

# Structuring Local Identity: Nation, Province and County in Shanxi During the 1990s

David S.G. Goodman

**ABSTRACT** One of the more interesting aspects of politics in the People's Republic of China during the 1990s was the attempt by many provincial leaders to create a specifically provincial discourse of development that entailed the reformulation of provincial identity. Both inside and outside the People's Republic of China, provincialism has often been held to challenge the unity of the Chinese state. However, an examination of the provincial discourse of development in Shanxi during the 1990s suggests that provincial and indeed more local identity politics are more complex and finely nuanced than might at first seem to be the case. Shanxi's new provincial identity was neither exclusive nor opposed to other identities, but one of a series of multiple and overlapping identities, structured within a hierarchy of place and identity that reached down to and interacted with the more local levels of county and village, as well as up to the national level. At the same time it is clear that the appeal to localism has started to influence the ways in which provincial leaders participate in national politics. Moreover, there is some indication that the emphasis on localism may have resulted in the county and the town or city becoming more significant locales for identity formation than the province, though the consequences of this for provincial and local politics remain unclear.

In 1958, the then Governor of Shandong province, Zhao Jianmin, was purged after having reportedly partially argued "I am a native of Shandong. I am for the people of Shandong and the cadres of Shandong."<sup>1</sup> In 1993, the then Governor of Shanxi province, Hu Fuguo, became something of a local hero when in his first speech to the Provincial People's Congress he said, in very similar terms, "I was born in Shanxi, grew up in Shanxi, lived and worked in Shanxi for 44 years. Shanxi is my home, and the Shanxi people raised me as a son of peasants. As the saying goes 'Home influences are hard to change, home feelings hard to forget.' I have never been able to forget the affection of the people at home. My own fate and that of my home are firmly bound together."<sup>2</sup>

One of the more interesting aspects of politics in the People's Republic of China (PRC) during the 1990s was the attempt by many provincial leaders to create a specifically provincial discourse of development, not least because each entailed the reformulation of provincial identity.<sup>3</sup> For most of the previous 40 years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would have considered appeals to "localism" and the articulation of

1. Reported in *US Survey of the China Mainland Press*, No. 1850, 10 September 1958, p. 24.

2. "Renminde shengchang yao dui renmin fuze" ("The people's governor must be responsible to the people") in Hu Fuguo, *Jiang zhenhua, ban shishi, zuo biaooshuai: zai chuanguang Sanjin huihuang (Tell the Truth, Make Things Happen and Set an Example: Reconstructing Shanxi's Glory)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1996), p. 11.

3. Tim Oakes, "China's provincial identities: reviving regionalism and reinventing 'Chineseness'," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (August 2000), p. 667. Hans Hendrichske and Feng Chongyi (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

provincial interests in such partial terms to be a political crime of considerable magnitude. In 1957–58 there was a major purge of provincial leaders, including Governor Zhao Jianmin in the first case just cited, removed from office precisely for their “localism,”<sup>4</sup> and it was a common accusation hurled at many provincial leaders during the Cultural Revolution. The CCP has not generally articulated a “law of avoidance,” such as applied under the imperial system of government to prevent officials being appointed to their native place or where they had particularistic ties. All the same, its practice in appointments to positions of leadership at provincial-level and within provinces has clearly reflected a concern to avoid localism,<sup>5</sup> even though there is some evidence that a higher proportion of natives have been appointed in the reform era.<sup>6</sup>

Reform has certainly highlighted the role of provincial-level authorities as through decentralization and devolution the CCP has withdrawn from government, and government has withdrawn from economic management. Provincial autonomy has undoubtedly increased during the last 20 years. There would thus seem to be the potential for a provincialism to emerge that was not only fuelled by an economic base but also reinforced by political identity. The articulation of the provincial does not have to be seen to reinforce the arguments of those outside the PRC who at the beginning of the 1990s argued strongly that the country will at some stage fracture politically along the lines of its provinces, and equivalent territorial-administrative units, to be taken seriously. A strongly articulated provincial identity might clearly serve goals that are far less than those of separatism: the tradition of regionalism in late Qing China was after all not a propensity to disintegration.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it can even be argued that at that time provincial identity to a large extent allowed provincial elites to know, and far from not minding, celebrate that they were not the centre.<sup>8</sup>

An examination of the provincial discourse of development in Shanxi during the 1990s suggests that provincial and even more local identity politics are indeed more complex and finely nuanced than might at first seem to be the case.<sup>9</sup> Shanxi certainly saw a fairly successful attempt by

4. Frederick C. Teiwes, “The purge of provincial leaders, 1957–1958,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 27 (July 1966), p. 14.

5. Frederick C. Teiwes, *Provincial Party Personnel in Mainland China 1956–1966* (New York: The East Asia Institute, Columbia University, 1967), p. 15.

6. Cheng Li and David Bachman, “Localism, elitism and immobilism: elite formation and social change in post-Mao China,” *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (1989); and Xiaowei Zang, “Provincial elite in post-Mao China,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 6 (June 1991), p. 512.

7. Franz Michael “Regionalism in nineteenth-century China,” in Joseph Levenson (ed.), *Modern China: An Interpretive Anthology* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 34–52.

8. Joseph Levenson, “The province, the nation and the world: the problem of Chinese identity,” in Albert Feuerwerker, Rhoads Murphey and Mary C Wright (eds.), *Approaches to Modern Chinese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 268–288.

