools in Heze. Sun fully utilized the discretionary space provided by the omnipotence of the Peasants Schools to selectively emphasize the "self-defense" component among the four main objectives of the school—namely “politics, education, prosperity, and self-defense”—while advancing regular programs such as cooperatives and agricultural technologies. Under his leadership, the Peasants Schools established village self-defense classes, which functioned as semi-military training bases, with armed training becoming the primary focus⁷⁷. The self-defense classes imposed forced conscription on villagers, primarily targeting wealthier self-cultivating peasants and rich peasants. Initially, the rule was that any household owning more than 100 mu of land had to send one able-bodied young man, along with a firearm, to the Peasants Schools for training. After several sessions, the standard was revised so that households owning between 50 and 100 mu were also required to send one able-bodied young man with a firearm for training. Finally, households with less than 50 mu of land were required to combine two or three households together to provide one person and one firearm for training. It was also stipulated that trainees in the self-defense classes had to be male, aged 18 to 30, regardless of educational background. A few wealthy households, unwilling to participate or fearing military service, chose instead to pay others to attend the training on their behalf or paid a

76. Liang Shuming, “Our Work in Shandong,” in *The Complete Works of Liang Shuming* (Vol. 5) (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 1016. 梁漱溟. 我们在山东的工作. 梁漱溟全集 (五). 山东人民出版社. 1992, 1016; Liang Shuming, “Overview of Recent Work of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute,” *Dagongbao*, 1934. 梁漱溟. 《大公报》. 1934. 山東鄉村建設研究院最近工作概述

77. Fu Lixuan, “Recollections of the Schools in Heze Experimental County,” in *Liang Shuming and Shandong Rural Reconstruction*, ed. Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991), 258–259. 傅理轩. 回忆菏泽实验县的学校. 山东省政协文史资料委员会. 梁漱溟与山东乡村建设. 山东人民出版社. 1991, 258-259

military equipment fee to the Peasants Schools⁷⁸. The self-defense training classes were held simultaneously across various Peasants Schools, with each school enrolling approximately 50 students per session. From June 1933 to June 1935, a total of five training cohorts graduated, producing 4,282 graduates⁷⁹.

The combination of intensive military training and the successfully penetrated organizational structure in the countryside significantly enhanced the local state's capacity for military mobilization in Heze. According to contemporary newspaper reports, in 1934, even though Heze County had only just begun its armed training program, it was already capable of mobilizing an armed force of 4,000 men within eight hours, drawn from over 1,800 villages across the county. As the training expanded and the Peasants Schools grew, this number only increased. Each self-defense training class lasted four months. Each township would organize one to two sessions per year, with class sizes ranging from 30 to 200 trainees. At that time, Dongping Township, which was considered one of the larger townships with over 800 hectares of land, organized seven training sessions, each with over 100 trainees, resulting in a total of approximately 900 young and able-bodied peasant trainees. Across the 21 Peasants Schools in the county, most organized seven training sessions, and the total number of villagers who received military training across the county was no fewer than 10,000⁸⁰. According to the recollections of Han Fujū's son, Han Zihua, these militias were later reorganized by Han Fujū during the Anti-Japanese War into a brigade and were eventually even integrated into the Central Army as artillery troops under He Yingqin⁸¹. I never found other evidence to corroborate this claim, but what can be confirmed is that Sun Zerang and other VGS intellectuals regarded the military training in Heze as a means to help the local state harness the diffuse military resources and defense capacity embedded in the rural population, serving, if necessary, as a reserve force for the regular army⁸². In terms of practical outcomes, villagers

78. Ibid.

79. Sun Zerang, "Heze de Xiangcun Ziwei (Rural Self-Defense in Heze)," *Jiaoyu Yu Minzhong (Education and the Public)* 9, no. 4 (1939), 28.

