

## *Reevaluating the Nanjing Decade: A Provincial Perspective*

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Scholarly evaluations of Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing regime polarized early on into two competing approaches. Sympathetic scholars originally tried to highlight the progress made, at least until interrupted by the Sino-Japanese War, by enumerating Nanjing's achievements (often in very concrete terms, such as the establishment of a unified currency, the miles of roads constructed, the number of schools established, etc.).<sup>1</sup> This mechanical methodology was ultimately challenged, and largely supplanted, by a critique developed by scholars largely unsympathetic to the Chiang regime, such as Lloyd Eastman and Tien Hung-mao, who placed more emphasis on overall institutional failure and bureaucratic corruption.<sup>2</sup> This critique was certainly correct in the sense that a list of accomplishments does not in itself prove overall regime success. Nonetheless, it could also be argued that this critique, in its own way, also relied heavily on broad conclusions drawn from selective cases.<sup>3</sup> This tendency toward broad generalization is due in part to the underlying interest of both approaches not so much to explain the nuances of the Nanjing era itself but to engage in the broader debate over the reasons for the failure of Chiang Kai-shek's government in its struggle with the Communist Party in the late 1940s. Whereas one side saw the potential for successful state-building thwarted by extraneous events (primarily the Sino-Japanese War), the other side found intrinsic flaws in the Nationalist

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of this approach can be found in Paul K.T. Sih, ed., *The Strenuous Decade: China's Nation-Building Efforts, 1927-1937* (Jamaica, NY: St. John's Univ. Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Hung-mao Tien, *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China, 1927-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> This is particularly true of Eastman's work, which admitted up front that it "lays no claim to comprehensiveness." Eastman, xiii.

party-state, already evident in the Nanjing decade, that made its failure a near inevitability. Making these cases required, perforce, broad-ranging conclusions about the nature of the Nationalist regime as a whole.

More recently some scholars, such as Julia Straus and Morris Bian, have begun to shed new light on the Nanjing decade by differentiating specific ministries or agencies from the regime as a whole. While acknowledging the considerable variation that occurred among different central organizations, they present a fundamental challenge to the Eastman-Tien approach by showing how successful institutionalization was not only possible but actually took place in a number of instances.<sup>4</sup> Less constrained by preconceived judgments about, and the desire explain, the overall success or failure of the Nanjing regime, these studies make an argument for the advantages of a more disaggregated approach to an understanding not only of this era but also of the long-term development of the Chinese state.

In the interest of advancing this disaggregation, this paper suggests that it is also important to examine the potential impact of provincial governments in this period on broader state-building goals. In this regard, one immediately confronts a bias in the scholarship that has defined successful state-building only in terms of the centralization of state power by the Nanjing government itself. This bias had historical roots in China's modern political development. Certainly there has been a consistent body of thought among Chinese nationalists that has seen the centralization of power as the main requirement for the construction of a strong and modern nation-state. (Not surprisingly, this view was shared by most Chinese leaders who aspired to head the central government, whether Yuan Shikai, Chiang Kai-shek, or Mao Zedong). There

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<sup>4</sup> Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Morris L. Bian, *The Making of the State Enterprise System in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

was, nonetheless, an alternate vision in the early twentieth century that argued for the integrative capacity of a federalist system that would allow for greater local or provincial autonomy. The emergence of warlords as the greatest defenders and representatives of such autonomy, however, largely delegitimized this alternate approach to state-building in China. As a result, the proponents of centralization won the day. One upshot of this political outcome, though, was an untoward spillover into the scholarly world that also made successful centralization the primary evaluative criterion for successful state-building. In this regard, the mere existence of provincial regimes that retained a considerable degree of political autonomy has been taken as evidence of the failure of state-building.<sup>5</sup> This paper argues that over-privileging the importance of the central state, and its ability to exert its control over local and provincial government, can actually obscure facets of state-building that occurred at lower levels.

One objection to this approach might be the continued “warlord” control of many provincial regimes in the Nanjing era. Warlord regimes that first emerged in the provinces in the early Republic were hardly known for their good governance. Most of the military commanders who seized political power in this period saw civil administration as providing access to resources needed to maintain their military forces; the provision of “public goods” that might improve the lives of the people under their control was normally not a high priority. Responding to this situation, the Nationalist Party made the elimination of warlordism, and its replacement with a stronger and more effective state, one of its main goals. The Northern Expedition that

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, while nearly half of Tien Hung-mao’s study of government in the Nanjing era focuses on the provinces, it does so within the evaluative framework of centralization. Thus, his examination begins with the unquestioned assumption that, “The revival of provincialism in the early republican period seriously hindered national integration” (p. 89). While Tien then goes on to give the Nanjing regime some credit for extending its “authority” over ten provinces by the mid 1930s, its ultimate failure is defined by the inability “to establish a uniform, centralized administration” (p. 180). Somewhat contradictorily, though, Tien also criticizes Chiang’s government for its failure to foster meaningful local self-government (pp. 94-95).

began in 1926 was dedicated to achieving this goal. Even at the time, though, it was generally recognized that Northern Expedition had not, in fact, achieved its putative goal of the elimination of warlordism. The Northern Expedition did successfully defeat many warlords, including prominent figures such as Wu Peifu and Sun Chuanfang. Nonetheless, the Northern Expedition ultimately only achieved its military “success” by incorporating large numbers of warlord armies under the Nationalist Party banner. These “warlord converts,” as Diana Lary calls them, made up the bulk of the revolutionary forces to emerge from the Northern Expedition.<sup>6</sup> This process of incorporation, however, left largely intact the autonomous power of many warlord commanders who still held sway over large sections of the country. James Sheridan thus coined the term “residual warlordism” to describe the anomalous situation of the survival of powerful regional military commanders despite the supposed unification of the country under the Nationalist party-state.<sup>7</sup> While Sheridan suggests that residual warlordism might have been as much a “symptom” as a “cause” of Nationalist weakness,<sup>8</sup> conventional historical wisdom has continued to see the existence of residual warlordism as among the main obstacles to the further political consolidation in the Nanjing era.

There were, however, subtle yet significant differences between the warlords of the early Republic and the residual warlords of the Nanjing decade that suggests that this assumption might deserve further examination. Alfred Lin sums up well the two main features of what he describes as a “new genre” of warlord in the Nanjing era. The first feature of these new warlords was their asserted allegiance to the ideology of Sun Yat-sen and Nationalist Party. The second

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<sup>6</sup> Diana Lary, *Region and Nation: The Kwangsi Clique in Chinese Politics, 1925-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 64.

<sup>7</sup> James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yu-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Sheridan, p. 16.

feature was their common involvement in, and dedication to, programs of “provincial regeneration.”<sup>9</sup> Both aspects of residual warlordism point to new ways by which warlords in Nanjing decade either sought, or felt constrained, to legitimate their authority (and thus differentiate themselves from the evil of warlordism of the previous period). At the same time, these two features are also interconnected in the sense that Sun Yat-sen’s ideology, exemplified in the Three Principles of the People, not only called for national unity and the development of democracy but also for commitment to improve the “people’s livelihood.” In other words, in accepting the legitimizing principle of the Nationalist ideology, they also committed themselves to the broader state-building goals of the Nationalist party-state as defined by this ideology. As a result, even if the continued existence of such residual warlords frustrated the broader centralizing goals of the Nationalist regime, the expanded roles taken on by provincial regimes, particularly in the provision of “public goods,” also laid the foundations for a stronger and more effective state.

This paper seeks to open this discussion on the possible contributions of provincial regimes to the broader state-building project of the Nanjing era through an examination of Hunan province. For most of the Nanjing period, Hunan was under the control of a single residual warlord, He Jian. There is no question but that He’s efforts to consolidate his own political and administrative authority in Hunan were fully consistent with warlord behavior. Nonetheless, as a residual warlord He only consolidated his power within the context of growing subordination to the central government in Nanjing. As such, He’s efforts at political and administrative consolidation should also be evaluated on their own terms as a part of a broader, albeit provincial-based, state-building project. One aspect of He Jian’s provincial-based state-building

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred H. Y. Lin, “Building and Funding a Warlord Regime: the Experience of Chen Jitang in Guangdong, 1929-1936,” *Modern China* 28:2 (April 2002), pp. 177-180.

project that deserves particular attention was its commitment to providing a range of “public goods.” When the achievements of He’s government are examined from this perspective, we are reminded that many of the oft-cited “concrete” accomplishments of the Nanjing decade were actually carried out by provincial regimes under such residual warlords. Rather than delinking such projects from the broader issue of political institutionalization, as reflected in the works of Eastman and Tien, this paper argues that even the most “concrete” of these accomplishment, such as road-building, actually reveal successful institutionalization when measured in terms of expanded government capacity and the mobilization of resources. Insofar as many of these projects were initiated and completed by provincial regimes, a more nuanced evaluation of the Nanjing decade, then, must also include an examination of the process of state building that was unfolding at the provincial level.