9. This article draws on the provincial media and interviews undertaken in Shanxi with entrepreneurs, local cadres, provincial leaders, intellectuals, workers and peasants since 1996 as part of research projects into social change in the province supported by the Australian Research Council. Research would not have been possible without the assistance of Professor Tian Youru of the Modern Shanxi Research Institute, and Li Xueqian of Shanxi University. Neither they, nor any of the interviewees, are responsible for the views expressed or the opinions articulated in this article.

the provincial leadership to create a new and specifically provincial identity within a more general appeal to localism. However, its provincial identity was neither conceived nor received as an exclusive identity separate from or opposed to other identities, local or national. On the contrary, provincial identity was seen as one of a series of multiple and overlapping identities. In particular, the new provincial identity was structured within a hierarchy of place and identity that reached down to and interacted with the more local levels of county and village, as well as up to the national level.

While the possibility of other long-term consequences cannot be excluded, it would seem that two other related features of Shanxi's identity politics are also more likely to reinforce the province's integration with the rest of China in the shorter term. In Shanxi, provincial identity became important, to ordinary people as well as to the provincial leadership of the CCP. However, this was a social particularism, rather than an ideology of separatism or some other form of political provincialism. Moreover, this social particularism was itself derived from the many different strands of even more local cultures within the province, with the aim of mobilizing the population behind national economic goals. In the relationship between national and provincial culture, it was China as a whole that remained privileged, in popular culture as much as within the politics of the party-state, rather than Shanxi.

At the same time, Shanxi's experience suggests that the more general appeal to localism – as opposed to the detail of its new provincial identity – has already had political consequences both on provincial leaders in their participation in national decision-making, and on the dynamics of local politics in urban areas and at the county level. Provincial leaders effectively have two constituencies to satisfy: the centre and the province. Their appointments and careers depend through the nomenklatura system on the CCP and its central authorities. However, in order to perform their centrally imposed duties satisfactorily they must also deliver to some extent on demands from and within the province. There is every evidence that Shanxi's provincial leadership tried hard to articulate an identity that at the level of principle expressed harmony with both Beijing and other provinces. Nevertheless, there was also much in the nature of their appeal to a notion of popular localism within the province – particularly the notion of provincial rights – that almost necessarily invited conflict, however muted, in specific discussions of the national interest, when there were competing interests to be reconciled.

As will already be clear, the terms “local” and “localism” have both been politicized and very broadly conceptualized, not least in the PRC. “Local” does not always refer to a small area where people know each other and can readily communicate, such as the village or county. On the contrary it has been applied to anywhere outside the political centre and below the national level of interaction. Provinces are often referred to as “local,” yet most are socially as complex and as large in scale as a nation-state in Europe. However, that comparison may also be misleading. They are more accurately regarded as an intermediate level of

government: an administrative division that originated for the most part during the Yuan dynasty, and that was intended to exercise central control by ensuring that provincial boundaries cut across the patterns of interaction of local cultures rather than reinforcing them.<sup>10</sup>

“Localism” too has had a wide range of meanings, varying not only with the scale of the “local,” but also from an implication of strong identification with a locality, through the articulation of local opinion or interest, to partiality in opposition to the national interest. In the past it has been more used negatively in the PRC to indicate resistance, or reluctance to implement a given CCP policy or strategy, albeit as articulated by leaders at or below regional or provincial levels of the administration, rather than any necessary local feeling. Unsurprisingly, the negative approach to “localism” has started to change with reform and the introduction of an effective state-sponsored discourse of localism, though the precise term for “localism” (*difangzhuyi*) has still not been depoliticized. Interviews with entrepreneurs and cadres in Shanxi indicate that the discourse of localism has significantly encouraged identification with the local – usually native place or the site of the family home – and the development of positive local feelings that stimulate public action. However, despite the efforts of the provincial leadership, this appears to have been translated into the county and the town or city being considerably more significant locales for identity formation than the province. The consequences of this for the development of politics within urban areas and counties, at the level of county, town or city, and between those levels and the province, as well as more generally, remain unclear but indicate their importance for future research agendas.

### *Shanxi in Reform*

Since the establishment of the PRC, Shanxi province has been central to its development both economically and politically. Industry based on the province’s natural resources – including coal mining, ferrous metals, chemicals and munitions – had already been established in Shanxi by the province’s modernizing warlord, Yan Xishan, during the 1920s and 1930s. After 1949, a major national centre of heavy industry was developed on these foundations, dominated by large-scale state-owned enterprises. Coal is the major industry with reserves found in all but seven of the province’s 101 counties. Most of the coal deposits are of a high industrial quality, and Shanxi is responsible for one-third of all mined coal and three-quarters of all transported coal in China, as well as two-thirds of national coke production. In addition, the province is also nationally significant in the production of aluminium and specialist steels. Almost half the known national bauxite reserves are in Shanxi, as well as China’s largest aluminium smelter. The Taiyuan Iron and Steel Company

10. Joseph B.R. Whitney, *China: Area, Administration, and National Building* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper No. 123, 1969).

produces just over a third of all China's stainless steel, and a third of all the country's silicon steel.<sup>11</sup>

Politically, Shanxi has been important primarily as a result of its role in the War of Resistance to Japan, when the base areas and the three border regions established on its north-west, north-east and south-east borders were the main frontline positions for the CCP. After 1949, despite its contributions to national heavy industrial production, Shanxi came to be associated in the public mind outside the province more strongly with peasant radicalism. Land reform and collectivization had started during the early 1940s in the Shanxi base areas and the province was an obvious source for the earliest national model peasants and rural collectives during the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> This tradition was maintained with the campaigns starting in the early 1960s to "In Agriculture, Learn from Dazhai," itself part of the Taihang base area during the war years and one of the first localities to come under the control of the 129th Division of the Eighth Route Army in 1937. The intensity of CCP activities in Shanxi during the war also meant that it recruited heavily there at that time. As a result the province provided a large number of Party members who after 1949 disproportionately became a major source of the new regime's cadre force throughout the rest of the PRC.