80. Fu Lixuan, "Recollections of the Schools in Heze Experimental County," 258–259.

81. Han Zihua and Zhou Haibin, *Wo de Fuqin Han Fujū (My Father Han Fujū)* (Zhonghua Book Company, 1993), 50.

82. Liang Shuming, "Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Ji Zouping Shiyān Xiān Gongzuo Baogao (Work Report of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute and Zouping Experimental County)," in *Liang Shuming Quānji (Wu) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 5)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 582.

who received this military training at least acquired the autonomous capacity to defend their localities against bandit and roving marauder incursions⁸³.

A win-win deal

The actions of VGS intellectuals in Shandong skillfully catered to the local state's state-building demand to enhance military mobilization capacity. As a result, they secured dual support in terms of both financial resources and administrative authorization, which in turn allowed them to largely implement and expand their own programs. By meeting the needs of the state, they were able to maintain a degree of autonomy.

In terms of financial support, at the initial stage of being incorporated into county reform, as Liang Shuming wrote in 1934, since VGS intellectuals joined the county reform program in July 1933, the amount of tax revenue remitted to the provincial treasury, the administrative funds allocated from the provincial treasury, and the land tax surcharges collected from local society in Zouping and Heze counties had not changed as a result of the reform. This left the intellectuals feeling financially constrained, as they were required to accomplish more with the same amount of resources⁸⁴. However, perhaps impressed by the outstanding contributions made by VGS intellectuals during the 1933 flood relief efforts, the local state began to deepen its cooperative relationship with them: in July 1934, Zouping and Heze were allowed to retain 30% of the tax revenue previously remitted to the provincial treasury for use in county reform, and they were promised additional administrative funding⁸⁵.

Moreover, unlike the Hebei local state, which never fully delivered on its commitments, the Shandong local state not only generously provided financial support to VGS intellectuals—who had contributed nothing to the provincial fiscal capacity—but also continued to increase this support. In 1932, the administrative budget for the Rural Reconstruction Research Institute, controlled by VGS intellectuals, was 107,580 yuan; the administrative funding for Heze County was approximately 18,200 yuan, and for Zouping County about 12,000 yuan⁸⁶.

83. Fu Lixuan, "Recollections of the Schools in Heze Experimental County," 261.

84. Liang Shuming, "Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Zuijin Gongzuo Gaishu (Overview of Recent Work of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute)," *Dagongbao*, 1934.

85. *Shandong Sheng Zhengfu Gongbao (Shandong Provincial Government Gazette)*, no. 320 (1935), 5.

86. Shandong Provincial Department of Finance, *Zhonghua Minguo Ershiyi Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Putong Suiyu Suichu Gaisuan Shu (Estimated Annual Ordinary Revenue and Expenditure for Shandong Province in the 21st Year of the Republic of China)* (1933).

In 1933, the Research Institute’s budget rose to 120,900 yuan, while the administrative funding for Heze and Zouping remained basically unchanged at 18,744 yuan and 12,432 yuan, respectively⁸⁷. By 1934, the Research Institute’s funding stood at 116,700 yuan, while administrative funding for Heze and Zouping rose rapidly to 62,137 yuan and 58,171 yuan, respectively, while administrative budgets for other ordinary counties remained below 20,000 yuan⁸⁸ (see Figure 6).