### **The Rise of He Jian**

He Jian only set his sights on a military career in his mid-twenties. He was born into a farm family of fairly limited means in Liling county, Hunan, in 1887. He’s great-great grandfather, however, had achieved a *jinshi*, the highest degree in the traditional examination system. Not surprisingly, then, the family looked to education to restore the family’s wealth and status. Perhaps reflecting the unsettled nature of education in the last decade of the Qing dynasty, He alternated his studies between traditional and modern style schools.<sup>10</sup> Originally He’s goal seemed to have been to pursue a career in civil administration. But he may have been influenced by the role of military forces in the 1911 Revolution, and the opportunities for quick advancement in new modern-style armies, to exchange his writing brush for a gun. Shortly after

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<sup>10</sup> *He Yunqiao xiansheng jinian ji (chubian)* [Commemorative record of Mr. He Yunqiao]. (Taipei?: n.p. 1966?), pp. 1-2.; Liu Yuehou, “He Jian de chushen he qijia” [He Jian’s background and his rise], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials] 5 (1963), p. 138.

the success of the Revolution, He enrolled in a new military officers' training center in Changsha. When this center closed, he entered the ranks of a student corps in Nanjing. Given the army's need for educated officers, He was soon assigned to attend a military preparatory school in Hubei. The capstone of his military education was admission into the Baoding Military Academy, graduating with its third class in 1916.<sup>11</sup> Similar to many military school graduates at this time, He was no doubt hoping to use education as a stepping-stone into a stable military career. He seemed to be well set on this path with an initial assignment for in-service training in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the Hunan Provincial Army, followed by an appointment as a platoon commander, and then a promotion, in 1917, as a deputy company commander.<sup>12</sup>

The outbreak of civil war in Hunan in September 1917, as the Hunan Army rebelled against the arrival of a centrally imposed military governor, threatened the stable career trajectory He may have envisioned even as it offered new opportunities for non-traditional military advancement. In 1918, many parts of the Hunan Army, including He's platoon, disintegrated in the face of a massive invasion of Northern troops. Rather than simply abandoning his military career, though, He returned to his home in Liling county where, with the approval of commander of the Hunan Army Zhao Hengdi, he gathered up defeated troops and scattered guns to form a local guerilla force to continue the struggle against the Northern invaders.<sup>13</sup> The goal of this entrepreneurial activity, though, was not simply to establish himself as a local strongman. Instead, He turned the guerilla unit under his command into "capital" to be

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<sup>11</sup> Liu Yuehou (1963), pp. 138-39.

<sup>12</sup> Wen Rixin, "He Jian," in Wang Chengbin, Liu Bingyao, Ye Wanzhong, and Fan Zhuanxin eds., *Minguo gaoji jiangling liezhuan* [Biographies of high ranking military officers in the Republic] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1988), vol. 1, p. 270.; Howard L. Boorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 60-61.

<sup>13</sup> Liu Yuehou (1963), pp. 139-140; *He Yunqiao xiansheng jinian ji*, pp. 2-3.

used to negotiate his return to the regular Hunan Army, now encamped on the province's southern border. In an early sign of He's ambition, he initially tried to obtain a brigade commander's position for himself by exaggerating the number of troops that he could bring back into the provincial army.<sup>14</sup> In the end, though, the best deal he could get was the reorganization of his unit as a cavalry battalion within a regiment commanded by Tang Shengzhi in the Hunan Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Division.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, as one of He's comrades noted, advancement from platoon commander to battalion commander after only one year was no mean achievement.<sup>16</sup>

He's placement under Tang Shengzhi turned out to be a stroke of good fortune. While the Hunan Army eventually forced the retreat of occupying Northern forces from Hunan in the summer of 1920, this only opened the way for a series of internal military struggles and civil wars within Hunan itself. Tang, however, emerged on the victorious side of each of these conflicts and as a result gained a series of promotions (and the expansion of the forces under his control), ultimately obtaining the command of his own division. Riding on Tang's coattails, He Jian rose from battalion commander to regiment commander, and then in 1923 was appointed commander of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade under Tang's 4<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>17</sup>

As Tang's own military power began to grow, he began to develop higher ambitions. In March 1926, Tang marched on Changsha to force his long-time superior, Zhao Hengdi, from power as Hunan's military governor. Tang's attempted coup was not unopposed, however.

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<sup>14</sup> Liu Yuehou (1963), p. 140. According to late Qing and early Republican military regulations, a brigade would normally consist of around three thousand men. A brigade in turn was formed from two regiments, each with three battalions of around five hundred men apiece. Edmund S. K. Fung, *Military Dimensions of the Chinese Revolution* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), pp. 21-22; Ralph L. Powell, *The Rise of Chinese Military Power, 1895-1911* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 178-79.

<sup>15</sup> Liu Yuehou (1963), pp. 140-146.

<sup>16</sup> Liu Yuehou (1963), p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Wen Rexin, p. 271.



Another Hunan division commander, Ye Kaixin sought assistance from the Beiyang general Wu Peifu and soon pushed Tang's forces back to south Hunan. At this crucial moment, Tang decided to seek outside support as well by throwing in with the growing Nationalist Party revolutionary movement in Guangdong. Nationalist Party leaders saw an opportunity in the Tang-Zhao/Tang-Ye War not only to gain new allies but also to turn the war in Hunan into the spearhead of the "Northern Expedition" initiating the military unification of the country. So Tang was welcomed into the revolutionary fold with the expansion and re-designation of his Hunan division as the NRA 8<sup>th</sup> Army and his appointment as Northern Expedition Front Commander. He Jian continued to benefit from his relationship with Tang with authorization for the expansion of his brigade into the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>18</sup>

The ensuing Northern Expedition was less the steady progression of a growing revolutionary army, then, than a moving maelstrom of political and military forces. Even as it targeted and destroyed many warlords it identified as enemies of the revolution, the revolutionary juggernaut itself grew by sweeping up any and all military forces willing to swear allegiance, often for purely opportunistic reasons, to the new regime and its ideology. Thus, the eight Armies, largely drawn from four provinces, that provided the initial military foundation for the campaign would eventually grow by summer 1928 into more than fifty Armies composed of 176 divisions, with perhaps as many as two million men under arms.<sup>19</sup> The dependency of the Northern Expedition on the various military forces it absorbed to some extent replicated, in ironic contrast to its anti-warlord goals, the very conditions that had originally given rise to warlordism in the early Republic by increasing the political influence of military commanders, including both Tang Shengzhi and eventually He Jian. The main difference was that this political

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<sup>18</sup> Wen Rexin, p. 272.

<sup>19</sup> Lary, p. 132.

influence was increasing channeled into struggles to define the parameters of the new Nationalist party-state. As a result Diana Lary favors the term “Kuomintng (Guomindang) warlord, instead of residual warlord, to describe the politically powerful military commanders who emerged in this context.<sup>20</sup>

While He Jian remained subordinate to Tang Shengzhi in the early stages of the Northern Expedition, he also began to make his own mark as a military commander. Following the fall of Changsha to Tang’s forces, He led a flanking attack that contributed to the fall of Yuezhou, the strategic gateway port between Hunan and Hubei. As the National Revolutionary Army moved into Hubei, He was given command of a column of troops that, in another flanking attack, captured the industrial city of Hanyang and the commercial port of Hankou across the Yangzi River from the provincial capital of Wuchang. Encircled by revolutionary forces as a result of these victories, Wuchang itself finally fell on October 10.<sup>21</sup> In the wake of these victories, in Spring 1927, Tang Shengzhi’s 8<sup>th</sup> Army was expanded and reorganized into five armies, all under Tang’s control as commander-in-chief of the 4<sup>th</sup> Group Army. As part of this reorganization, He Jian was promoted to the command of the new 35<sup>th</sup> Army.<sup>22</sup>

At this point, though, the complex alliances of political and military forces that had made these victories possible began to unravel. From this point on He Jian’s survival would depend not just on his military command but on his ability to navigate growing factional divisions with the Nationalist Movement. It was also in this period, though, that He began to emerge from under Tang Shengzhi’s shadow as a political player in his own right.

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<sup>20</sup> Lary, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup> Wen Rexin, p. 272-275.