In the reform era Shanxi has clearly not been an economic powerhouse alongside Guangdong, Jiangsu or Zhejiang provinces. Economic growth has been moderate; its level of foreign investment has remained extremely low, if not negligible; and state sector heavy industry – particularly coal, steel and energy – still dominates the provincial economy.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, during the 1990s it too managed some sure economic advances. At the beginning of the 1990s Shanxi province had a GDP of 42 million *yuan*, and a GDP per capita of 1,528 *yuan* for a population of 29 million people. By the end of the 1990s its GDP had increased to 151 million *yuan*, and GDP per capita to 4,727 *yuan* for a population of 32 million.

Economic growth in Shanxi, though lower than in those provinces that have been the national pacesetters, was steady, and during each of the four years 1995–98 was above the national average rate of growth in GDP. In particular that growth was fuelled by a steadily increasing private sector of the economy, so that by the end of the 1990s Shanxi's private sector as a proportion of industrial output was second only to that of Zhejiang province, where the latter's economy is largely one of light industry and so more likely to have a substantial private sector. Of

11. Unless otherwise indicated, statistics for Shanxi are taken from Shanxi sheng tongjiju (ed.), *Shanxi tongji nianjian 2000* (*Shanxi Statistical Yearbook 2000*) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji nianjian, 2000). Comparative data within China are taken from: Guojia tongjiju (ed.), *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2000* (*China Statistical Yearbook 2000*) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2000).

12. The first national model peasant under the PRC was Shen Jilan from Xigou village in Pingshun county, south-east Shanxi.

13. Wang Yifeng, "Meidianlü liancan shi Shanxi zuidade youshi" ("The combination of the coal, electricity and aluminium industries is Shanxi's advantage"), in *Shanxi fazhan dabao* (*Shanxi Development Herald*) (*SFD*), 28 July 1998, p. 2.

perhaps even greater significance, for the first time since the establishment of the PRC, Shanxi's above average rate of growth during 1995–98 was achieved without an increase in central government investment in the province.<sup>14</sup>

*Leadership change.* The improvement in Shanxi's economic performance came in and after 1992 with a dramatically new strategy based on an explicitly provincial discourse of development. An appeal to localism and the creation of a specifically provincial identity were the provincial leadership's response to a number of different problems. The economic difficulties were the most clearly articulated, and the most obviously linked to a provincial discourse of development, especially since the national government's reform agenda was essentially requiring Shanxi to become more self-reliant. However, the political were equally important, not least since in one respect they might have led to a challenge to the CCP's sense of control and authority.

The catalyst for policy change was the emergence of a nativist and technocratic provincial leadership in and after 1992. The appointment of Hu Fuguo, first as Acting Governor and then as Secretary of the Shanxi Committee of the CCP from 1993 to 1999, led to a radical new style of Shanxi politics that was both popular and populist, and that sought explicitly to appeal to provincial feelings of community. Hu Fuguo was a native of south-east Shanxi, and had originally been a miner, later a mine administrator, and then Vice-Minister of the Ministry of the Coal Industry for a decade before returning to Shanxi. A product of the party-state and its leadership training programmes, Hu had excellent connections to senior CCP leaders both nationally and within the province which enabled him to move Shanxi in new directions with respect to the policies to be implemented, the style of politics to be adopted, and the personnel who would be put in charge. At the same time, his local credentials were impeccable and enabled him to generate loyalty and support for Shanxi's new directions very quickly, not only from provincial administrators but also to a large extent from the population at large, some of whom were clearly eagerly waiting for the speedy implementation of a more open reform agenda.

Faced by the imperative to deliver a more self-reliant Shanxi, Hu Fuguo laid the foundations for an appeal to localism. His appeal was not simply as a native son, but one who argued that the province had contributed greatly to the national cause without necessarily gaining adequate recompense. In part that attitude to national contributions was derived from an understanding of Shanxi's role during the war years. However, it also reflected the provincial coal industry's long-held feeling

14. Data on Shanxi for 1949–89 may be found in *Quanguo ge sheng, zizhiqu, zhixiashi lishi tongji ziliao huibian 1949–1989* (Collection of Historical Statistical Material for all Provinces, Autonomous Regions and Municipalities 1949–1989) (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1990), pp. 153–183.

that its operation benefited the rest of the country more than it benefited Shanxi.