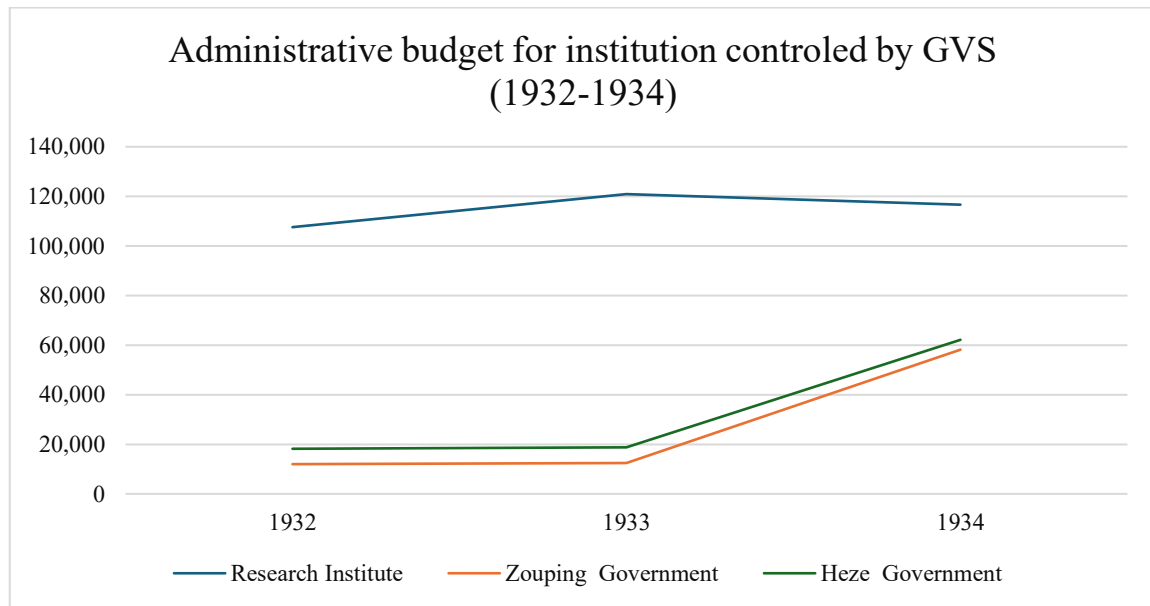


Figure 6

In terms of administrative power, the intellectuals rapidly gained administrative control over the two experimental counties of Zouping and Heze through the newly established organization of the Peasants Schools after being incorporated into the reform program. Specifically, the Peasants Schools were structured on two levels: the township school (*xiangxue*), which was established in each township and replaced the original district-level administrative unit, the *district office* (here, the term “district” means the administrative level directly below the county); and the village school (*cunxue*), which was established in each village and replaced the former village-level administrative unit: the *village office*.

Author’s note: Shandong Province categorized its counties into three levels (first, second, and third class) based on fiscal contributions and population. There were 34 first-class counties, 50 second-class counties and 24 third-class counties. Class determined financial allocations. For the lack of actual record, I used the average administrative budget to represent Heze (a first-class county) and Zouping (a third-class county)’s budgets. No such estimation is needed for 1933 and 1934 since the actual administrative budgets are directly reported in provincial fiscal documents.

87. Shandong Provincial Department of Finance, *Zhonghua Minguo Ershier Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Putong Suiyu Suichu Gaisuan Shu* (Estimated Annual Ordinary Revenue and Expenditure for Shandong Province in the 22nd Year of the Republic of China) (1934).

88. Shandong Provincial Department of Finance, *Zhonghua Minguo Ershisan Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Zongyusuan Shu* (General Budget for Shandong Province in the 23rd Year of the Republic of China) (1935).

Both the township and village schools were required to elect a school head (*xuezhang*) to replace the former district heads and village heads. The school heads were typically local, educated, respected, and wealthy gentry-intellectuals who handled conflict mediation, policy implementation, and other administrative matters⁸⁹. In their role as school heads, they embodied the Confucian ideal of the omnipotent intellectual, serving as intermediaries who conveyed the people's hardships upward to the state while maintaining social stability and enforcing state policies downward in village society—thus mediating the state-society relationship⁹⁰. According to recollections of staff at the time, the Peasants Schools treated the entire rural population as their target for education and conducted comprehensive interventions and training in areas such as culture, military skills, daily customs, and political consciousness. After the start of self-defense training in 1934, VGS intellectuals further gained control over the training and command of armed forces below the county level. There is no doubt that this concentration and consolidation of power was accomplished with the active support of the local state. At the beginning of 1935, recognizing the significant benefits of the Heze model for military mobilization capacity, the Shandong local state decided to extend similar practices to a larger region. Heze and its thirteen surrounding counties were merged into the First Administrative District (in which “district” refers to an administrative unit smaller than the province but larger than the county), specifically to promote the county reform model centered on self-defense training⁹¹. Sun Zerang, the VGS intellectual who first initiated this model, was appointed as executive secretary, equivalently to the Deputy Administrative Commissioner⁹².