<sup>22</sup> Fan Yinfei, “Tang Shengzhi,” in Wang Chengbin, Liu Bingyao, Ye Wanzhong, and Fan Zhuanxin eds., *Minguo gaoji jiangling liezhuan* [Biographies of high ranking military officers in the Republic] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1988), vol. 1, p. 404.

In January 1927, the National Party government, under Wang Jingwei, had moved from Canton to Wuhan, while the main body of the National Revolutionary Army under Chiang Kai-shek moved on to capture Nanjing and Shanghai. Soon after the fall of Shanghai in April, Chiang began a violent purge of the Communist Party and its allies. When the Wuhan government condemned his actions, Chiang established a rival Guomindang government in Nanjing, splitting the revolutionary movement in two. At this point, Tang Shengzhi, with his troops dominant in both Hunan and Hubei, and on the Henan front of the Northern Expedition, emerged as the main military supporter of the Wuhan government. He Jian was actually sympathetic with Chiang's opposition to Communism, playing a behind the scenes role in a violent anti-Communist purge in Hunan in May 1927.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, He remained loyal to Tang, and even participated in an "Eastern Expedition" launched by Tang against Chiang's Nanjing government.

He's loyalty to Tang finally become a liability when the Wuhan government also broke off its relations with the Communist Party in July 1927. This opened the way for a reconciliation between the Wuhan and Nanjing governments—facilitated by the temporary resignations of both Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek from their respective positions. Seeking to maintain his own autonomy, Tang Shengzhi established a branch political council in Wuhan in opposition to the new reunified Nationalist Government in Nanjing. In October, the Nanjing government, under the influence of Guangxi military leaders, announced a "Western Expedition" against Tang. Soon finding himself in an untenable military position, Tang Shengzhi resigned in mid-November, and left the country for Japan.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, under assault from the Nanjing Western

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<sup>23</sup> Wei Zhen, "'Mari shibian' qinliji" [Personal record of the Mari Incident], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials], volume 5 (1963), p. pp. 1-8.

<sup>24</sup> Fan Yinfei, pp. 406-406; Tian Fulong, *Hunan jin 150 nian shishi rishi, 1840-1990* [Daily record of history events in Hunan's recent 150 years, 1840-1990] (Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1993), p. 122.

Expedition, He Jian along with Tang' other subordinate commanders retreated back into Hunan where in March 1928 they finally surrendered to pursuing Guangxi forces.<sup>25</sup>

While this surrender was a nadir in He Jian's military career, in the end was actually the first step toward toward He's emergence as the political overlord of Hunan. This was only possible, though, because He was able to take advantage of a new rivalry that emerged between the Guangxi clique and Chiang Kai-shek, who had returned to head up the Nanjing government in January 1928. Rather than removing He from the gameboard, both sides sought to turn him into an ally, which ultimately gave He an opportunity to maneuver between the two sides in pursuit of his own interests.

Given the strength of Guangxi clique in central China, following a shift of their base of operations to Wuhan, He initially had no choice but to submit fully to the Guangxi cause. In return, He was allowed to remain in Hunan and retain his command of the 35<sup>th</sup> Army. More importantly, In April 1928 He was appointed Hunan's Vice-Superintendent for Rural Pacification (*qingxiang huiban*) directly under the provincial Chair.<sup>26</sup> The post of provincial Chair was actually held in quick succession by two different Hunan military commanders, Cheng Qian and Lu Diping, who while involved with the Guangxi clique in the Western Expedition had also retained political ties with the Nanjing government. These appointments were therefore seen to be a possible means of keeping the lines of communications open between the Guangxi

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<sup>25</sup> Liu Xing, "Huiyi guomin gemingjun dibajun" [Remembering the National Revolutionary Army's 8<sup>th</sup> Army], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials] 6 (1963), p. 91; Tian Fulong, pp. 124-126; Peng Songling, Huang Weihang, and Hu Da, "He Jian junshi jituan de xingcheng he wajie" [The formation and disintegration of He Jian's military group], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials] 7 (1964), p. 28.

<sup>26</sup> Peng, Huang, and Hu, p. 29; Zhang Muxian, "He Jian liyong Jiang, Gui maodun qude Hunan zhengquan" [He Jian's use of Jiang-Guangxi contradictions to obtain Hunan's political power], *Hunan wenshi ziliao*, volume 5 (1963), pp. 148-49. Zhang often represented He Jian in his negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek starting in 1928.

clique and Nanjing. For the same reason, however, neither man was ever fully trusted by their original Guangxi sponsors. Thus in May 1928 the first Chair, Cheng Qian, had a falling out with his Guangxi allies, leading to his removal from office and arrest.<sup>27</sup> When the succeeding Chair, Lu Diping, sought to consolidate his own control over Hunan by eliminating He's command and position, He played on Guangxi suspicions to support a plot to remove Lu from office in February 1929. As a reward for his seeming loyalty through these affairs, the Guangxi clique nominated He Jian to succeed to the post of provincial Chair.<sup>28</sup> The ouster of Lu Diping, however, led to an open confrontation between the Guangxi clique and the Nanjing government, which challenged the legal authority of the Branch Council they controlled in Wuhan to take this action. Both sides then began to position their armies in preparation for military conflict.<sup>29</sup>

This situation presented He Jian with an opportunity to play both sides against the other. First, He hid his own role in the coup against Lu to avoid alienating potential negotiations with the Nanjing government. Second, he declined to assume the post as Hunan Chair unless confirmed by both the Guangxi-dominated Wuhan Branch Council and the Nanjing government. Eager to maintain He's support, the Wuhan Branch Council was reduced to pleading with He to take up position, further sweetened by the restoration of the Rural Pacification office with He as Superintendent (*duban*). This put Chiang Kai-shek in a difficult position, since refusing to confirm He's appointment might simply push him further into the Guangxi camp. So, on February 29 Nanjing issued an order making He "acting" Chair. Meanwhile, He sent a secret emissary to Nanjing to explain that he only supported the Guangxi cause under duress and

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<sup>27</sup> Zhang Muxian, pp. 149-150; Dai Yue, "Hi Jian lian-Gui qu-Lu de yimu" [One scene in He Jian's alliance with Guangxi to oust Lu], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials], volume 5 (1963), p. 175.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang Muxian, pp. 150-53; Peng, Huang and Hu, p. 29; and Tian Fulong, p. 131.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang Muxian, pp. 154-155.

assuring Chiang of his true support for the central government.<sup>30</sup> However when actual war broke out between Guangxi and Nanjing forces in March 1929, He first offered his support to the Guangxi clique—particularly since Guangxi’s forces seemed to outnumber Nanjing’s. Then when desertions among Guangxi forces led to a reversal their fortunes, and a loss of Wuhan to Chiang’s armies, He just as quickly sent word to Chiang of his support for the central government. Chiang responded by appointing He Jian as commander of the “Quell the Rebels” (*taoni*) 4<sup>th</sup> Route Army for a campaign against Guangxi forces.<sup>31</sup> Even so, He did not publically accept this appointment until it was clear that the Guangxi Army was on the run.<sup>32</sup> Steadily, though, He’s shift toward Chiang’s camp became increasingly pronounced. In late April, Chiang personally traveled to Changsha to discuss the war effort with He, and stayed for a ceremony regularizing He’s position as both Hunan Chair and Rural Pacification Commander (*qingxiang siling*).<sup>33</sup> Repaying Chiang’s favor, in May 1929 He organized Hunan’s forces for an assault on Guangxi itself, which ended in the capture of the capital of Guilin and other major cities.<sup>34</sup>

The appointments He received from Chiang over the course of these events ultimately provided the framework for He’s consolidation of his authority over Hunan province. The title of 4<sup>th</sup> Route Army commander came with a significant amount of financial assistance from the central government for He’s military expenses. More importantly, in granting this title Chiang

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<sup>30</sup> Zhang Muxian, pp. 155-56; Tian Fulong, p. 133.

<sup>31</sup> Zhang Muxian, p. 158; Peng Songling, “He Jian lian-Gui qu-Lu he fu-Jiang tao-Gui jingguo” [The experience of He Jian’s alliance with Guangxi to oust Lu and his alliance with Chiang to quell Guangxi]. *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials], volume 5 (1963), pp. 170-72.

<sup>32</sup> Wen Renxin, p. 278.