The essence of Hu Fuguo's appeal was encapsulated in his speech to the seventh Shanxi CCP Provincial Congress in January 1996:

It has been nearly half a century since the Liberation. What reason do we have to see our people live such a poor life? Shanxi enjoys rich natural resources and our people are kind-hearted and hard working. How can we continue to let them live in poverty? Shanxi people made enormous contributions to the nation during the revolutionary war and subsequent socialist construction. How can we reward them with such poverty? How can we allow our people to enter the 21st century in the shackles of poverty?<sup>15</sup>

That passage reflects a populism that was a constant feature of Hu Fuguo's leadership. His style of politics was deliberately open and inclusive, and he led the way in raising the provincial leadership's profile and popularity through public exposure. Appearing in public and the media were part of this changed style. Few opportunities were lost for news stories in the print or electronic media that portrayed him as a "man of the people" who by inference could be supported and trusted. Eating out in a restaurant, he would almost always visit the kitchens and speak to the cooks and staff before leaving. Opening ceremonies for new projects were rarely perfunctory events, but more usually large-scale celebrations of this new style based on local culture. In June 1996, for example, Hu Fuguo even played the traditional peasant drums of his native region as part of the ceremony that opened the province's first major superhighway, the Tai-Jiu Expressway connecting Taiyuan through the Taihang Mountains to Shijiazhuang in Hebei.<sup>16</sup>

The immediate problems faced by Hu Fuguo on his return to Shanxi were political. Reform had come very late to Shanxi. During the 1980s provincial politics were almost overwhelmed by the internal agenda of clearing up after the Cultural Revolution. The provincial elite had been highly factionalized at that time in conflicts that reached back to the war years.<sup>17</sup> The same conflicts, including the relevance of Dazhai as a model for agricultural development in Shanxi,<sup>18</sup> continued to plague decision-making. Even official CCP accounts of the 1980s in Shanxi record that there had been considerable resistance to the national policies of reform.<sup>19</sup> The urgency behind a provincial discourse of development and the emphasis on Shanxi as a provincial identity allowed the new provincial

15 Hu Fuguo, "Quanmian guan che dang de jiben lilun he jiben luxian wei shixian xingjin fumin de kuashijie mubiao er fendou" ("Fight to ensure the global goal of *A Prosperous Shanxi and a Wealthy People* through thoroughly implementing the CCP's basic theories and policies"), in *Qianjin (Forward)*, No. 2 (1996), p. 10.

16. *Shanxi ribao (Shanxi Daily (SXR)), 26 June 1996.*

17. *Dangdai Shanxi jianshi (An Introductory History to Contemporary Shanxi)* (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe), p. 287.

18. Chen Jiayi, *Xiyang nongcun jingji shiji (Economic History of Rural Xiyang)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi sheng shehui kexueyuan, 1984), especially pp. 137 ff.

19. For example: Bai Suyu (ed.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de Shanxi (Shanxi Today)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), Vol.1, p. 17.

leadership to focus the minds of its fairly large – and nationally well connected – political elite on the things that brought them together rather than those that pushed them apart.

However, there was another and probably even more significant political ramification of late reform. Shanxi had been exceptionally late in its introduction of rural de-collectivization. The process did not start in the province until late 1983 and was not completed until 1989. Rural enterprise development was considerably delayed compared to the rest of the PRC, but as it started to develop in the late 1980s and early 1990s rural localities and their new entrepreneurs were able to learn quite directly from other provinces, rapidly developing in numbers and at a pace that caught the provincial leadership unawares. The challenge to the authority of the CCP never became acute, but it clearly had that potential. Through its embrace of localism the provincial leadership not only legitimated the actions of the early rural entrepreneurs but also placed itself at the head of the processes of reform and social change once again. At the same time, the construction of a specific Shanxi identity placed the activism of the rural entrepreneurs in a wider structure than simply that of their native place or hometown.

*Policy change.* Hu Fuguo's long-term response to the need for reform was to establish a number of working parties, each of which would examine strategies for Shanxi's development.<sup>20</sup> To staff these working parties he turned less to cadres from former provincial administrations, but to professional intellectuals (university and research institute staff) and technocrats with industrial and business experience, all of whom were natives of Shanxi, and almost all of whom had previously been prevented from participating in forms of public life because of their families' class backgrounds. The result was not only a series of policies and strategies for the future development of Shanxi but also the formation of an administrative team ready and able to put those policies into practice, with many becoming senior officials in the provincial government.

The difficulties the Shanxi economy faced by the late 1980s and early 1990s were not simply those that came from a dominant state sector or the provincial specialization in heavy industry – both of which had their roots in the command economy developed by Yan Xishan during the 1930s as much as with the CCP.<sup>21</sup> The inherent weaknesses in Shanxi's economic development for 40 years had been its dependence on central government investment and the lack of infrastructural development. When, as in the late 1970s and early 1980s, central investment in Shanxi

20. The preparatory reports were published as Li Zhenxi (ed.), *XingJin funin: shi da keti yanjiu* (*A Prosperous Shanxi and a Wealthy People: Ten Important Questions for Research*) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994).

21. Jing Diankui and Kong Jinzhu, *Yan Xishan guanliao ziben yanjiu* (*Research on Yan Xishan's Bureaucratic Capitalism*) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jingji chubanshe, 1993); and Donald G. Gillin, *Warlord Yen Hsi-shan*, pp. 125 ff.



rose, so too did the rate of economic growth. In 1984, for example, there was a 24 per cent increase in GDP over the preceding year as a result of increased central investment during 1981–84. However, when central government investment decreased, as with the Seventh Five-Year Plan in the latter part of the 1980s, then the provincial economy slowed and the rate of growth in GDP not only fell back to single-digit figures, it fell beneath the rate of inflation. In addition, there was an over-emphasis on the consumption of Shanxi's natural resources rather than their processing or the development of the province's infrastructure. Coal was mined almost exclusively for transport to other parts of China, despite the lack of adequate road or rail networks linking the province to the rest of the country.