In November 1935, as some North China officials—supported and encouraged by the invading Japanese military—proposed a plan for North China autonomy aimed at driving a wedge between the North China local states and the central state, the external military crisis facing the northern provinces intensified. To better respond to the deteriorating situation, the Shandong local state decided to adopt the VGS intellectuals' “Three-Year Plan” and implement their policies across the entire province. The

89. Liang Shuming, “Xiangcun Jianshe Dayi (General Idea of Rural Reconstruction),” in *Liang Shuming Quanjī (Yi) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 1)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 658.

90. P. C. Huang, “Public Sphere”/“Civil Society” in China? The Third Realm between State and Society, *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 216-240.

91. The other 13 counties were Cao County, Shan County, Chengwu, Dingtao, Jinxiang, Yutai, Jiexiang, Juye, Yuncheng, Juancheng, Jining, Dongping, and Wenshang.

92. *Shandong Sheng Zhengfu Gongbao (Shandong Provincial Government Gazette)*, no. 320 (1935), 9.

plan called for, between 1936 and 1938, the division of Shandong into several administrative districts and the sequential implementation of: (1) local administrative reform, replacing the long-established administrative organs with the Peasants Schools; and (2) popular self-defense training, using the Peasants Schools to conduct militarized training, strengthen military mobilization capacity, and unify command under the authority of the administrative districts⁹³. Although the Three-Year Plan was later suspended due to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, it had already been approved by the provincial government and had made substantial progress in three administrative districts. By the time the VGS intellectuals withdrew from Shandong due to the war, more than 70 of the province's 108 counties had already established Peasants Schools⁹⁴.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the intricate process of political co-optation of rural reconstruction intellectuals in 1930s China. I set out to answer two main questions: how and why did this co-optation occur in 1932, and why did different subsumption strategies lead to divergent outcomes for intellectuals. Applying the synthetic theoretical framework proposed in this paper, which emphasizes the interplay between intellectuals' collective agency and emergent structural demands, I analyze the contrasting fates of the two most influential cases, the CAM and VGS intellectuals. As my analysis shows, CAM intellectuals adopted a formal subsumption, maintaining distance from the Hebei provincial state. Their strategy didn't align with state demands for fiscal revenue or military mobilization, leading to negligible support, conflicts with local elites, and ultimately their withdrawal. In contrast, VGS intellectuals in Shandong pursued a substantial subsumption. Their strategy proactively addressed the provincial state's needs by integrating military training into Peasants Schools, directly bolstering military mobilization. This alignment with structural demands resulted in significant agency realization, securing substantial financial and administrative support and allowing their agenda to be realized.

93. Wang Guanjun, "Huiyi Kangzhan Qian de Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Recollections of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Before the Anti-Japanese War)," in *Liang Shuming Yu Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Liang Shuming and Shandong Rural Reconstruction)*, ed. Shandong Sheng Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui (Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991), 15.

94. Liang Shuming, "Gao Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe Tongren Tongxue Shu (A Letter to Colleagues and Students of Shandong Rural Reconstruction)," in *Liang Shuming Quanjì (Liu) (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming, Vol. 6)* (Shandong People's Publishing House, 1992), 26.

This study offers several significant contributions to the sociology of intellectuals and historical sociology.

First, by proposing and applying a synthetic theoretical framework, this paper advances the study of state-intellectual relations. It transcends the teleological and deterministic traps often found in the Dependence-Independence model, which can offer a static view of autonomy. Simultaneously, it avoids the Intervention model's overemphasis on individual agency, which can obscure broader structural influences. My framework demonstrates that while intellectuals' theoretical propositions and collective agency fundamentally shape their intervention strategies, the ultimate realization of this agency is profoundly contingent upon its resonance with emergent structural demands within the broader historical context. This offers a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of how intellectual autonomy and structural constraints mutually constitute the possibilities of social action.

