

Outside the Gates: Chengdu's Suburbs during the Qing and Early Republic

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The gates in city walls in Qing China served important symbolic and practical functions. Often their towers could be seen by approaching travelers long before any other part of the city's infrastructure was visible.¹ The uniformed guards stationed at the gates denoted the presence of the imperial government. The gates could be closed off in times of war or unrest, to protect officials, city people, and property. The gates also allowed the government to collect taxes on goods brought from the countryside or from other cities, to be sold in urban markets.

Infused with the imperial aura, the area inside city gates was the most intensively governed space of all Qing territory. At the extreme, in the Inner City of Beijing, more constables per capita patrolled the streets than in any other city in the world.² Even the most obscure county seat, however, had a contingent of yamen runners and official bodyguards to keep order and make imperial power visible.³ In addition to the formal administration of walled cities, urban neighborhoods during the Qing also tended to promote order. In the words of G. William Skinner, "neighborhood associations took responsibility not only for the ritual purity of the area but also for its general order, harmony, and cleanliness."⁴

But what of the city beyond the walls? To what degree did the government's and residents' concern for ordering urban space extend outside the gates? What factors influenced the way suburbs developed around Chinese walled cities? How did the opening of new gates affect the areas inside and outside the walls? This paper begins to explore these questions in the case of Chengdu in the Qing and early Republic.

The topic is significant in several ways. Suburbs have long been important in Chinese urban history. Marco Polo noted that the walls of the Yuan capital, Dadu, were encircled by lively suburbs.

1 In the case of Qing Beijing, see, for example, Naquin 2000, 7.

2 On Beijing's Qing police system, see Dray-Novey 1993.

3 On the runner system in urban areas, see Watt 1977 and Reed 2000.

4 Skinner 1977b, 547. For more detailed discussion of these associations, as they existed in cities in Taiwan, see DeGlopper 1977 and Schipper 1977.

The areas between the neighbouring gates have been occupied by a continuous series of dwelling, commercial, factory, and other buildings which were hardly separated from each other by rural land. The expansion of the city along the main highways stretched about 3-4 miles; and the built-density of the suburbs even exceeded that of some of the areas within the walled city.⁵

Study of the history of these suburbs will allow us to reconsider Frederic Mote's influential argument concerning the "rural-urban continuum" in Chinese history. Mote claimed that one of the most important distinctions between Western European and Chinese cities was the degree to which the lives of their residents were different from those of the inhabitants of rural villages. In Western Europe, Mote noted, city culture and rural culture clearly diverged. In late imperial China, however, that was not the case.

Neither the city wall nor the actual limits of the suburban concentration marked the city off from the countryside in architectural terms. Nor did styles of dress, patterns of eating and drinking, means of transportation, or any other obvious aspect of daily life display characteristic dichotomies between urban and rural.

Mote admitted, however, that this observation pertained primarily to elite culture: "Among the lower ranks of society," he added, "there probably were much more clearly identifiable urbanites and ruralites, and no doubt the distinction between city and country must have had greater meaning in their daily lives."⁶

When Mote proposed his "rural-urban continuum" hypothesis, there had been very little research on the areas outside the walls of Chinese cities, what he called "the actual limits of the suburban concentration." Twenty-five years later, that still seems to be the case. My study of Chengdu's suburbs aims to contribute to a better understanding of the role they played as a border zone between the city and the countryside, and prepare the ground for a more thorough examination of how the city was experienced by a wide range of people in the Qing and republican periods.

Since Mote wrote his pioneering essay, the development of suburbs in other parts of the world has become an important topic in comparative urban history. Urban historians have devoted a great deal of attention to why, for example, in the twentieth century suburbs became so much more prominent in American metropolitan life than they did in

5 Glen Trewartha provided this synopsis of Marco Polo's observations on Dadu; cited in Wu Jin 1993, 30.

6 Mote 1977, 116-117.

Europe.⁷ In studies of Western European cities, the suburbs have been examined as distinct cultural zones whose residents shared a collective identity. Paris in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had its “red belt,” where neighborhoods with high concentrations of workers gave birth to radical political movements.⁸ East Asian cities have not been included in cross-cultural historical study of suburbs, primarily because the development of suburbs in East Asia has been almost entirely ignored by historians, despite the size and importance of these districts.