The various working parties that reported to Hu Fuguo emphasized the need for light industrial development and recommended a series of infrastructure projects. Essentially the provincial government was to concentrate on the latter, leaving the former largely to the market, though the development of the coal (small-scale mining and coke production) and coal by-products (particularly chemicals and plastics) industries was highlighted. The most spectacular infrastructure projects included a massive road-building programme to meet Shanxi's communications problems, and the attempt to ameliorate the severe water shortages through damming the Yellow River at Wanjiashai (in north-west Shanxi) and diverting water through pipelines to Datong and Taiyuan. In the event the road-building programme earned Hu Fuguo the soubriquet of "the road building secretary" within the province.<sup>22</sup> The largest and most publicized road project was the Tai–Jiu Expressway which brought the rest of China much closer, and was the first stage in a network of expressways within the province linking Datong in the north with Yuncheng in the south, and Shanxi with neighbouring Hebei, Henan and Shaanxi.<sup>23</sup> The Huang (Yellow) River diversion project was no less spectacular for having been proposed by the province 40 years earlier.<sup>24</sup>

In addition there were equally as important projects to develop industries that would process Shanxi's raw materials within the province: notably the construction of electricity generation capacity, and the processing of bauxite into aluminium. In particular, the long-distance supply of electricity became a major feature of reform in Shanxi, where before little attention had been given to the possibility of establishing thermal generation plants in the coalfields and then exporting the electricity. Large new power plants were established in Shuozhou and Yangcheng

22. For example Gong Guoqiang, "Wosheng gonglu jianshe xin gaochao zaiqi" ("Another high tide for highway construction in Shanxi"), *Shanxi jingji ribao* (*Shanxi Economic Daily*) (*SXJR*), 25 June 1998, p. 1.

23. Du Wu'an, "Guanyu TaiJiu gaosu gonglu jianshe qingkuang de baogao" ("Report on the construction of the Taiyuan–Jiuguan Expressway"), *SXRB*, 26 June 1996, p. 2.

24. Tao Lujia, *Yige shengwei shuji huiyi Mao zhuxi* (*A Party Secretary Remembers Chairman Mao*) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 97; Jiao Zurao, *Huanghe luotian zuo Shanxi* (*The Yellow River Moves from Heaven into Shanxi*) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996).

supplying respectively Beijing, Hebei and Tianjin on the one hand, and Jiangsu on the other.<sup>25</sup>

The problem with all these projects, and others, including the expansion of educational services and the building of an international airport in Taiyuan, was financial. Although central government did not completely withdraw all promise of contributions to investment, it had also made it very plain that much less would be forthcoming in future. Moreover, foreign direct investment in Shanxi had been extremely low, even for a non-coastal province.<sup>26</sup> Investment was more likely from within the PRC, as with the development of the Yangcheng Power Station funded by the Jiangsu People's Government, than from foreign investment. Even by the end of the 1990s foreign investment still accounted for less than 5 per cent of provincial GDP, compared to a national average of about 20 per cent. The Pingshuo Open Cast Mine (in Shuozhou) originally developed in co-operation with Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum, was the spectacular exception to this at the start of the decade, but this relationship ended with Hammer's death and the end of the Cold War.

With the national imperative of rapid economic growth, yet with considerably less external funds, the only realistic option for the provincial leadership was to attempt to mobilize whatever resources were available locally, financial and otherwise. Necessarily this would have to be a long-term strategy, supplemented by immediate measures. One tactic was to encourage people to think and invest locally. Another was to promote a new provincial identity, not only to strengthen feelings of community and solidarity as a motivator to public action, but also to change previous popular self-conceptions of the province as socially conservative and isolationist.<sup>27</sup> Both might prove in time to be resources that would provide the key to unlocking other, as yet unspecified, economic opportunities. In the short term though the emphasis on provincial identity was also designed to encourage people to donate their savings to the public good: part of the provincial leadership's programme of infrastructure development was funded by essentially mandatory public subscription.

The development of the Tai-Jiu Expressway project provides an example of the subscription process that was put in place. National and provincial governments provided only 40 per cent of the costs of the expressway development. The remainder was funded through public contributions and collection. Cadres at different levels in the Shanxi party-state were assigned a level of donation based on their rank. Given that the province has considerably more cadres as a proportion of the population than the national average (1.6 times more<sup>28</sup>) this strategy was

25. For example "Shanxi fazhan tuopin zhudao chanye" ("Shanxi develops core industries to shake off poverty"), *SXR*B, 9 October 1996, p. 1.