<sup>33</sup> Tian Fulong, p. 134; He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu jiunian zhengzhi shuyao* [A political synopsis of nine years of Hunan’s provincial government] (n.p., 1938?), *zongxu*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Peng Songling, 1963, p. 172.

confirmed He's authority over all military forces in Hunan.<sup>35</sup> Thus, with official approval, He gathered in other remnant forces that had been stranded in Hunan in previous conflicts and, together with his own forces, organized them into three divisions and two independent brigades, with a total of 40,000 men.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, as Rural Pacification Commander, He was given special authority oversee and command Hunan's local militia. Finally, the regularization of He's position as provincial Chair, which gave him complete control over Hunan civil administration. At this point, as He himself later acknowledged, military and civil power in Hunan was combined in one person.<sup>37</sup>

He Jian had only achieved this position by carefully tacking against the shifting political winds of this period. When Chiang Kai-shek had returned to reclaim control over the central government in Nanjing in January 1928, the military forces he controlled only held the provinces of Jiangsu, Anhui and Zhejiang. There remained, however, four other "militarist agglomerations" of nearly equal power. In the North there were three major military groupings under Feng Yuxiang, Yan Xishan, and Zhang Xueliang. South and Central China, meanwhile, was still dominated by the Guangxi clique, led by Li Zongren.<sup>38</sup> With the capture of Beijing and

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<sup>35</sup> Zhang Muxian, p. 158. Despite this official authority, He was not initially able to exert effective control over some more deeply embedded local forces. The main example of this was Chen Quzhen, whose forces had dominated West Hunan since 1920 and who had no intention of subordinating himself to He. Chen's position was even reinforced by He's opponents in Nanjing who convinced Chiang Kai-shek to give Chen's forces a national army designation to maintain at least some counterbalancing force in Hunan against He. Slowly, though, He undercut Chen's power, finally forcing his removal from West Hunan in 1936. At that point He's military consolidation was finally complete. Peng, Huang, and Hu, p. 32; Chen Tongchu, "Yi xianfu Chen Quzhen" [Remembering my father, Chen Quzhen], *Xiangxi wenshi ziliao* [West Hunan historical materials], volume 2 (1984), pp. 61-62, 68.

<sup>36</sup> Peng, Huang, and Hu, pp. 30-32.

<sup>37</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu: zongxu*, p. 3,

<sup>38</sup> Martin C. Wilbur, "Military Separation and the Process of Reunification under the Nationalist Regime, 122-1937," in Ho Ping-di and T'ang Tsou, eds., *China's Heritage and the Communist Political System*, vol. 1, book 1 of *China in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968),

the formal end of the Northern Expedition in the summer of 1928, these regional militarists officially all swore allegiance to the Nationalist Party. This did not mean, however, that they accepted the full authority of the Nanjing central government or of Chiang Kai-shek. Indeed, these “residual warlords” would periodically mount a series of challenges to Chiang Kai-shek’s claim of ultimate authority over the party and the state. While Chiang was ultimately able to defeat these challenges, he was never completely able to eliminate these “residual warlords.” What he was able to do, as C. Martin Wilbur noted, was to reduce their threat to largely provincial proportions.<sup>39</sup> He’s position was significantly different from other major residual warlords, though, in the sense that his power was not reduced but increased to provincial proportions. This outcome owed much to He’s ability to perceive the signs of the shifting balance of power in Chiang’s favor and as a result increasing position himself as Chiang’s ally.

Both men no doubt found reasons to justify this alliance. First, they had a shared antipathy toward Communism. Beyond supporting the initial anti-Communist purge in Hunan in 1927, as Vice-Superintendent of Rural Pacification in 1928 He had also taken the lead in the violent suppression of Communist uprising and had organized a successful joint military assault on Mao Zedong’s Jinggangshan base. Chiang took a personal note of, and rewarded, He for his role in this victory.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, He allayed some of Chiang’s concerns about his own untrustworthiness by rejecting a call from Tang Shengzhi in late 1929 to join him in a military challenge to Chiang in North China. Soon after, He also rejected blandishments from the Guangxi clique to restore their original alliance—a rejection that resulted in the temporary fall of

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p. 259.

<sup>39</sup> Wilbur, p. 260.

<sup>40</sup> Wen Rexin, pp. 281-84.



Changsha to an invading Guangxi strike force.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, Chiang also had a practical interest in bringing He Jian into his camp. While Chiang's growing power raised hopes for increasing political integration, his reach was still limited, as shown in his inability to remove Guangxi militarists completely from the playing field. In this situation, He's control over Hunan helped to create a strategic buffer in Hunan between Nanjing the continued Guangxi threat.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the continued threat from Communist armies based in Jiangxi also meant that Chiang could see the advantage of a strong anti-Communist ally in Hunan.<sup>43</sup> Chiang's expectations for He in this regard do not seem to have been misplaced. In the years to come, He not only used his armies against incursions by Red Army forces but to participate in Chiang's encirclement campaigns against Soviet base areas in Jiangxi.<sup>44</sup>

To the extent that Chiang found He useful, He ultimately also benefited enormously from Chiang's support. The legitimacy of He's position in Hunan stabilized along with Chiang Kai-shek's growing authority as the head of the Nationalist Party. Chiang also backed up He's efforts to consolidate his power in Hunan in more specific ways. The importance of this support was most apparent in Chiang actions following the capture of the Hunan provincial capital by Communist forces in July 1930. The second fall of He's capital was major blow to He's reputation and it led, not surprisingly, to considerable outrage among the Hunan people, both inside and outside the province, and to calls for He's removal. Chiang however appreciated the fact that one reason for the weakness of Changsha's defenses was the deployment of the core of He's army against the Guangxi clique in south Hunan. So instead of responding to this

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<sup>41</sup> Zhang Muxian, 160-165; Cao Bowen, "Huiyi He Jian tongzhi Hunan shiqi de jijianshi" [Remembering a few matters form the period of He Jian's control of Hunan], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials], volume 7 (1964), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Peng, Huang, and Hu, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Peng, Huang, and Hu, p. 29.

<sup>44</sup> Wen Rexin, pp 285-286.

opportunity to remove He, Chiang absolved him of blame and confirmed his continued authority over the military and civil administration of the province.<sup>45</sup> In the end, He's nine-year rule over Hunan would not have been possible without Chiang's continued support.

It is likely that Chiang might have preferred to have eliminated all regional militarist regimes, He's included, in favor of stronger centralized bureaucratic administration. But in this transitional period, Chiang was clearly willing to accept, and support, both the survival of some militarist regimes insofar as they advanced specific objectives. Beyond any broader balance of power considerations Chiang may have had, allowing the consolidation of He's power in Hunan also had the positive result of halting the tendency toward the increasing autonomy of local military commanders that had been in progress in Hunan since the 1911 Revolution. The relative stability of He Jian's regime served the interest of establishing state power, even if this state power was not defined purely in terms of the extension of the power of the central government. Indeed, it provided a platform for other initiatives within Hunan that can be seen as advancing broader state-building goals.

### **He Jian's State-building Project**

Soon after he left Hunan in 1937, He Jian edited and published a *Synopsis* of his nine years at the head of Hunan's government. In a preface to this work, He acknowledged, with the modesty expected in such circumstances, that "his achievements were not many."<sup>46</sup> This did not stop him from providing a detailed account of what he saw as his accomplishments, divided among six major areas: civil government, finances, education, construction (*jianshe*), peace preservation (*bao'an*), and administrative management (*xingzheng guanli*). This publication reveals the extent to which He himself felt the need to justify his administration in terms of

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<sup>45</sup> Zhang Muxian, pp. 163-166.

<sup>46</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, zongxu*, p.7

improvements in governance and the benefits he had provided to the people of Hunan. At the same time, this *Synopsis* also provides a window on the ways in which the state-building project of the Nanjing decade was not simply a concern of the central government, but was also manifested in the policies and actions of residual warlord regimes in the provinces. State-building was not simply a process that expanded the authority of the *central* government and extended it downward into local society. A parallel process occurred in the consolidation of provincial regimes.