One factor that might help explain why historians have not developed many theories concerning Chinese suburbs is their great variety. Consider two rather extreme examples: Beijing and Guangzhou. In her recent book on the former, Susan Naquin writes that Beijing's walls and moat drew “a sharp line between it and the countryside.” This is not to say that the two were unconnected: “Although imperial and official Peking usually presented itself as the sharply bounded space defined by the walls, the worlds of commerce, religion, and private leisure extended firmly but irregularly into the countryside.”⁹ Still, the vast majority of Beijing people lived inside the walls. In Guangzhou, on the other hand, most people lived outside the walls, as Michael Tsin makes clear. “Not unlike many other urban centers in late imperial China, Qing Canton did not have any clearly defined boundaries.” Nevertheless, the walls of Guangzhou, he argues, served as “a poignant symbolic divide between the two sides” of commerce and government. All merchant native-place associations (*huiguan* 會館) were located outside the walls. When in 1905 the Qing administration created a new Chamber of Commerce (*zong shanghui* 總商會), its intention to dominate that institution was clear: it located the Chamber inside the walls.¹⁰

Chengdu stands as an intermediate and perhaps more typical case. There was substantial commercial activity inside the walls, but the suburban areas were also well developed. Chengdu's history in the first decades of the twentieth century also make it an interesting site to observe the evolution of suburbs. As an important provincial capital, it experienced the major urban transformations associated with the Qing New Policies reform efforts. The construction of two new gates in the first few years after the 1911 Revolution allows us to gauge the significance of gates in the early twentieth century and consider how the collapse of the Qing affected the morphology of the urban fringe.

7 The classic study of this phenomenon is Jackson 1985; this work inspired a flood of research on comparative suburbanization. For a review of some of this literature, see Sies 2001.

8 Merriman 1991; Robert 1997, 41.

9 Naquin 2000, 6, 17.

10 Tsin 1999, 17-18.



Figure: Map of Chengdu circa 1911, showing the Qing-era city walls with rivers surrounding them. The wall surrounding the Banner garrison is shown on the left. Published in volume five of *Shina shō betsu zenshi* (Tokyo: Toa Dōbunkai, 1917).

Chengdu's Walls and Gates: The 17th-19th Centuries

The city wall that surrounded Chengdu in the mid-Qing was built on roughly the same scale and site of a wall that had been constructed in the ninth century by Tang administrators.¹¹ Before that time, Chengdu's city wall had enclosed a rather limited area. Tang Chengdu was quite populous, and, before the new wall was built, the majority of residents lived outside the walled area. In the ninth century, these suburb dwellers suffered from incursions of the armies of the Nanzhao kingdom from the southwest. In 876, Gao Pian 高駢 of the Tang requested and received imperial permission to build a larger enclosure, called the Luocheng 羅城, and reroute the rivers to flow around it.¹² In the Song dynasty, the Tang Luocheng was rebuilt as the main city wall. It was expanded slightly in the Ming, although the number of city gates declined from ten in the Tang to five in the Ming and only four in the Qing.¹³

11 The most detailed study of the development of Chengdu from its first construction in 310 B.C.E. is found in *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed. 1987. That study uses gazetteers, official histories, travel accounts, and poetry (particularly for the Tang and Song periods) to describe the physical evolution of the city up to 1949.

12 On the rerouting of the rivers, see Feng Ju, et al., eds. 1998, chapter five. G. William Skinner argues that, in the Upper Yangzi region, "the location of major cities appears virtually preordained by the structure of the river systems" (1977b, 13), but the authors of *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed. 1987 (pp. 13-14), speculate that Chengdu's site was chosen by the Qin conquerors in 310 B.C.E. because of its strategic location in the middle of Shu territory. The river system that served the city was designed then and modified over subsequent centuries.

13 This does not include water gates, which allowed a branch of the river and small boats to pass through the city walls. There were water gates through the west and east walls in the Qing era.

In 1646 this wall and all buildings in Chengdu were more or less completely destroyed by the forces of Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠. Zhang had declared himself emperor a few years earlier, making Chengdu his capital. Faced with the advancing armies of the Qing conquerors, however, he laid waste to his capital and much of Sichuan.¹⁴

After defeating Zhang and pacifying Sichuan, Qing administrators slowly rebuilt Chengdu, starting with the outer wall. The first provincial offices in Qing Chengdu were located in the gate towers constructed above the four gates. When finished, the outer wall enclosed 1,150 hectares, which made Chengdu the seventh largest walled city during the Qing.¹⁵ By the end of the Kangxi era (1661-1722), Chengdu once again was filled with administrative offices, and immigrants from other parts of China had repopulated it. The Qing also rebuilt the walls of the old Ming palace city in the center of the larger walled area, using the space for the provincial examination hall and a mint. Most provincial offices were located to the south and east of this area, which the people of Chengdu continued to call the “imperial city district” (*huangcheng ba* 皇城壩), a reference to when it had been the site of the imperial palace of the Former Shu state in the early 10th century. Several thousand Banner soldiers were stationed in Chengdu early in the eighteenth century, and an area in the western sector of the city was walled off as a garrison for them in 1718. This “smaller city” (*Shaocheng* 少城) occupied about a fifth of the total walled area of Chengdu.¹⁶ The western wall of the larger city was also the garrison's western wall; the larger city's West Gate could be reached from within the city only by passing through the Banner garrison.