26. Cui Yi, "Zijin weishenme bu xiang Shanxi liu?" ("Why won't capital flow into Shanxi?"), *SFD*, 9 June 1998, p. 2.

27. Gillin, *Warlord Yen Hsi-shan*, pp. 6–8.

28. Xu Guosheng, "Shanxi jingji luohou shei zhigou?" ("Who bears responsibility for Shanxi's economic backwardness?"), *SFD*, 2 January 1998, p. 4.

possibly more effective here than elsewhere, but nevertheless represented a considerable financial burden. The public at large were also encouraged to contribute, with their labour if not with cash donations.<sup>29</sup>

### *Reconstructing Shanxi*

The construction of a specifically provincial identity was essentially the cultural infrastructure project of Shanxi's new reform strategy.<sup>30</sup> Despite the provincial leadership's desire to build on a sense of provincial community for both economic and political ends, an idea of Shanxi and that identification first had to be created. Unlike native place, county and even to some extent the province's various sub-regions, Shanxi was not a strong or primary focus of identification. The development of a specifically provincial identity had been encouraged when Yan Xishan was the provincial warlord, especially during the period from 1911 to Japan's invasion in 1937. As a result Shanxi probably had a more clearly articulated identity than many provinces before 1949. However, even at that time local cultures, centred on county towns and the larger cities, remained considerably more clearly defined.<sup>31</sup>

The provincial discourse of development was promoted in and after 1992 under the slogan of "A Prosperous Shanxi and a Wealthy People" (*xingJin fumin*). This was a phrase that had clear resonances with Hu Fuguo's statement, cited earlier, about his vision of Shanxi and its development. It mirrored well his calls to heritage, particularism and self-reliance. However, the legitimacy for this approach was grounded not just in the PRC or even the 20th century, but also, as in other provinces faced by the need to develop a provincial discourse of development during the 1990s, in the length of the history of the area of today's province.

In Shanxi's case, this meant in particular an emphasis on the three periods when the area had been a major centre for culture and politics. The first and most significant was from the state of *Jin*, during the sixth century bce, through the Qin and Han dynasties to the Wei. The second was under the Tang – the imperial Li family had partly originated locally and had strong local connections; and the third was during the late Qing, when provincial bankers had been economically important throughout China.

29. Du Shiwei (ed.), *Sanjin tengfei zhilu – shisida yilai Shanxi shixian Deng Xiaoping lilun diaoyan baogao (Shanxi's Roads Fly Ahead – a Report into the Implementation of Deng Xiaoping's Ideas since the 14th Congress of the CCP)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1997).

30. Lan Baoli and Liu Shuxin (eds.), *Shanxi shengqing yu fazhan zhanlue yanjiu (A Study of Shanxi's Provincial Spirit and Development Strategy)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1996), especially the foreword by then Governor Sun Wencheng, "Wo kan Shanxi de jinhou shiwu nian" ("My view of Shanxi's next fifteen years").

31. Fan Changjiang, "Shanxi jixing" ("Record of a journey through Shanxi"), *Guowen zhoubao (National Weekly)*, 29 March 1937, p. 21; Colonel Fukuyama and Major Ohkubo, "Sanseishō shūkyō jyōkyō chōsa" ("Investigation of religion in Shanxi province"), Hokushina Hakengun Rikugun Sangakubutai Honbu (Mountain District HQ North China Army), 28 April 1941.

The sense of history was often quite exaggerated: the media and provincial leaders were quite capable of describing anything since the Tang dynasty as “recent” or “modern.”<sup>32</sup> Linguistically, Shanxi was often referred to as *Sanjin* (Three or Tripartite Shanxi) or *Jin*, rather than the modern Shanxi, thereby reinforcing the notion of a long heritage. The description of the province as *Sanjin* refers to the Warring States period that started around 453 bce. At that time today’s Shanxi south of the Beiyue Mountains (that is everything except the region centred on Datong in the north) was divided into three principalities, corresponding to the areas around today’s Yuncheng, Changzhi and Taiyuan.

Perhaps more remarkably, the provincial leadership also turned to Yan Xishan’s rule as a positive example. Yan Xishan had been a Confucian revivalist, who attempted to inculcate pride in Shanxi as the essential manifestation of a fast-disappearing Chineseness that had to be preserved at all costs. Moreover, before 1936 he had been largely opposed to Chiang Kai-shek’s leadership. His construction of an inward and backward-looking culture of self-reliance for Shanxi thus had an element of conviction, as well as more narrowly political motives.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1990s the provincial leadership attempted not simply to resurrect the Shanxi identity of the pre-war years, but to adapt its formulations in order to move in different directions, notably those that supported its provincial discourse of development. Yan Xishan’s advantage to the provincial leadership of the 1990s was not only that he had preached a doctrine of self-reliance but that he had also been a committed modernizer and nationalist. All the same, Yan was not personally rehabilitated in the 1990s. He had co-operated closely with the CCP between 1936 and 1939, and indeed this united front was the genesis of the CCP’s organizational strength in the Shanxi base areas during the War of Resistance to Japan. However, Yan and the CCP had been in severe conflict both before and after.

In practical terms, a sense of Shanxi identity was cultivated through the media as part of the reform agenda. As in other provinces the propaganda system of the provincial government produced a whole series of publications dedicated to the promotion of local culture, though perhaps to a greater extent. These included magazines such as the bi-monthly *Shanxi wenshi ziliao* (*Materials on Shanxi’s Literature and History*); culturally broad magazines such as *Cangsang* (*Vicissitudes*) and more literary journals such as *Huanghe* (*Yellow River*), *Huohua* (*Spark*), *Beiyuefeng* (*The Wind on the Beiyue Mountains*) and *Dushi wenxue* (*Metropolis*); as well as a series of compendia, such as the 52-volume *Shanxi tongzhi* (*The Shanxi Encyclopedia*) which is still in production.