Simply taken at face value, He's *Synopsis* presents a picture of a vibrant and engaged government, pursuing initiatives promoting the public good over a wide range of areas. While some degree of exaggeration might be expected in a vanity piece of this nature, He's regime did in fact establish a reputation for a considerable level of achievements. A short biography of He Jian included in a commemorative volume published in Taiwan after his death in 1956 provided brief summary of the range of accomplishments by which He's administration was remembered. Thus, He was credited with largely eradicating Communist "bandits," implementing a *baojia* mutual security system to keep peace in rural villages, and eliminating abuses in local militia to turn them into "crack" military units. His administration was also acknowledged for its success in developing Hunan's internal road network and for building highways to neighboring provinces. More generally, He was seen to have improved government administration, restored public granaries, and completed a new cadastral survey. Special note was made of He's advancement of education, including Western sciences and "national arts" (with an emphasis on martial arts) and his role in the establishment of many schools, including an army cadre school that eventually produced 12,000 graduates. Finally, he was praised for his development of Hunan's economic resources, particularly in the encouragement of tung oil production, opening national product

exhibition halls, establishing agricultural experimentation stations, and supervising the building of textile, paper, alcohol, and machine factories.<sup>47</sup> While the hagiographic nature of this biography means its appraisal can only be accepted with caution, it is a picture confirmed at least in part by a major biography of He published more recently in the People's Republic by Yang Xuedong. Not surprisingly, Yang does not count the suppression of Communism among He's accomplishments, but he presents a fairly positive picture of He's achievements in the promotion of education and culture, the development of Hunan's economy, and the completion of construction projects.<sup>48</sup>

The scope and scale of activities directed at the provision of public goods seen in these works confirms the residual warlord nature of He Jian's provincial regime based on Alfred Lin's criterion of dedication to provincial rejuvenation. At the same time, a detailed listing of these activities might also serve as a reminder that the figures used in claims about the successful achievements of the Nanjing era were in many cases the result of provincial rather than central initiatives. Nonetheless, simply enumerating achievements is perhaps less useful in evaluating the overall success or failure of He's administration, given the subjective nature of any such evaluation. What they can reveal, though, are actual changes in state capacity and in state-society relations at the provincial level. One of the best places where this can be shown is He's signature program—the reform and reorganization of Hunan's local militia.

He Jian's involvement in the management of local militia began with his appointment as Vice Superintendent of Rural Pacification in 1928, and continued under successive appointments as Rural Pacification Superintendent and Commander (1929), and later as Peace Preservation Commander (1933). Although local militia was administratively considered part of civil

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<sup>47</sup> *He Yunqiao xiansheng jinian ji*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>48</sup> Yang Xuedong, pp. 514-554.

government, clear supervisory authority was assigned to these military offices to promote better coordination between local forces and the regular army for the promotion of local order (and particularly for the suppression of Communist insurgency). Even though He's eventual appointment as provincial Chair also gave him civil authority over local militia, he maintained the principle of military supervision by channeling his management of Hunan's militia through these Rural Pacification and Peace Preservation offices. And He did not hesitate to exert his authority over local militia, making it a major focus of attention for the entire period of his administration. As a result, while militia is often seen as a quintessentially "local" organization, under He Jian the organization of military became a means through which the state, represented here by He's provincial regime, began to impinge more directly on the lives of Hunan's people.<sup>49</sup>

Upon first taking charge of Rural Pacification affairs in 1928, He had initially encouraged local initiative in the expansion of local militia as an immediate response to the challenges of local banditry and Communist uprisings. He soon became concerned, though, about both the independence and effectiveness of these forces. Local militia were generally seen as controlled by, and serving the interests of, local elites. In this regard Nationalist authorities shared the view of Communist activists of such elites as "local bullies and evil gentry" (*tuhao lieshen*). Many individual local militia commanders, meanwhile, were not only corrupt but used the military power under their control to interfere in local government and the administration of local justice. Furthermore, the quality of local militia varied considerably from one location to the next, and the autonomy of militia commanders hindered coordinated operations.<sup>50</sup> These concerns would lead He through a series of militia reforms aimed at bringing these forces under greater

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<sup>49</sup> The points raised in the section below are discussed in more detail in McCord, "Local Militia"; and McCord, "Militia Training."

<sup>50</sup> Fu Juejin and Liu Lansun, eds., *Hunan zhi tuanfang* [Hunan's militia] (Changsha: Hunan sheng zhengfu, 1934), pp. 20-21.

provincial control. While a coordinated effort, these reforms would distinguish between two types of militia: standing forces of armed regulars and “mass” militia composed of ordinary citizens.

The first reform, carried out in mid 1928, sought to establish stronger official control by organizing all local militia, designated Household Conscription Militia (*aihutuan*), under a unified bureau headed by the county magistrate and assisted by vice-heads selected from among the local elite. All existing full-time militia units were to be reorganized into standardized “standing companies” (*changbeidui*). Meanwhile, one in every three adult males under the age of forty was required to participate in unpaid mass militia units, termed “watch patrols” (*shouwangdui*). At this point, He sought to maintain a close connection between the two types of militia, by selecting men from the watch patrols to serve three-year terms in the standing companies.<sup>51</sup>

Attempts to implement this new militia system soon revealed many problems. Most magistrates were too busy with other duties to give the militia much attention. This left actual power in the hands of the vice-heads, many of whom continued to exhibit the same abusive behaviors as local militia commanders before the reform (indeed many of the vice heads were simply original local military commanders).<sup>52</sup> Many localities were also slow to implement the watch patrol system. Lacking the watch patrols as a recruiting foundation, most of the standing companies remained, in effect, mercenary forces.<sup>53</sup> Finally, individual standing companies

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<sup>51</sup> “Xiuzheng Hunan aihutuan tiaoli” [Revised Hunan household conscription militia regulations], in *Hunan sheng zhengfu gongbao*, no. 11 (17 August 1928), pp. 31-36.

<sup>52</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao'an bian tuandui*, p. 2; *Minguo shijiunian Hunan zhengzhi nianjian* [The 1930 political yearbook of Hunan province] (Changsha: Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu, 1931), p. 836.

<sup>53</sup> *Hunan guomin ribao* [Hunan citizens' daily] (Changsha), 31 October 1928, and 14 March 1929.

largely operated on their own, despite the supposed overriding authority of the county militia bureau, limiting effective cooperation against larger threats.<sup>54</sup>

In response to these issues, another major reform was carried out in 1930 with a particular focus on transforming the nature of the standing companies. First, all the standing companies in any one county were consolidated into a single “Peace Preservation” regiment or battalion (*bao’an tuan/dadui*). Equally important, these forces were to be professionalized by organizing them according to regular army standards, and providing them with regular military training. The supervisory role of county magistrates was eliminated. Instead Peace Preservation units were placed under officers who were largely selected on the basis of either established militia or military experience or military education. These officers were now to be directly appointed by the Rural Pacification Commander, namely He Jian.<sup>55</sup> The professionalization of these forces took another step in 1933 when He ordered the consolidation of individual county Peace Preservation units into several dozen regiments attached to multi-county Peace Preservation districts.<sup>56</sup> The end result of this process, then, was to eliminate the original autonomy and local identification of standing militia forces by bringing them under direct provincial control.

This process was reinforced by a similar provincial takeover of local militia finances. Originally local militia were funded by a confusing array of local taxes and fees raised by the

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<sup>54</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, baoan bian tuandui*, p. 1; *Minguo shijiunian*, pp. 836-37; *Minguo ershiyinian Hunan nianjian* [The 1932 yearbook of Hunan province] (Changsha: Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu, 1932), p. 15

<sup>55</sup> “Hunan gexian baoantuan ji baoan dadui zhanxing zhangcheng” [Hunan county peace preservation regiment and peace preservation battalion provisional regulations], in *Hunan sheng xianxing fagui huibian* [Collection of current laws and regulations of Hunan province] (Changsha: Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu, 1931), pp. 627-730.

<sup>56</sup> *Hunan guomin ribao*, 2 December 1933; He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao’an bian*, pp. 2-3; *Minguo ershisinian Hunan nianjian* [The 1935 yearbook of Hunan province] (Changsha: Hunan sheng zhengfu mishu chu, 1935), p. 225.

communities where they were based. Embezzlement of these funds by militia commanders or local authorities was a common problem. In 1934 He replaced all local militia taxes with a single, uniform tax collected as an add-on to the regular land tax. All the funds collected through this tax were forwarded to the provincial government, which then dispersed funds, based on approved budgets, directly to Peace Preservation regiments.<sup>57</sup> One side effect of this reform was that the people of the province benefited from a reduction of militia taxes by over two million yuan, due to both the elimination of corruption associated with the collection and management of the previous taxes and a decrease in costs through the reduction in the total number of standing militiamen under the consolidated Peace Preservation system.<sup>58</sup>

Equally important reforms were carried out in relation to the province's mass militia. Fighting against weak local implementation of the watch patrol system, the 1930s reform actually doubled down by requiring the participation of all men, not just one in three, from the ages of 18 to 40 in an expanded mass militia system. These militia were also more openly politicized by naming them Communist Extermination Volunteer Corps (*changong yiyongdui*).<sup>59</sup> At the same time, another explicit goal of this system was to "militarize the people of the entire province."<sup>60</sup> He Jian would note that militia (*tuandui*) were the "armed forces of the people"; but "when discipline was not strict and when skill and education were lacking, then not only were they a waste of local resources but of no real benefit to the people."<sup>61</sup> Therefore all adult males

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<sup>57</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao'an bian tuandui* pp. 5-6; *Minguo ershisinian*, pp. 225-26; *Hunan guomin ribao*, March 18, 1934

<sup>58</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao'an bian tuandui*, 6; *Minguo ershisinian*, p. 226.