The *Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer* of 1815 reported that 775,000 people resided in Huayang and Chengdu, the two counties encompassing the walled city of Chengdu.¹⁷ Perhaps as many as a third of these lived within the city walls of Chengdu. Accounts from first decade of the twentieth century state that extensive vegetable plots still existed within the city walls, but well before then the suburbs outside the gate had already developed into lively communities. T. T. Cooper, a British traveler who visited the city in the 1860s, “entered by the east gate after passing though an immense extent of suburbs.”¹⁸

As in other Chinese cities, Chengdu had no real equivalent to a downtown core such as could be found in European and American cities. Small shops and businesses were

14 Sichuansheng wenshiguan, ed. 1987, 91-94; Wang Di 1993, 259-261.

15 Chang 1977, 91. According to Chang's reckoning, Chengdu's walled enclosure was about the same size of that of Kaifeng, Hangzhou, and Xi'an. The only substantially larger enclosures were at Beijing, Nanjing, and Suzhou.

16 The name Shaocheng was a legacy of the Qin era, when the larger walled city was flanked on the southwest by a smaller garrison area. See Sichuansheng wenshiguan, ed. 1987, 14, 99. On the history of the Banner garrison, see Liu Xianzhi 1983.

17 *Sichuan tongzhi* (1815), cited in Li Shiping 1987, 168.

18 Cooper 1871, 155.

scattered throughout the walled area. The most concentrated business district, though, occupied the southeast corner of the walled city, flanking the Great East Street that extended from the center of town to the East Gate. In addition to many imposing shops, most of the native-place associations established by sojourning merchants were located in this southeastern quadrant.¹⁹

Other areas of Chengdu were primarily residential, but temples and government property existed in every sector of the city. The latter included archery ranges for the various military units stationed in the city, as well as large parade grounds in the four corners of the outer city wall. The largest of these was the east parade ground, where the Qing governor-general reviewed the provincial troops once a year. Surrounding the east parade ground was one of Chengdu's most elegant districts—the northeast corner.

The author Ba Jin's family lived in Chengdu's northeast corner, and the household compound featured in his *Turbulent Stream* trilogy 激流三部曲 is a representation of the environment in which he grew up. By the late-nineteenth century, this area contained some of the largest residences in the city. Shops lined the main streets, but the smaller streets resembled the residential alleys in Beijing's inner city—rows of lofty walls stretching between elaborate gates that led into the enclosed courtyards of the city's wealthiest residents.

In some ways, the districts outside all four gates were quite similar. Chengdu is in the center of a large plain, with intensively planted and irrigated cropland in all directions. A walk outside any of the gates would take one first through a enceinte or defensive enclosure filled, by the late-nineteenth century, with small shanties erected by some of the city's poorer residents. Continuing on through an outer gate in this enclosure, one would encounter more simple residences, shops, markets, temples, farmsteads, and villages. The thin strips of land along the moat-like rivers that encircled the city were rented to farmers who grew vegetables there.²⁰ All this was common to all the outer gate areas. But there were some important distinctions in the nature of the hinterland in each direction. Inside and outside the perimeter wall, the four quarters of the city developed in different ways, influenced in part by the traffic that passed through each gate. A quick sketch of the milieu of each of the gates will illustrate this point.

The North Gate

Since its construction by the Qin state in 310 BCE, Chengdu has always been an impor-

19 In addition to *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed., 1987, see Stapleton 2000, chapter one, for more detailed description of Chengdu.

20 Fu Chongju 1987, 1: 16. Fu describes both the huts in the enceinte area and the vegetable plots along the edges of the rivers. He states that this land was rented to poor farmers, but does not note who owned the land and received the rents.

tant administrative capital. Until the twentieth century, its administrators have almost always looked to the north for their political instructions. That was certainly the case during the Qing. The imperial road upon which officials made their way to Beijing began at the North Gate. The first of eighteen post stations leading to the Sichuan border with Shaanxi, Jinguanyi 錦官驛, was located adjacent to the yamen of the Chengdu county magistrate, inside the North Gate. Thirty horses were kept ready to carry the couriers who delivered monthly reports and special dispatches from the Sichuan governor-general to the Qing court along the imperial road outside the North Gate.²¹

Fleeing warfare around the imperial capital, Chang'an, the Tang emperors Xuanzong (r. 712-756) and Xizong (r. 873-888) traveled this road to Chengdu. During their Sichuan sojourns, they endowed several monasteries and temples around Chengdu. One of the largest was the Zhaojue Monastery 昭覺寺 outside the North Gate. Scenic Fenghuang mountain 鳳凰山, due north of the city, was the site of numerous family shrines.²²

During the Qing, Chengdu was the seat of the Sichuan provincial government, as well as the West Sichuan circuit attendant, the Chengdu prefect, and two county magistrates. The boundary between Chengdu and Huayang counties passed through the walled city, northeast to southwest. Chengdu county's City God Temple was located just outside the North Gate.²³ Large crowds gathered in the courtyard of this temple for annual performances of the drama *Mulian Saves His Mother* (*Mulian jiumu* 目蓮救母). Performances could last from ten days to a month. Criminals sentenced to "lingering death" were executed outside the North Gate, although sentences of decapitation or strangling were carried out at the military parade grounds inside the walls.²⁴