Second, this research underscores the vital importance of "bringing the structure back" for future historical sociology. While fully acknowledging the contingent nature of historical events and the active choices made by historical actors' agency, my findings powerfully demonstrate that the effectiveness and outcomes of these choices are deeply embedded in and fundamentally shaped by prevailing macro-social structures and historical contexts. The stark divergence in outcomes between the Hebei and Shandong cases vividly illustrates that even well-intentioned and strategically designed interventions by intellectuals can fall short if they fail to align with the critical structural demands of their time, such as the fiscal-military needs of provincial states in 1930s China. Conversely, when intellectual agency finds congruence with these overarching structural imperatives, it can lead to genuinely impactful and transformative outcomes. This calls for historical sociological studies to not only meticulously capture the agency of historical actors but also rigorously assess the structural conditions that enable or constrain the realization of that agency, providing a more comprehensive and empirically grounded understanding of social change.

Bibliography

Baert, Patrick. *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.

Bauman, Zygmunt. "Love in Adversity: On the State the Intellectuals, and the State of the Intellectuals." *Thesis Eleven* 31, no. 1 (1992): 81-104.

- Bell, Daniel. *The Winding Passage: Sociological Essays and Journeys*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Intellectual Field and Creative Project." *Social Science Information* 8, no. 2 (1969): 89-119.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Homo Academicus*. Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Brahimi, Mohamed Amine, and Thomas Brisson. "Strategies of a Transnational Intellectual: Tariq Ramadan and the Project of a European Islam." *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1015-1031.
- Brym, Robert J. "Structural Location and Ideological Divergence: Jewish Marxist Intellectuals in Turn-of-the-Century Russia." In *Social Structures: A Network Approach*, edited by B. Wellman and S. D. Berkowitz, 359-379. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*. Belknap Press, 1998.
- Coser, Lewis A. *Men of Ideas: A Sociologist's View*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Eyal, Gil. "Anti-Politics and the Spirit of Capitalism: Dissidents, Monetarists and the Czech Transition to Capitalism." *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 49-92.
- Eyal, Gil, and Larissa Buchholz. "From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 117-37.
- Fourcade-Gourinchas, Marion. "Politics, Institutional Structures, and the Rise of Economics: A Comparative Study." *Theory and Society* 30, no. 3 (2001): 397-447.
- Gouldner, Alvin W. "The New Class Project, I: A Frame of Reference, Theses, Conjectures, Arguments, and an Historical Perspective on the Role of Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in the International Class Contest of the Modern Era." *Theory and Society* 6 (1978): 153-203.
- Gramsci, Antonio. "Intellectuals and Education." In *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, edited by D. Forgacs, 300-322. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
- Gross, Neil. "Becoming a Pragmatist Philosopher: Status, Self-Concept, and Intellectual Choice." *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (2002): 52-86.
- Hauchecorne, Mathieu. "The Spatial Logics of Intellectual Strategies: The Case of the Reception of Rawlsian and Post-Rawlsian Theories of Justice in France." *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1049-1069.
- Huang, P. C. "Public Sphere"/"Civil Society" in China? The Third Realm between State and Society. *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 216-240.
- Jiao, Jianhua. *Zhongguo Caizheng Tongshi (Di Ba Juan): Zhonghua Minguo Caizheng Shi (A General History of Chinese Finance, Vol. 8: Fiscal History of the Republic of China)*. Hunan People's Publishing House, 2015.
- Lamont, Michèle. "How to Become a Dominant French Philosopher: The Case of Jacques Derrida." *American Journal of Sociology* 93, no. 3 (1987): 584-622.
- Leperlier, T. "Literary and Political Strategies in a Literary Field: The Case of Tahar Ouettar." *The Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2020): 1032-1048.
- Li, Huaiyin. *The Making of the Modern Chinese State: 1600-1950*. Routledge, 2020.
- Li, Jinghan. *Dingxian Shehui Gaikuang Diaocha (Survey of Dingxian Social Conditions)*. Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005.
- Li, Weizhong. *20 Shiji 30 Niandai Xianzheng Jianshe Shiyuan Yanjiu (A Study of County Administration Construction Experiments in the 1930s)*. Renmin Chubanshe, 2009.
- Lü, Shue. *Hebei Sheng Difang Baowei Tuan Yanjiu (1901-1937) (A Study of Hebei Provincial Local Defense Groups, 1901-1937)*. Tianjin Guji Chubanshe, 2016.
- Merkel-Hess, Kristen. *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China*. University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Merton, Robert K. "Priorities in Scientific Discovery: A Chapter in the Sociology of Science." *American Sociological Review* 22, no. 6 (1957): 635-659.
- Parsons, Talcott. "Unity and Diversity in the Modern Intellectual Disciplines: The Role of the Social Sciences." *Daedalus* 94, no. 1 (1965): 39-65.
- Shils, Edward. "The Intellectuals and the Power: Some Perspectives for Comparative Analysis." In *The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays*, 3-22. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