<sup>59</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao'an bian tuandui*, pp. 3-4; "Hunan changong yiyongdui zhanxing zhangcheng" [Temporary regulations for Hunan's Communist extermination volunteer corps], in He Jian, *Ruhe nuli changong* [How to resolutely exterminate Communism] (Disilu zongzhuihuibu mishuchu, n.d.), appendix, pp. 1-10.

<sup>60</sup> *Minguo shijiunian*, p. 16; *Hunan guomin ribao*, 21 July 1932.

<sup>61</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, bao'an bian tuandui*, p. 4.



serving in the mass militia were required to attend at least three half-day training sessions per month.<sup>62</sup> While the training for standing militia was modeled after that provided to regular army units, mass militia training was much broader. Besides martial arts (unlike standing militia, mass militia were discouraged from arming themselves with firearms) and practical instructions on militia regulations and procedures, the Volunteer Corps received a heavy dose of ideological and citizenship training.<sup>63</sup>

The successive reforms of local militia carried out by He Jian reflected an unprecedented degree of control by his government over the organization, recruitment, staffing and funding of local militia. One major effect was to undermine the autonomy of local elites who had either risen to power or had reinforced pre-existing local power through the organization and control of militia. A second major effect was to increase the role of the government in both the direct indoctrination and regimentation of the lives of the common people. The organization of local militia in this case therefore provides a prime example of the way in which the provision of a public good, in this case the restoration and preservation of local order (though the Communists suppressed by He's local militia might disagree with this characterization), was tied to a broader process of state-building.

The extraordinary attention He Jian paid to the management of local militia does, however, reveal the extent to which military affairs remained a dominant concern for provincial administrations as well as the central government. He himself openly admitted that over the nine years of his administration, two-thirds of his time was taken up by the management of military

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<sup>62</sup> “Xiuzheng Hunan geshixian changong yiyongdui xunlian shishi fangfa” [Revised Hunan city-county Communist Extermination Volunteer Corps training implementation methods], in *Hunan guomin ribao*, 14 July 1934.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

matters, leaving only one one-third of his time to deal with civil government and construction.<sup>64</sup>

This kind of situation has provided the basis for one general critique of the Nanjing era, expressed succinctly in this passage by Tien Hung-mao:

Little was accomplished in the way of socioeconomic reform. The central government and all provincial governments continued to allocate most of their resources to military, quasi-military, and administrative purposes. The percentage of revenues allocated to improving socioeconomic conditions was relatively small.<sup>65</sup>

While this is a commonly accepted conclusion about the Nanjing decade, the qualification “relatively small” is made without reference to any standard of what would or would not have been sufficient. This statement also begs the question as to whether the revenues allocated to military uses were actually a misappropriation of government funds or an allocation determined primarily by very real conditions of civil war and insurgency. One might argue that in the case of Hunan, He Jian’s concentration on military affairs may have been more than justified by the need to address widespread banditry, recurring military threats, and persistent Communist uprisings. The contextual nature of the attention given to military matters is supported by Yang Xuedong when he notes that the period of relative peace that followed the passage of the Long March through Hunan in late 1934, allowed He to reallocate substantial human, material and financial resources from military objectives to economic “construction” (*jianshe*). The result was soaring development in this area in the last years of his administration.<sup>66</sup> Thus while the overall Hunan case may confirm the conventional observation that military concerns often prevailed over civil affairs during the Nanjing decade, it also shows the conditions under which this occurred and suggests a potential for increased socioeconomic initiatives under the right circumstances.

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<sup>64</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng, zongxu*, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Tien, p. 181.

<sup>66</sup> Yang Xuedong, p. 515.

Even if there can be some debate over the relative weight given to military and civil affairs, there is no question but that He's regime did not lack in attention to civil administration and socioeconomic programs. One factor in He Jian's overall willingness and ability to pursue non-military initiatives may have been the growing stability of his regime over time. Ch'i Hsi-sheng noted that most warlords in the early Republic were disinclined to invest in economic development because of the precarious nature of their regimes, since any investments would be lost if and when they were forced their territories.<sup>67</sup> Wang Zhanyuan's investments outside of Hubei were an example of this principle in practice, though focused more on his own personal wealth than economic development. As He Jian consolidated his regime, he (as well as other residual warlords in similar circumstances) may have seen less risk in investing his resources non-military objectives. The crucial difference here again, though, is the concentration of such resources on public goals over the generation of private wealth.<sup>68</sup> It is precisely at this point though that it becomes clear that the most important question is not the adequacy or inadequacy of socioeconomic programs per se, but how such projects provide insights into the evolution of state power in the Nanjing era, and the role of provincial regimes in this development. The record of He Jian's administration in two notable areas, education and transportation, provide

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<sup>67</sup> Ch'i Hsi-sheng, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 177.

<sup>68</sup> This is not to say that He Jian did not increase his private wealth while serving as Hunan's Chair. Nonetheless, a critical account dedicated to showing how He Jian "plundered" Hunan, and which starts with the accusation that much of this plunder ended up in He's own pocket, concludes by noting that the property and land he acquired over his term of office was in fact "still not great." Liu Yuehou, Mao Tiquan, Gan Rong, and Zuo Zhongwen, "He Jian zai Hunan de sougua gaikuang" [General survey of He Jian's plundering in Hunan], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials] 7 (1964), p. 137. To the extent that there was "waste" in He's finances, this account suggests that most of He's excess wealth was paid out almost as soon as it came in gifts to his followers and in enormous bribes to influential people and possible enemies (pp. 135-37). This suggests that He prioritized "political" expenditures to sustain his position rather than in the accumulation of personal wealth.

additional examples of a growing state capacity.

The level of activity devoted to the expansion and promotion of education suggests a degree of direct personal interest by He Jian second only to his attention to militia reorganization. One focus of He's efforts was the development of primary education, resulting in an increase in the number of primary schools in Hunan over the course of his administration from 18,000 to 23,800. At the same time, He also expanded middle schools enrollments, pushed for the establishment of normal schools in each county (forty were founded by 1934), created a system of exams for elementary and secondary school teachers to improve the quality of instruction, established a selection process and provided public funding for students wishing to study abroad, founded short-term elementary schools and scholarship programs for the children of poor families, and organized a literacy campaign that by 1936 had reached over 10,000 people.<sup>69</sup>

This level of educational activity is particularly striking in contrast to the state of education in Hunan under previous warlord regimes. The worse situation occurred under the military governorship of the Northern general, Zhang Jingyao, from 1918 to 1920, when funds for education were largely siphoned off to pay for military expenses.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, not only the maintenance but also the expansion of education under He Jian was made possible by his guarantee, throughout the period of his administration, that at least one-quarter of the province's budget would be dedicated to this purpose.<sup>71</sup> This is not to say that He's regime was flush with funds. Indeed, expense payments for government offices were often delayed, and even troop pay

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<sup>69</sup> Yang Xuedong, pp. 516-522. Also see He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, jiaoyu bian*.

<sup>70</sup> Hunan shanhou xiehui [Hunan rehabilitation association], ed., *Xiangzai jilue* [A record of Hunan's disasters] (n.p., 1919), vol. 1, pp. 301-321.

<sup>71</sup> Yang Xuedong, p. 517.

was frequently in arrears.<sup>72</sup> That educational costs successfully competed with military and administrative needs suggests a broadening sense of responsibility for the provision of public goods in He's regime at odds with the usual priorities of warlord governance, as seen in particular in the case of Wang Zhanyuan in Hubei.<sup>73</sup>

Another notable area of achievement under He's administration was the expansion of transportation and communication systems. In his *Synopsis*, He Jian drew special attention to the expansion of highways for motorized vehicles from around 1000 *li* (Chinese miles) in 1929 to over 4000 *li* in 1937. The completion of these roads, He noted, meant that one could actually drive motorized vehicles to all of Hunan's surrounding provinces (Sichuan, Hubei, Jiangxi, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Guangdong).<sup>74</sup> Another major achievement occurred in railroad construction. From 1932 to 1936, the long delayed Beijing-Canton line was finally completed with the construction a 450 *li* section of railway between Zhuzhu and Shaoguan.<sup>75</sup> According to Yang Xuedong, these projects ranked Hunan above all other provinces in both highway and railroad construction for this period.<sup>76</sup> Another achievement was reached in the installation of long distance telephone lines. Prior to He's administration, only 90 *li* had been installed. Between 1934 and 1935, though, Hunan's Construction Department laid down fifteen lines,

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<sup>72</sup> Liu, Mao, Gan and Zuo, pp. 135-36.