Economic activity outside the North Gate centered on the trade in lumber. Logs harvested in the mountains to the west were floated down the Fu River. There they were cut and sold at lumberyards north of the walled city.²⁵

The East Gate

By the mid-Qing, much of Chengdu's long-distance trade was carried out along the river and land routes leading to Chongqing and the rest of the Yangzi river valley. As a result,

21 Zhou Xun 1986, 42-44. *Chongxiu Chengduxian zhi* 1971, 1: 271.

22 See the illustration in *Chongxiu Chengduxian zhi* 1971, 1: 60-61.

23 The authors of the *Revised Chengdu Gazetteer* published in the 12th year of the Tongzhi reign (1873) did not know when this city god temple was first built, but note that it contained an incense burner dating from the Ming era. *Chongxiu Chengduxian zhi* 1971, 1: 219.

24 Zhou Xun 1987, 61, 55-56.

25 Fu Chongju's 1909 *Comprehensive Guide to Chengdu* lists twenty-four lumber merchants who operated outside the North Gate. Fu Chongju 1987, 2: 367-368, 525-526.

the commercial heart of city developed inside and outside the East Gate. The Great East Road inside the East Gate was the premier business location throughout the Qing and up until the mid-1920s. From dawn to dusk, the river port just outside the East Gate was full of porters and merchants, as well as travelers boarding boats for the journey downriver toward Leshan and Chongqing.²⁶

The area outside the East Gate was home to the largest suburban population during the Qing. In 1909, according to a police census, 36,771 people lived in the eastern suburbs. This was more than one-tenth the total population count for the city as a whole.²⁷ How were the neighborhoods east of the East Gate organized? The evidence on this point is unfortunately still quite limited. Judging from accounts from the early twentieth century, however, I suspect that the eastern suburbs had very active local headmen (*baozhang* 保長), who helped regulate construction and maintain local order. On the other side of the East Gate, inside the city walls, these matters were attended to by military patrolmen and runners attached to the county offices, in addition to neighborhood headmen. To understand the dynamics of suburban growth, it will be necessary to learn more about these local headmen.²⁸

The South Gate

Much of the traffic through the South Gate consisted of farmers bringing their produce to sell in the city. One of the streets just inside the gate was the site where dealers in young girls, as well as women seeking employment as nursemaids and household laborers, gathered to meet potential buyers or employers.²⁹ The built-up area outside this gate was relatively small. Large plots of land were used during the mid- and late-Qing as cemeteries by associations of people sojourning in Chengdu. The area just west of the South Gate on the opposite bank of the Fu River was the center of Chengdu's leather goods industry, where cattle and pigs were slaughtered and their hides tanned.³⁰

For most of the residents of the walled city, however, the South Gate was the way to get to the best pleasure grounds around Chengdu. The annual flower festival, a legacy from Tang times, was held in the spring in the Daoist Green Goat Monastery 青羊宮 and its neighbor, the Two Immortals Temple 二仙庵. Both of these were located southwest of

26 Wang Di 1993, 259.

27 *Xuantong yuannian Shengcheng jingqu diyici diaocha hukou yilanbiao*

28 After the creation of a new police force in Chengdu in 1903, newspaper accounts of local crime and neighborhood events frequently made mention of *baozhang*, who were always identified as located in the districts outside the city walls. Chengdu newspapers consulted include *Chengdu Daily* (*Chengdu ribao* 成都日報) in the late Qing and *Citizen's Gazette* (*Guomin gongbao* 國民公報) and *Gaze of the People Daily* (*Minshi ribao* 民視日報) in the early Republic.

29 *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed. 1987, 278.

30 *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed. 1987, 294.

the walled city, but, because the Banner garrison stood between the major residential areas and the West Gate, most people went to the flower festival via the South Gate. Another favorite destination to the south was the temple and park land surrounding the putative home of the Tang poet Du Fu.³¹

The West Gate

Although some of the richest farmland on the Chengdu Plain was located in Pi County to the west of the provincial capital, the area outside the west wall was the least well developed of Chengdu's suburban areas. This is no doubt due to the presence of the Banner garrison in the western sector of the walled city. As noted above, the street leading from the center of town to the West Gate passed through the Banner garrison. It is not clear, however, that there was a greater degree of difficulty passing through that gate than any other. When Cooper, the British visitor in the 1860s, left Chengdu on his way to Tibet, he went by way of the West Gate. His rather detailed account of this journey makes no mention of the garrison at all, although he noted that his party was delayed for ten minutes at the gate as customs inspectors checked his passport and made a record of all of his baggage. In contrast to the eastern suburbs, which he described as "immense," those outside the West Gate were "dirty and straggling." The people he saw were either farmers heading to the city with produce or impoverished laborers offering to carry his sedan chair and baggage as sub-contractors for the bearers he had already hired.³²