- Wang, Guanjun. "Huiyi Kangzhan Qian de Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Recollections of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Before the Anti-Japanese War)." In *Liang Shuming Yu Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Liang Shuming and Shandong Rural Reconstruction)*, edited by Shandong Sheng Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui (Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), 15. Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991.
- Wang, Lin. "Zaihuang Jiuji Yu Xinxi Gongkai: Lun 1935 Nian Shandong Huanghe Shuizai Jiuji Zhong de Zhenkuan Shouzhi (Disaster Relief and Information Disclosure: On the Income and Expenditure of Relief Funds in the 1935 Shandong Yellow River Flood Relief)." *Shandong Shehui Kexue (Shandong Social Sciences)*, no. 4 (2023): 124–34.
- Wang, Lin, and Yuan Yingying. "1933 Nian Shandong Huanghe Shuizai Yu Jiuji (The 1933 Yellow River Flood and Relief in Shandong)." *Shandong Shifan Daxue Xuebao (Renwen Shehui Kexue Ban) (Journal of Shandong Normal University: Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)* 50, no. 6 (2005): 93–96.
- Xue, Weiqiang. "Dingxian Shiyan Liuxuesheng Kaolue (A Study of Returned Students in Dingxian Experiment)." *Xinan Jiaotong Daxue Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban) (Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University: Social Sciences Edition)* 21, no. 5 (2020): 54–75.
- Xu, Shuren. "Wo Danren Zouping Shiyan Xian Xianzhang de Qianqian Houhou (My Experiences as County Magistrate of Zouping Experimental County)." In *Liang Shuming Yu Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe (Liang Shuming and Shandong Rural Reconstruction)*, edited by Shandong Sheng Zhengxie Wenshi Ziliao Weiyuanhui (Shandong Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), 97. Shandong People's Publishing House, 1991.
- Zhang, Lianhong. *Zhenghe Yu Hudong: Minguo Shiqi Zhongyang Yu Difang Caizheng Guanxi Yanjiu (Integration and Interaction: A Study of Central-Local Fiscal Relations during the Republican Period)*. Nanjing Normal University Press, 1999.
- Želinský, Dominik. "The Sociology of Intellectuals in the 20th and 21st Century." *Sociology Compass* 14, no. 4 (2020): e12775.