<sup>73</sup> He Jian claimed to have met the challenge of reduced provincial revenues (as a result of national taxes reclaimed by the central government) along with increased costs for construction projects through bonds issued against profits of public industries. Left unacknowledged was a more unsavory process by which He generated revenues through the control and taxation of opium shipments passing through Hunan. Yang Xuetong, p. 538; Liu, Mao, Gan and Zuo, pp. 127-29.

<sup>74</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng, jianshe bian, bianyan*, pp. 2-3, *jianshe bian*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>75</sup> Yang Xuedong, p. 542. Work was also undertaken on Hunan lines leading to Guangxi, Jiangxi, and Guizhou. Yang Xuedong, pp. 542-44. Interestingly, railroad construction was not covered in He's *Synopsis*, perhaps because the railroad system was considered a national project, even though Hunan resources were allocated for the work.

<sup>76</sup> Yang Xuedong, pp. 538-39.

totaling 2,800 *li*, which ultimately reached 33 of Hunan's 75 counties.<sup>77</sup>

Some scholars have questioned the degree to which such transportation and communication projects in the Nanjing era should actually be counted as “achievements” when measured in terms of the actual benefits they brought to the Chinese people. For example, Lloyd Eastman noted that the motivating force behind most road-building projects was to enhance military transportation. For Eastman, the construction of roads for motorized vehicles actually brought fewer benefits to farmers (who rarely had access to such vehicles), and thus was more a sign of the underlying flaws in the Nationalist regime than a marker of its success.<sup>78</sup> In the case of Hunan, it is indeed clear that military goals were at least one main driver behind the construction of highways, railroads and telephone lines. This should not in itself obscure the collateral non-military benefits that were envisioned by these projects.<sup>79</sup> Even so, simply dismissing their value because of the military use to which they were put ignores the importance of extending the government's military reach to national integration. There is a certain inconsistency in criticizing the Nanjing regime for its failure to extend its political authority over the entire country while disapproving of efforts to increase the military capacity needed to make this possible. Yang Xuedong puts a different but positive spin on these military benefits by noting that China's logistical capacity during the war against Japan was greatly aided by the transportation hub created in Hunan under He's regime.<sup>80</sup>

There are many other aspects of He's administration where similar analysis might be applied. Besides the achievements praised in the commemorative biography cited at the

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<sup>77</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, jianshe bian*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>78</sup> Eastman, *Abortive Revolution*, pp. 211-12.

<sup>79</sup> He Jian was careful to note that the installation of telephone lines were important for not only for military purposes but also for political, cultural and commercial reasons. He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, jianshe bian*, p. 50.

<sup>80</sup> Yang Xuedong, p. 545.

beginning of this section, He's *Synopsis* draws attention to the efforts of his administration in the charting and clearing of waterways, the repair of major urban dikes, the management of disaster relief, the founding of orphanages and hospitals, the organization of over 3000 cooperative societies, and the eradication of opium cultivation.<sup>81</sup> More specific analysis would be required to confirm the extent, and success, of these various initiatives. No matter what outcome might result from more detailed study, though, the very scope of activity seen in under He's administration argues that at least some successful government institutionalization must have occurred to make this possible, even if only measured in expanded government capacity and general success in the mobilization of resources.

Some recognition might also be made of more direct efforts aimed specifically at the improvement of government administration under He Jian's regime. One particular area of attention was the expansion and restructuring of local administration. Thus He promoted the development of examination and evaluation systems for county magistrates, and ordered an expansion and elaboration of county government. He also undertook the reorganization and regularization of sub-county government (reinforced by recurring efforts, with varying degrees of success, to institute a *baojia* mutual security system).<sup>82</sup> A system of periodic inspections was also put into effect to evaluate responsiveness of local officials to, and effectiveness in, implementing government policies.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, another underrated aspect of the expansion and elaboration of government administration seen in the Nanjing era, and manifested in Hunan under He Jian, was the proliferation of rules and regulations covering an expanded range of governmental concerns and

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<sup>81</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, jianshe bian*, pp. 14-19, 57-58, and *minzheng bian*, pp. 53-74, 86.

<sup>82</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, minzheng bian*, pp. 6, 10, 21-22.

<sup>83</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, minzheng bian*, pp. 11-12.

activities. He Jian's *Synopsis* is actually remarkable for the attention that it gives to the record of his regime in the establishment of regulations, the formation of plans, and the organization oversight committees for major and minor activities in every category. One common critique of Nationalist government is that it produced more plans and regulations than actual results.<sup>84</sup> He Jian seems to be responding to this kind criticism when he cites the Han dynasty scholar Shen Gong, "Governance is not in the amount of words, but in implementation" (*wei zheng bu zai duo yan, gu li xing he ru er*).<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, He also makes the case that laws and regulations are an essential foundation for any action, and presents not only the writing of regulations but also their dissemination as an important function of government.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the linkage of regulations (and their constant revision) to actual programs and accomplishments, suggests that, at least in Hunan, regulations were not being written in place of action, but as guides to action. Indeed, seeing these regulations in the context of provincial government initiatives reveals the production of an increasingly institutionalized regulatory regime that was clearly linked to a broader state-building effort.

### **Central-Provincial Relations**

Over the course of his regime, He was always very careful to justify and frame his programs in terms of his commitment to the goals of the Nationalist Party as expressed by Sun Yat-sen's ideology. One does not necessarily have to discount the possibility that in pursuing the projects portrayed as his main achievements He Jian was also motivated, at least to some degree, by a sincere interest in the political and economic regeneration of his province. Certainly the special attention paid to education seems a reflection of He's own personal interests. There may,

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<sup>84</sup> Eastman, *Abortive Revolution*, pp. 277, 297.

<sup>85</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, minzheng bian, bianyan*, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, xingzheng bian, bianyan*, p. 2.



however, have also been practical reasons why He also felt the need to “win the hearts” of his people in this way. The danger He faced did not come from specifically from discontented masses, though, but from a substantial number of political enemies who used every opportunity to attack him. This included other Hunan politicians and other prominent Hunan military commanders forced to accept postings in other areas, who were waiting in the wings hoping for an opportunity to take He’s place. There were also party and bureaucratic factions inside Hunan who saw He’s removal as a way to increase their own government influence and share of political power. These factions were allied, in turn, with the CC clique in Nanjing, which was committed to reducing or eliminating the power of regional militarists like He Jian in the name of great state centralization.<sup>87</sup> For He, then, the provision of increased educational opportunities, efficient civil government, expanded transportation, economic benefits, and local security were an important part of a public relations campaign to counter political attacks.

In the absence of any real participatory democracy, though, there was no direct mechanism by which popular dissatisfaction with his rule could bring about his downfall. Just as with the warlords of the earlier Republic, the removal of a residual warlord usually required the threat of superior military power. But popular disapproval could provide a justifying excuse for an attack by a military competitor. In the case of residual warlords the greatest threat did not come from other local or regional military commanders per se, but from Chiang Kai-shek. It was in He’s interest then to keep on Chiang’s good side, and the best way to do this was to prove his ability, not only as a military commander but also as a competent, and loyal, civil administrator. At least until 1937 He was successful in performing well enough to discourage any inclination Chiang may have had for He’s removal. This then was another way in which the two features of

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<sup>87</sup> Yang Xuedong, p. 515. [Add]

residual warlordism, subordination to the Nationalist party-state and the provision of public goods, were conjoined.

While He Jian clearly guarded his own political and military power in Hunan, his relationship with to the Center was not purely defined by a drive to maintain his political or military autonomy. Indeed, there were ways in which he presented himself, and no doubt saw some benefit in presenting himself, as acting through his programs as an extension of central and serving larger central goals. Thus, his *Synopsis* stressed that the officials in his government received central appointments and that they followed all Central orders. At the most he argued that central laws were not always appropriate for local conditions, but that central approval was always received for adjusted regulations to address these special conditions.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, he clearly heralded his success in extending his government's control over all seventy-five of Hunan's counties in terms of their being no longer beyond the reach of "central" laws and orders.<sup>89</sup>

Many of the specific programs He implemented were likewise directly linked to central plans or followed central orders. Thus, while He could take credit for the expansion of Hunan's transportation system, this effort also fit closely into central transportation plans ordered by Chiang Kai-shek. In the end, the completed transportation network in Hunan facilitated not only campaigns against Communist forces inside Hunan, but prepared the way for Chiang's own military push into the Southwest against other militarist regimes.<sup>90</sup> In such cases, He's construction projects served both provincial and central ends, while at the same time providing a means for He to show his value to Chiang.