This brief survey of the areas surrounding Chengdu's four gates tends to confirm Mote's views on the regularity and frequency of city residents' movement back and forth through the gates. The East Gate in particular must have seen a steady stream of passers-by. But our study so far has revealed little about the differences between neighborhoods inside and outside the wall. Evidence on the significance of "inside" versus "outside" is still difficult to assess. A slightly clearer picture of the nature of Chengdu's suburbs emerges when we examine the history of the late Qing New Policies reforms of 1901 to 1911.

Chengdu's Suburbs in the Early Twentieth Century

In the early twentieth century, Chinese urban life changed dramatically. Rapid immigration to the industrializing cities along the east coast produced a new sort of Chinese city, in which native place associations and factory dormitories played significant roles in or-

31 *Sichuansheng wenshiguan*, ed. 1987. On the two temples, see pp. 390-394; on Du Fu's "grass hut," see pp. 355-361. Zhou Xun 1987, 53-54.

32 Cooper 1871, 164-165.

ganizing communal life.³³ Cities throughout China felt the effects of the self-strengthening movement, when provincial governors and other officials began promoting the development of industry and commerce. In the course of the New Policies reforms in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Qing government expanded the reach of the formal state by setting up professional, centralized police forces, sanitation offices, and a range of new institutions, such as workhouses for indigents and orphans. And, even in the interior, foreigners began to acquire urban land and construct residences, offices, factories, schools, churches, and hospitals. All of these developments affected the shape of Chinese cities.

In Chengdu, the districts outside the gates were transformed in quite different ways by the creation of a new police system, the growth of the foreign community in the city, and the new emphasis on economic development. The history of these transformations shows that the late Qing state succeeded in getting a much tighter grip on the territory outside the North and East Gates, while giving up control over the area south of the walled city.

In 1902, a band of rebels succeeded in entering the walled city of Chengdu from the east, passing unobtrusively through the dense suburbs and the East Gate. Approaching the governor-general's compound, they seized knives and other implements from a hardware shop and attacked the yamen guards. It took several hours for troops from the city garrison to subdue them.³⁴ This incident was the catalyst for the creation of the new Chengdu police force. The Chengdu police were modeled on the forces Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 had set up in Changsha in 1898 and Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 had established in Baoding and Tianjin in 1901, which were modeled on the Meiji-era Tokyo police system.

The first step Chengdu police authorities took in setting up the force was to divide the city into police districts. This process played an important role in drawing the boundaries of the city in an era when "city administration" (*shizheng* 市政) became a top priority for both officials and local elites. The Banner garrison became a district of its own, with an independent police force recruited from among Banner soldiers. The rest of the city, as the police defined it, was divided into six districts: Central, East, South, West, North, and Outer East. The creation of the Outer East district, which covered the developed area outside the East Gate, indicates that police authorities considered the suburbs an integral part of the city. They had planned, at first, to create "Outer" districts outside the other three gates as well. By the time the police began patrolling the streets in late

33 On native place associations in Shanghai, see Goodman 1995. On the world of Shanghai workers, see Honig 1986.

34 On this incident, and for more detail on the Chengdu police, see Stapleton 2000, chapter three.

spring of 1903, however, the North, West, and South police districts had taken responsibility for setting up sub-district offices and patrols in the area outside their respective gates.³⁵ Nevertheless, it is clear that late-Qing officials did not consider the walls a divide between different types of administrative districts. The eastern suburbs were recognized as equivalent to the center of the walled city, in administrative terms. And it is clear that police undercover investigations were particularly active in the suburbs. In 1908, police investigators claimed to have uncovered a plot to attack foreigners and government buildings when they overheard the members of a religious sect discussing their plans in a tea-house outside the North Gate.³⁶

Like the Tokyo police in the Meiji era, the Chengdu force was given a broad mandate to bring order to the city, and the suburbs were a prime target of their cleanup campaigns. Since the mid-Qing, prefectural and county authorities had set up soup kitchens (*zhouchang* 粥廠) every winter, one outside the East Gate and one outside the North Gate. One late-Qing official estimated that some two thousand people had received food there each year.³⁷ Many of the most indigent Chengdu residents, who supported themselves by begging, lived under bridges in the eastern suburbs, according to early twentieth-century observers and police reports.³⁸ The new police administration determined to rid Chengdu of beggars. It created two “beggar workhouses” outside the East and South Gates, a new charity hospital outside the North Gate, and an orphanage inside the East Gate. Official reports state that these institutions housed 2,000 people by 1906.³⁹

The attention the new Chengdu police paid to regulating the suburbs strongly suggests that, before the twentieth century, the areas outside the gates had been allowed to develop without close oversight from county authorities. In that sense, they had been a “fringe” zone, where rules were less strict and beggars could find a bit of living space. The late-Qing police, however, tried to incorporate this zone into their well ordered, uniformly administered city.