Primary Sources

Archival Materials and Official Documents

- Chinese Mass Education Movement, 1927-1932. Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records, Educational Interests, Series G. Rockefeller Archive Center. <https://dimes.rockarch.org/objects/LQsRu87HFuvK4NjfEnBts3>.
- Hebei Provincial Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, ed. *Hebei Wenshi Ziliao Xuanji (Selected Historical Materials on Hebei Cultural History)*. Hebei People's Publishing House, 1983.
- Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute. *Dingxian Fushui Diaocha Baogao Shu (Report on Dingxian Taxation Survey)*. 1934.
- . *Dingxian Jingji Diaocha Yibufen Baogao (Partial Report on Dingxian Economic Survey)*. 1934.
- . *Dingxian Nongcun Jiaoyu Shiye (Dingxian Rural Education Affairs)*. 1935.
- . *Hebei Sheng Xian Danwei Shizi Yundong Shishi Fang'an (Implementation Plan for County-Unit Literacy Campaign in Hebei Province)*. 1935.
- . *Hebei Sheng Xian Zheng Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Gongzuo Gaikuang (Overview of Hebei Provincial County Reconstruction Research Institute Work)*. 1937.
- Hebei Provincial Department of Finance. *Hebei Sheng Ershier Niandu Caizheng Baogao Shu (Hebei Provincial Fiscal Report for the 22nd Year of the Republic of China)*. 1934.
- . *Zhonghua Minguo Ershiyi Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Putong Suiru Suichu Gaisuan Shu (Estimated Annual Ordinary Revenue and Expenditure for Shandong Province in the 21st Year of the Republic of China)*. 1933.
- . *Zhonghua Minguo Ershier Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Putong Suiru Suichu Gaisuan Shu (Estimated Annual Ordinary Revenue and Expenditure for Shandong Province in the 22nd Year of the Republic of China)*. 1934.
- . *Zhonghua Minguo Ershisan Niandu Shandong Sheng Difang Zongyusuan Shu (General Budget for Shandong Province in the 23rd Year of the Republic of China)*. 1935.
- Rong, Mengyuan, ed. *Zhongguo Guomindang Licix Daibiao Dahui Ji Zhongyang Quan Hui Ziliao (Di Er Bian) (Materials on the Congresses and Plenary Sessions of the Chinese Kuomintang, Vol. 2)*. Guangming Daily Press, 1985.
- Saito, Yasuo. "Hebei Sheng Dingxian de Caizheng (Dingxian's Finance in Hebei Province)." In *Dongya Tongwen Shuyuan Zhongguo Diaocha Ziliao Xuanyi (Zhong) (Selected Translations of China Survey Materials from Toa Dobun Shoin, Vol. 2)*, edited by Feng Tianyu et al., 1144. Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012.
- Shandong Sheng Zhengfu Gongbao (Shandong Provincial Government Gazette)*. 1935.
- Sun, Wen. *Guomin Zhengfu Jianguo Dagang (Outline for National Reconstruction by the Nationalist Government)*. Chinese Kuomintang Taiwan Province Executive Committee, 1947.
- Xu, Xiuli, ed. *Zhongguo Jindai Xiangcun Zizhi FAGui Xuanbian (Selected Laws and Regulations on Modern Chinese Rural Self-Governance)*. Zhonghua Book Company, 2004.

Newspapers and Periodicals (1930s)