However, an even more determined encouragement of the reconstructed Shanxi identity was to be found in the regular media – the radio,

32. For example “Yiyan-nanjin Shanxiren” (“Some comments on Shanxi people”), *Linfen ribao* (*Linfen Daily*), 19 January 1996, p. 2; and “Shuo chi” (“Speaking and eating”), *SXRB*, 22 January 1996, p. 8.

33. Gillin, *Warlord Yen Hsi-shan*, pp. 59 ff. Yan’s own views are provided in *Shijie datong* (*Universal Harmony*) (Taipei: Yan Bochuan xiansheng jinianhui, 1954).

television and newspapers – which carried stories and items of local content. Where the establishment newspapers and programmes carried stories of strategic interest in terms of economic development, the popular media concentrated on items of more cultural or general interest. Thus not surprisingly *Shanxi ribao* (*Shanxi Daily*) featured development of the Shanxi coal industry<sup>34</sup> and other industries.<sup>35</sup> Papers such as the *Taiyuan wanbao* (*Taiyuan Evening News*) and *Shenghuo chenbao* (*Morning Life*), on the other hand, concentrated on issues such as local foods, vinegar consumption and local history, both ancient and modern.<sup>36</sup>

To support this construction of local and provincial identity, the provincial leadership ensured the development of a whole network of institutes, study groups and associations dedicated to popularizing the idea of Shanxi. These included a Shanxi Culture Research Association and a Shanxi Overseas Exchange Committee. The provincial leadership also established a Shanxi Research Institute under its Provincial CCP Committee, with an initial staff of just under 100 people. Perhaps even more remarkably, it also appointed 165 local historians in different locations around the province. In absolute terms this figure is clearly not large in a population of some 30 million, but given the other challenges that were facing the provincial leadership at the time and required funding, these appointments reflect the importance attached to the development of local knowledge. A major feature of the work of these local historians was to supply news stories of various kinds to the official media.

At the same time, the scale and nature of the changes wrought during the 1990s need to be kept in perspective. Not every aspect of the new idea of Shanxi represented a radical break with the recent past, and in any case the result was definitely not a doctrine of necessary conflict with the national and nationalist ideology. The CCP's pre-reform interpretation of the province had stressed Shanxi's role both as a supplier of national resources and as a source of Communist traditions. The new provincial identity under reform built on those two elements and added two more.

One of the additional elements was a considerable discussion of and emphasis on the distinctive social characteristics of Shanxi people, clearly designed to establish a provincial sense of solidarity to overlay the more local cultures. The other was even more dramatically different. As under Yan Xishan, Shanxi was identified as a source, and sometimes the authentic source, of Chinese traditions. This aspect of the new provincial

34. For example Zhao Shurong, "Shanxi meitan gongye chengjiui huihuang" ("Shanxi's coal industry has splendid achievements"), in *SXRB*, 15 November 1996, p. 4.

35. For example Zhang Xiu and Ji Ping, "Zhaidi guzhong fuzhong bashe" ("The development of the food industry is important during recession"), *SXRB*, 8 August 1996, p. 6.

36. For examples Zheng Sheng, "Guanchang" ("Guanchang (a traditional Shanxi snack)"), *Shenghuo chenbao* (*Morning Life*) (*SHCB*), 2 August 1996, p. 6; Qu Shaosheng, "Yan Xishan tuixing de tuhuo yundong" ("Yan Xishan's native goods campaign"), *Taiyuan wanbao* (*Taiyuan Evening News*) (*TYWB*), 14 August 1996, p. 8; Liu Fang, "Techan mingchi" ("Local specialities and famous food"), *SHCB*, 7 April 1998, p. 3; and Kang Yuqin, "Shanxi de gudu" ("Ancient capitals of Shanxi"), *TYWB*, 24 December 1998, p. 7.

identity sought its substantiation not only in the length of settlement in today's Shanxi stretching back to pre-history, but also in an interpretation of the area's centrality to the development of Chinese culture. Moreover, within this interpretation of Shanxi's traditions, emphasis was not only placed on its commercial culture, clearly marking a break with the more recent past of CCP rule, but also on the province's links with the world outside Shanxi, both within China and beyond, in complete contrast to the Yan Xishan years.

*Shanxi distinctiveness.* The distinctiveness of Shanxi people was described very much in terms of social characteristics and cultural practices, with little if any attempt to identify core values as the basis of solidarity. In particular, considerable attention was paid to food, especially noodles and vinegar, as well as music and folk traditions. This process of constructing the idea of Shanxi from local cultures and practices was very mixed. Sometimes, as with the identification of noodles or vinegar as a provincial cultural icon, it was possible to highlight a near common characteristic for much of the province. On the other hand, sometimes a specific cultural element of a locality was transformed into a provincial trope, as with the transformation of Fenyang county's *fenjiu* – a sorghum-based liqueur – into the provincial drink; or with the recognition of local opera and theatre traditions. It was even possible to create a new tradition as a provincial characteristic through the elaboration of a previously highly localized cultural practice, as with the development of Drum and Gong Troupes.

The centrality of food to an identification of Shanxi is not hard to understand since eating habits over most of the province, though varied, are really not the same as much of the rest of China,<sup>37</sup> and given the absence of large communities of non-Han peoples this is doubly unusual.<sup>38</sup> Even Shanxi's nativist literary culture is identified by reference to food, and is known as the "Potato School."<sup>39</sup> Agriculture is largely dry-land farming, with almost no rice cultivation, and considerable grazing land. Except in the far south-west, where there is rice, the major staples are millet, sorghum, wheat, oats and potatoes. All grains, including potatoes, are often ground and their flour used to make noodles, as well as dumplings, griddlecakes and breads. Stews and casseroles are commonplace, and lamb is the meat of choice.