Ironically enough, however, just as the northern and eastern suburbs were being drawn into the newly policed city, a large sector of the southern suburb was being separated from it. In 1905, a coalition of Christian mission organizations active in Chengdu agreed to establish a university. In 1910, they were able to buy a large piece of land south of the walled city, upon which to build the West China Union University (WCUU).

35 *Sichuan tongsheng jingcha zhangcheng*.

36 *Xinhai gemingqian shinianjian minbian dang'an shiliao* 1985, 2: 779-89.

37 Zhou Xun 1987, 39-40.

38 Vale 1907a.

39 *Xiliang yigao* 1959, I: 46.

Much of the land was purchased from native-place associations, which had used it as burial grounds for sojourners from other provinces. Although there are no records of the deals struck with the associations and other landholders, there is no doubt that the foreign consuls exerted a great deal of pressure on provincial authorities to get them to intercede and promote the transfer of deeds.⁴⁰ WCUU's large campus was completely surrounded by a wall, with well guarded gates of its own. Much as in the case of the Banner garrison in Qing times, the vast majority of Chengdu residents were not welcomed inside those gates. A visitor in the mid-1920s remarked ruefully that the campus constituted a small foreign heaven in what, at that point, was a rather hellish city.⁴¹

The history of the construction of the WCUU campus suggests that, with sufficient motivation, Qing officials could get control of suburban land and set in motion major changes outside the city walls. Another project to the southwest of the city demonstrates this, as well. Economic development was one of the goals of the New Policies era, and Chengdu officials decided one way to achieve that was to transform the old Flower Festival, held each spring in the Green Goat Monastery, into an industrial fair to promote crafts and industry in Sichuan. As a symbolic statement of the mission to open Chengdu to new economic forces, the provincial government widened the road leading from the South Gate to the fairgrounds in the monastery. Shortly afterwards, the first rickshaws in Sichuan began transporting fairgoers back and forth along this road.⁴²

There was widespread agreement in elite Chengdu circles that modern transportation was the key to economic development. In 1905, the Qing emperor authorized the formation of a company to build a railroad connecting Chengdu to Chongqing and then Hankou. The arrival of the railroad in Chengdu would certainly have had profound effects on its morphology, as David Buck has shown in the case of Changchun.⁴³ But, despite the high hopes of Chengdu's merchants and gentry, trains would not approach the city for another half century. The railroad company was nationalized in 1911, leading to widespread protests against the Qing that helped bring about the collapse of the dynasty. The next transformations in Chengdu would be the work of its new republican rulers.

New Gates in Republican Chengdu

The first half of the twentieth century saw the destruction of many of China's city walls

40 On the establishment of WCUU, see Beech 1933.

41 Shu Xincheng 1934

42 Fu Chongju 1987, I: 306-307.

43 Buck 1999.

and gates. Walls began to go down in eastern China beginning in 1902, when the imperialist allied armies that had occupied key north China sites in the wake of the Boxer uprising tore down Tianjin's city wall.⁴⁴ In 1912, right after the fall of the Qing, the Shanghai municipal council removed the walls around the old Chinese city. By 1918, when Guangzhou's city government began to have its walls torn down, it had become accepted among Chinese city planners that modern economic growth demanded that walls be replaced with roads.⁴⁵

Even though a new city government along the lines of Guangzhou's was set up in 1921 in Chengdu, the city's outer walls remained intact. Civil disorder and military unrest plagued Sichuan for most of the republican era, and the walls and gates continued to play a defensive role in the warfare. The decentralization of political authority in Chengdu reached its full extent in the 1920s. Unable to support an effective police force, city authorities ordered neighborhoods to organize street militia to patrol at night. Street militia heads taxed their neighbors to buy uniforms and equipment to outfit their men. To some observers, street militia heads seemed like warlords on a smaller scale. The term "militia lord" (*tuanfa* 團閥) began to appear in the local papers, used by editorialists who lamented the militarization of Chengdu's neighborhoods.⁴⁶

In the first few years of the Republic, the new authorities did make two major changes to the city's infrastructure: they tore down most of the smaller wall that had separated the Banner garrison from the larger walled city, and they created two new gates, one through the southern part of the west wall and one through the northern part of the east wall.⁴⁷ The new gate on the west quickly became the preferred route to the annual Flower Festival.⁴⁸ One might think that the opening up of the Banner garrison would have led to a surge of growth in the western suburbs, but that seems not to have happened. One possible explanation is the fact that the much of the land in the Banner garrison was bought up by the new militarists who had begun to dominate Sichuan politics.⁴⁹ Control over travel in the west of the city may very well have been as closely monitored and restricted as it had been in Qing times.