- “Da Hubei Zhengwu Yanjiuyuan Canguantuan Wen (Response to Hubei Political Affairs Research Institute Visiting Group).” *Xiangcun Jianshe Xunkan (Rural Reconstruction Ten-Day Journal)* 4, no. 26 (May 11, 1935).
- “Di Er Ci Quanguo Neizheng Huiyi Zhi Jingguo (Proceedings of the Second National Interior Affairs Conference).” *Zhongyang Shishi Zhoubao (Central Current Affairs Weekly)* 1, no. 8 (1932).
- “Dingxian Gejie Qingqiu Xianzheng Yanjiuyuan Yishe Tachu (Dingxian Circles Request Relocation of County Administration Institute).” *Huabei Ribao (Beiping) (North China Daily, Beiping)*, October 5, 1934.
- “Disici Weijiao Dajie (Great Victory in the Fourth Encirclement Campaign).” *Yongbao*, March 7, 1933.
- “Guoshui Quan Jiaohuan Zhongyang (All National Taxes Returned to Central Government).” *Yongbao*, May 18, 1932.
- Guomin Zhengfu Ling. “Yan Ji Xiaozhuang Shifan Xuexiao Xiaozhang Tao Zhixing (Order from the Nationalist Government to Strictly Pursue Tao Zhixing, Principal of Xiaozhuang Normal School).” *Guomin Zhengfu Gongbao (Nationalist Government Gazette)*, no. 443 (1930).
- Hu, Hanmin. “Jiesan Xiaozhuang Shifan de Yuanyin He Jingguo (Reasons and Process for the Dissolution of Xiaozhuang Normal School).” *Zhongyang Zhoukan (Central Weekly)*, no. 98 (1930).
- “Jiangning Zizhi Shiyan Xian Zuzhi Xiaozhuang Shiyan Qu (Jiangning Autonomous Experimental County Organizes Xiaozhuang Experimental Zone).” *Anhui Minzheng Gongbao (Anhui Civil Affairs Gazette)* 4, no. 3 (1934).
- Liang, Rongruo. “Hebei Dingxian Cangan Ji (A Visit to Dingxian, Hebei).” *Shandong Minzhong Jiaoyu Yuekan (Shandong Mass Education Monthly)* 4, no. 9 (1933).
- Liang, Shuming. “Henan Cunzhi Xueyuan Zhicai Shu (Statement of Purpose for Henan Village Governance Academy).” *Cunzhi (Village Governance)* 1, no. 9 (November 15, 1929).
- . “Shandong Xiangcun Jianshe Yanjiuyuan Zuijin Gongzuo Gaishu (Overview of Recent Work of Shandong Rural Reconstruction Research Institute).” *Dagongbao*, 1934.
- “Lu Junxiang Kunnan (Shandong Military Pay Difficulties).” *Yongbao*, January 7, 1932.
- “Lu Shuikuan Chongzu Junxiang (Shandong Tax Revenues Used for Military Pay).” *Wuhan Ribao*, January 13, 1932.
- Qian, Jiaju, and Li Zixiang, ed. *Xiangcun Jianshe Shiyan Diyi Ji (Rural Reconstruction Experiment Collection I)*. Zhonghua Book Company, 1935.
- . *Xiangcun Jianshe Shiyan Disan Ji (Rural Reconstruction Experiment Collection III)*. Zhonghua Book Company, 1938.
- “Xiang Yue Min Gan Jun Weijiao Zhumaodeng Gufi (Hunan, Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangxi Armies Encircle Zhu and Mao’s Bandit Factions).” *Xinmin Bao (Nanjing)*, August 12, 1932.
- “Xianzheng Jianshe Yuan Shangwei Zhengshi Chengli (The Institute of County Administration Construction Has Not Yet Been Formally Established).” *Yishibao (Tianjin)*, April 18, 1933.
- “Xianzheng Gaige An (Si) (County Reform Act, Part 4).” *Xin Jiangsu Bao*, December 13, 1932.
- Yan, Shutang. “Ping Jiaohui Yu Dingxian (The Mass Education Movement and Dingxian).” *Dulipingshi (Independent Review)* no. 73 (1933).
- Sun, Zerang. “Heze de Xiangcun Ziwei (Rural Self-Defense in Heze).” *Jiaoyu Yu Minzhong (Education and the Public)* 9, no. 4 (1939): 28.
- Tang, Qiaoshen. “Dingxian Xiang Zhengfu Dui Yu Chuanzhong Gongzhu Zhi Zhuyi (Dingxian County Government’s Attention to Spreading Improved Boar Breeds).” *Minjian Banyuekan (Minjian Bi-weekly)* 2, no. 4 (1935).
- Wang, Weixian. “‘Mofan Xian’ Qi Yu ‘Shiyan Qu’ Qi de Dingxian Xianzheng (‘Model County’ Period and ‘Experimental Zone’ Period of Dingxian County Administration).” *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Bao (Journal of Political Economy)* 5, no. 3 (1936).
- Yu, Huanwen. “Dingxian Qinian Zhongdou de Jingguo (Seven Years of Vaccination in Dingxian).” *Minjian* 3, no. 15 (1936).
- Collected Works and Memoirs (Primary Content)**
- Huang, Shaohong. *Huang Shaohong Huiyilu (Memoirs of Huang Shaohong)*. Dongfang Chubanshe, 2011.
- Liang, Shuming. *Liang Shuming Quanji (The Complete Works of Liang Shuming)*. Shandong People’s Publishing House, 1992.
- Party History Research Office of the CPC Central Party School, ed. *Zhongguo Guomindang Shi Wenxian Xuanbian (1894-1949) (Selected Documents on the History of the Chinese Kuomintang, 1894-1949)*. Research and Office of the CPC Central Party School, 1985.
- Yan, Yangchu. *Yan Yangchu Quanji (The Complete Works of Yan Yangchu)*. Tianjin Education Press, 2013.