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<sup>88</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, xingzhang bian, bianyan*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>89</sup> He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, xingzhang bian, bianyan*, p. 3, and *minzheng bian, bianyan*, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> Yang Xuetong, p. 544.

This complex interaction of central and provincial motives and goals was also evident in He's signature militia reforms. While ultimately implemented at the provincial level, the most important of these reforms, the consolidation of standing militia units into Peace Preservation Regiments based on military models, was originally proposed at a four-province meeting called at Hankou in 1930 by the director of Chiang Kai-shek's field headquarters, He Yingqin.<sup>91</sup> He's government also carefully sought Central approval for the specific regulations it established to implement this reorganization.<sup>92</sup> While He clearly had his own reasons for these militia reforms, especially in terms of creating stronger forces to complete the eradication of Communism in Hunan while extending his own authority deeper into Hunan's local society, his efforts clearly had Chiang's approval. Indeed, Chiang would join other commentators in holding Hunan's military reorganization up as a model for other provinces.<sup>93</sup>

The use of Hunan's reorganized militia also showed a combination of provincial and central purposes. When He ultimately cut the Peace Preservation Regiments away from their original local and county bases, he basically transformed them into provincial forces largely under his own control. Nonetheless, under Chiang's orders He also dispatched some of these regiments beyond even Hunan's borders to participate in multi-province anti-Communist and anti-bandit campaigns. Then, with the outbreak of war with Japan in 1937, most of these "militia" regiments were ordered to join front-line units far from their original Hunan bases.<sup>94</sup> He's consolidation of local militia under his own control thus proved but a first step toward their

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<sup>91</sup> Xie Liangyu, "He Jian tongzhi shiqi de difang wuli" [Local military power during He Jian's control period], unpublished manuscript no. 64-26, Hunan zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, wenshiban [Historical materials office, Hunan political consultative conference], pp. 4-5

<sup>92</sup> *Minguo shijiunian*, p. 836.

<sup>93</sup> *He Yunqiao xiansheng jinian ji*, p. 8; *Hunan guomin ribao*, June 12, 1932, June 7, 1934, and December 15, 1935

<sup>94</sup> *He Yunqiao xiansheng jinian ji*, p. 8; He Jian, *Hunan sheng zhengfu, baoanbian, bianyan*, p. 3.

ultimately absorption into national military units.

In the end, He's own regular military base was undercut in a similar fashion. He's original trade-off for his promotion to his leadership position in Hunan was the commitment of his forces to the broader campaign against the Guangxi clique. Subsequently, He accepted Chiang's orders to include his forces (and often play a leadership role himself) in multi-province anti-Communist operations, particularly as the western flank of encirclement campaigns directly against Communist bases in Jiangxi. Clearly He's participation in these operations served his own interests, namely eliminating the threat to his Hunan base from Red Army incursions; but they also solidified his subordination to Chiang's broader military goals. When the Communists broke free of Chiang's encirclement and set off on what would become the "Long March," He was ordered to use his troops to block their westward advance.<sup>95</sup> Although He failed miserably at this assignment,<sup>96</sup> the escape of the Communists gave Chiang an excuse to dispatch He's troops to pursue remnant Communist forces, beyond Hunan's own borders.<sup>97</sup> In early 1936, much of He's core army under the command of He's main subordinate, Liu Jianxu, was ordered to advance across Guizhou and into Yunnan. Later, Chiang approved Liu's request to transfer his troops to Zhejiang and Jiangsu to strengthen China's eastern defenses against a possible Japanese attack.<sup>98</sup> At this point, He Jian largely lost control over his original army.

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<sup>95</sup> Wen Rexin, pp. 286-87.

<sup>96</sup> Some of He's commanders seemed more inclined to avoid battle with the Communists rather than blocking their advance. Ou Guan, "Wo canjiale He Jian de qingxiang datusha" [My participation in He Jian's countryside clearance great butchery], *Hunan wenshi ziliao* [Hunan historical materials] 5 (1963), pp. 96-97. To be fair, though, like Chiang Kai-shek himself, He and his officers had more experience in positional warfare and were simply less effective against the mobile tactics of the Red Army. Li Jue, p. 61.

<sup>97</sup> Li Jue, pp. 67-70.

<sup>98</sup> Peng, Huang, and Hu, pp. 47-48. Liu Jianxu sought these transfers in the hope that breaking free of He's control would allow him to develop his own independent military power base. Chiang manipulated Liu's ambitions to reduce He's military power, but also thwarted

This situation paved the way for the end of He's control over Hunan. Many of Chiang's supporters in Nanjing (particularly the CC clique) had long sought the consolidation of Central control over Hunan by He's removal. Circumstances leading up to and following the outbreak of the war with Japan provided the context for the realization of this goal. First, an object lesson was provided an unsuccessful revolt in the summer of 1936 by Guangdong's King of the Southern Skies, Chen Jitang, against Nanjing plans to remove him from office. Desires for national unity in the face of growing tensions with Japan made political opposition to Nanjing even more perilous for residual warlords than in the past. Chen's own subordinates refused to support his revolt and declared their loyalty to Nanjing.<sup>99</sup> Second, the war with Japan itself had of course provided the justification for the final shift of He's military forces (including both regular army and standing militia) to the front. This reduction of He's military base made any real resistance impossible. Finally, He's mismanagement of a Miao uprising in West Hunan undermined his reputation for maintaining order in Hunan, particularly important in the face of war. In late November 1937, Chiang ordered his loyal follower and former dean of the Central Military Academy, Zhang Zhizhong, to take He's place at the head of the Hunan government.<sup>100</sup> He Jian himself was bumped upstairs with an appointment as the Central Government's Minister of Civil Affairs.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, then, He's own success as a residual warlord in civil administration had provided the cover for the transfer that meant the final end of his military

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Liu's ambitions by scattering the troops under his command and leaving him with no government position of consequence. Peng, Huang, and Hu, p. 49.

<sup>99</sup> Eastman, *Abortive Revolution*, pp. 258-260.

<sup>100</sup> Wu Xinfu, "Minguo nianjian xiangxi miaomin 'getun' douzheng" [The West Hunan Miao 'abolish military land' struggle in the Republican period], *Hunan wenshi* [Hunan history] 39 (1990), p. 188.

<sup>101</sup> He held this post for eighteen months, then was transferred to a position in the Military Affairs Commission. He retired in 1945. With the victory of the Communist Party in 1949, He moved first to Hong Kong and then Taiwan where he died in 1956. Boorman, volume 2, p. 63.

power.

## **Conclusion**

The ultimate fate of He Jian in Hunan suggests that by the outbreak of the war with Japan in 1937 the balance of power between the central government and regional militarists had taken a significant shift in the favor of the central government. One important factor in this shift was the acknowledgement of residual warlords such as He Jian of their ultimate subordination to the Nationalist Party. Insofar as residual warlords were Party warlords, their autonomy was already seriously compromised by the very ideology they now used to justify their positions. Even more importantly, though, Chiang Kai-shek's consolidation his own authority over the Nationalist party-state, backed by substantial military force, placed more concrete constraints on warlord behavior. What this meant in practice was contingent on many variables, not the least of which was simple geography. Thus, Hunan's strategic position gave Chiang some reason to accept He's continued rule over Hunan, even as Hunan's closeness to the center of Chiang's power make it increasingly difficult for He to maintain his autonomy. The Hunan case, then, validates the concept of "residual" warlordism in the sense that, unlike the expanding warlordism of the early Republic, the warlordism of the Nanjing era was a remnant that was slowly giving way to greater national reintegration.

The case of He Jian in Hunan also argues against seeing the provincial regimes of residual warlords as nothing more than obstacles to the broader state-building goals of the era. Indeed, He Jian's nine-year rule over Hunan is an example of how the province could serve as a base for the concurrent consolidation of political and administrative control, the extension of state power into local society, and the mobilization of resource for state aims. These developments were inimical state-building objectives if state-building is defined only in terms of

the centralization of state power. This is hardly to suggest that warlordism provided the optimum conditions for China's needs at the time. But the negative connotation of warlordism should also not preclude an understanding of how provincial regimes under warlord control in the Nanjing decade may have also made contributions to the making of the modern Chinese state.

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