It is not clear why a new gate was opened in the northern section of the eastern wall. Perhaps it was seen as a way to facilitate trade and movement between the commercial

44 Luo Shuwei 1989, 2. Luo argues that, although the destruction of Tianjin's walls by the foreign invaders was insulting to the Chinese, it did nothing but benefit the city itself, which developed as a "natural" economic center rather than as a "planned" imperial capital.

45 Tsin 2000, 61.

46 One such editorial appeared in the 18 September 1926 issue of *Minshi ribao*.

47 Sichuansheng wenshiguan, ed. 1987, 98-100.

48 Zhou Xun 1987, 56.

49 Yang Bingde, ed., 1993.

southeast and the wealthy areas in the northeast of the city. If that was the case, the plans seem to have failed miserably, judging from a series of communications dating to 1933 between city officials and residents of the northeast sector of the city. This exchange deserves to be described in some detail, because it sheds light on the fate of Chengdu's suburbs after the fall of the Qing.

The neighborhoods in the northeast suffered somewhat in the republican period from the construction of a new central business district in the neighborhoods adjacent to Great East Street, making the northeast corner of the city much more peripheral than it had been to the life of the city. This reshaping of the commercial life of the city had begun during the last decade of the Qing, when the government encouraged a group of wealthy merchants to launch a large-scale urban development project near the busy Great East Street commercial district, including a commercial arcade and an elegant hotel and theater complex, built in 1909. Ba Jin's uncle served as one of the directors of the company that formed to build the project, and he worked closely with provincial government officials.⁵⁰

The pattern of government-merchant cooperation in establishing a city center continued in the republican era, after a municipal government was set up. In 1924, a new commercial street was laid on the site of the office of the Qing provincial judge, linking the commercial arcade and Great East Street. The venture was promoted by the warlord who was occupying the city at the time, and supervised by a wealthy jeweler, who used his native Shanghai's Nanjing Road as a model for the new street. The agreement between the warlord and the jeweler-financier allowed the latter first right to buy the property along the new street, and he turned a tidy profit when the storefronts his company constructed filled up and the area became a vibrant city center.⁵¹ To add to the attractions of this downtown, the city government built a new Central Park on the site of the offices of the Qing provincial commander (*tidu* 提督), and rented the space within it to restaurant and teashop operators.

The development of this new business district preoccupied city authorities, and they and the military leaders in the city paid less attention to the neighborhoods in the northeast. In 1933 a group of fifty residents of the northeast sector of the city—including one sub-precinct militia head, one sub-precinct police commissioner, eighteen street militia heads, fifteen street headmen, and fifteen “citizens” (*gongmin* 公民)—from the East police precinct's fifth sub-precinct urged the city and provincial governments to adopt a

50 “Chengdu shangyechang.”

51 Stapleton 2000, chapter seven.

plan they had devised for the development of the east parade ground.⁵² The details of their proposal show that they had followed the development of the other districts of Chengdu closely. The development plan included a park, a public hall, and a tract of land to be sold to individual builders to pay for the other features.

The original petition adopted the language of city management that had been brought into Chengdu with the establishment of the police force in 1903 and a municipal government in 1921. The old east parade ground, the petitioners argued, was an important relic of Chengdu's history, and the creation of a park would help preserve this historical artifact, in addition to protecting public health. "As the nation becomes more civilized, the cities become more prosperous, and public places of recreation and entertainment increase," they noted, while pointing out that parks already existed in every other precinct in the city. Local students would benefit from the park, which would be provided with a library and newspaper reading room, as well as the teahouses and restaurants that would help pay for maintenance. Finally, the neighborhood leaders brought up the problem of security and crime in their quiet neighborhoods: the new east gate (called "Martially Accomplished Gate" or Wucheng men 武成門) was not very well monitored, and bandits occasionally made incursions into the walled city. The park project would encourage the development of commerce in the area, they argued, which would bring more people to the deserted streets of the northeast. For added security, they proposed that the authorities station troops next to the park and add to the guard at the new gate.

The neighborhood leaders waited two months for an answer from the city, and in May of 1933 sent another, more urgent petition that stated bluntly, "The sooner the park is built, the sooner this area will develop, and the sooner the people will be able to live in peace."

On June 17, the provincial construction bureau and city government reported that they had surveyed the area of the east parade ground and found it suitable for the development, since the only thing occupying it at the time was a brick factory. Unfortunately for the neighborhood residents, though, the city government decided to use the profits from the sale of land primarily for the restoration of the Guandi Temple 關帝廟 near the center of town, which was to be turned into a public meeting hall. Still, the east parade ground park was judged an excellent project, and the city commended the neighborhood leaders for their plans. There is, however, no record that the park was ever built.

This fragment of a story suggests several ideas to me about city development and

52 These petitions and related documents have been preserved in the Chengdu Municipal Archives, fond (*quanzhong* 全宗) 41, file 8880.

neighborhoods inside and outside the wall in Chengdu during the republican period. Municipal authorities concentrated their efforts on a few showcase districts in the city, such as the new downtown. Local leaders in other sections of town, worried that their neighborhoods were being left out, came up with their own development plans, which they justified in the same terms that the city government had used to promote its projects. In the case of the 1933 development plan, however, local leaders succeeded merely in drawing the attention of city authorities to a resource that they could use to further their own ends. The city developed very unevenly in the republican period, and neighborhood leaders could not effectively compete with a city government backed by warlords for the resources necessary for large-scale urban construction.

The other striking feature of this story is the lack of any connection or common purpose whatsoever between these residents of the northeast sector of the walled city and their near neighbors on the other side of the Martialy Accomplished Gate. To the petitioners, the new gate was judged only as a liability, making their neighborhoods less secure. We have no petitions from those even less secure residents of the neighborhoods outside the wall. Perhaps they suspected that they were even less likely than the inhabitants of the northeastern sector to win the support of city administrators intent on building a business district in the heart of town so that Chengdu would have its equivalent of Shanghai's Nanjing Road. Even the foreigners south of town could not contrive to make the suburbs secure. In 1926, the Chengdu YMCA decided to sell a piece of land near the West China Union University, which it had bought for residences in 1919. "At that time," a YMCA secretary explained, "it appeared as if the disadvantage of living outside the city and having to go through the city gates would not be serious as it was planned by the officials to keep the city gates open until midnight. This plan did not go into effect and there seems no immediate possibility of its doing so."⁵³

Let us return at this point to Mote's argument about the significance of city walls. He writes:

...the one thing that might seem to qualify as a definite boundary [between rural and urban areas], the city wall, was not in fact a boundary between an urban-within and a rural-without. It could assume the character of a real boundary between protected and unprotected areas in times of real crisis, but most Chinese in most periods had never experienced that.⁵⁴

53 YMCA Archives, China Correspondence. G.G. Helde (Chengdu) letter to R.S. Hall (Shanghai) Nov. 24, 1926.

54 Mote 1977, 103-104.

Unfortunately for the people of Chengdu, between 1911 and 1950 they did indeed experience times of real crisis. The city's walls continued to provide some security against bandits and roving armies, and the areas outside the protective walls did decline. It was only in the late 1930s, when attacks on Chengdu began to come from the skies, that great sections of the wall were torn down to facilitate evacuation of the city. The years between 1938 and 1945 mark a new stage in the evolution of Chengdu's suburbs, with the arrival of tens of thousands of refugees. These wartime transformations, as well as the subsequent development of the urban fringe after 1949, are excellent topics for future research.⁵⁵

Conclusions

This survey of the nature and evolution of suburbs in Qing and republican Chengdu—a first step, I hope, toward a more detailed and comparative study—suggests some tentative conclusions. First, suburbs flourished in the Qing, particularly the eastern suburb and its river port, which were well connected to the commercial area inside the East Gate by means of a continuous flow of merchants, transport workers, and travelers. Second, there is evidence that the suburban areas were less well policed than the walled city during the Qing, allowing rural and urban rebels to use them as staging grounds for protests against the provincial administration. Third, during the Qing New Policies reforms, authorities defined the built-up areas outside the gate as integral to the city and included them in the scope of the new police system. It would have been interesting to observe whether or not a new peripheral zone outside the new police districts would have developed in response to the tightening grip of the state on the suburbs. As it happens, however, the fall of the Qing was followed by the deterioration of the police system, even in the walled city. Fourth, and finally, the unsettled state of Sichuan military and political matters during the Republic led to the decline of the suburbs, as the walls once again served as a defense against threats from without. The new gates constructed in the first years of the Republic did not stimulate the development of the areas surrounding them or connect the neighborhoods inside and outside the walls more closely.

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55 Wu Jin (1993, p. 49) notes that "the urban fringe has now become one of the most active and important areas in contemporary Chinese urban development."

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[Abstract]

Over the course of the Qing dynasty, most provincial capitals were shaped and dominated by officials. Within the city walls, land use and construction was closely monitored and regulated for the benefit of the state. Outside the walls, however, the government seems to have exerted less control. Suburbs spread in a rather haphazard manner. This paper examines the growth of neighborhoods outside the four main gates of Chengdu. It focuses on the following topics: 1) the amount and character of the traffic that passed through each gate and how that influenced the communities outside the gates, 2) the extent of the connections over time between the districts inside the wall and the areas outside each gate, and 3) the development of the suburbs and their relationship to the walled city after the collapse of the Qing. The paper shows that, although city walls were a significant factor in Qing urban morphology, suburban development outside the walls could be substantial. Less regulated space outside the city gates served as a "fringe zone" in urban development. In the last decade of Qing rule, this fringe zone was brought under the administration of city officials, but the collapse of the Qing led to the decline of the areas outside the gates.