The transformation of noodles and indeed all flour products (*mianshi*) from everyday and commonplace to public culture has been a major feature of the 1990s. The media have been full of stories and articles that have raised the profile of this "noodle culture" not only generally, but

37. Li Defu, "Shanxi yinshi wenhua shuoyuan" ("The origins of Shanxi's food culture"), *SXJR*, 19 November 1998, p. 3.

38. There are only 60,000 Hui, mainly in Changzhi.

39. For example Zhu Xiaojin, "Shanyaodanpai" *yu Sanjin wen hua* ("The Potato School" and Shanxi Culture) (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), Dong Dazhong, "Shanyaodanpai' yanjiude zhongda chengguo" ("Important results of research on the 'Potato School'"), in *Shanxi wenxue* (*Shanxi Literature*) (*SXWX*), No. 2 (1996), p. 77.

more specifically as part of Shanxi distinctiveness.<sup>40</sup> Numerous books about noodles and flour products have been published,<sup>41</sup> and the province has seen the emergence of specialist *mianshi* restaurants in quite some numbers. In these restaurants – with names such as “Shanxi *Mianshi* World,” “Shanxi *Mianshi* King” or “The Complete Shanxi *Mianshi*” – noodles, dumplings, cakes and breads have become a main feature instead of being eaten as a staple at the end of the meal, or rather a somewhat longer endgame to meals has emerged.

The consumption of noodles is one explanation often advanced for Shanxi’s high vinegar consumption, which has also come to be regarded as a mark of provincial distinctiveness. Vinegar consumption is officially regarded as such an essential part of the Shanxi diet that its price remains state-controlled, if through devolution to the Qingxu county authorities, a major centre for vinegar production. Vinegar is said to aid the digestion of noodles and *mianshi*. Other explanations for its prevalence are said to be that vinegar is seen to counteract either the carbon monoxide released into the air from the burning of coal (used locally for cooking and heating since 1271) or the alkalinity of the water.<sup>42</sup>

The promotion of Shanxi distinctiveness in these ways was very much part of a process of province building. There had not, for example, previously been a specifically designated “Shanxi cuisine” before the provincial leadership encouraged its promotion. Nor had there been restaurants named specifically for the province before the 1990s – usually in terms of *Jin* and *Sanjin* at the more expensive ends of the market – which now started to proliferate. On the contrary, within Shanxi it was (and remains) often explicitly recognized that the province is characterized by its intense localism. It is, for example, commonly accepted that people from adjacent counties are almost certain to speak distinctly different languages and to have difficulties in communication. Though they are usually somewhat too heavy to be used as guidebooks, many county gazetteers in Shanxi provide a fairly lengthy section on the local language used in each county, and particularly its distinct characteristics.<sup>43</sup>

Far from there being a provincial cuisine, there had been (and remain, even if perceptions are changing) different food traditions, tastes and special foods and dishes characteristic of various parts of the province. To the end of developing a provincial identity, these were all brought

40. An informative example is Yi Fan, “Zhongguo mianshi shu Shanxi” (“Shanxi noodles are tops in China”), *SHCB*, 2 June 1998, p. 2.

41. For example Dou Nairong, Jia Baoyi and Li Jaiyan, *Shanxi miantiao (Shanxi Noodles)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1992); Wang Changxin and Ya Fei, *Shanxi mianshi (Shanxi flour products)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi kexue jishu chubanshe, 1994).

42. “Shanxi, Shanxi renmin, Shanxi laochemu” (“Shanxi, Shanxi’s people, Shanxi’s vinegar”), *Yanjiu yu fudao (Research and Guidance)*, No. 2 (1996), p. 44.

43. For example *Licheng xianzhi (Licheng County Gazetteer)* (Beijing: Zhonghua chubu, 1994), p. 683; and *Jiaocheng xianzhi (Jiaocheng County Gazetteer)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi guju chubanshe, 1994), p. 762.

together and described as “Shanxi” dishes.<sup>44</sup> Vinegar too remains locally differentiated with different grains used and many counties having their own traditions of production,<sup>45</sup> even though *Laochencu* vinegar from Qingxu remains privileged as a provincial icon.

The idea of Shanxi was also extended to theatre, music, folk traditions and literature, though more through the celebration of the local within the province. As in other provinces during the 1980s and 1990s, the plethora of new literary and cultural magazines produced in the province stressed their provincial focus, and provided a site where a specifically Shanxi culture and local identity could be explored. For theatre and music this was not difficult. Shanxi’s history of local opera and theatre forms is one of the richest in China.<sup>46</sup> However, these are all highly localized and not general across the province.<sup>47</sup> In the 1990s search for a Shanxi identity, all were encouraged and resurrected after their suppression during the Cultural Revolution, with some such as *Puju* (an opera form from Shanxi’s south-west corner) and Shangdang Theatre (the local theatre tradition of Changzhi and the province’s south-east) being recognized and often described as “Shanxi Opera” and “Shanxi Theatre” respectively.<sup>48</sup>

The search for a distinctive Shanxi folk tradition that could be promoted as part of the new provincial identity led straight to a process not unknown in other localities seeking to identify and market their own unique cultural representation. A highly localized folk tradition was made more formal and structured,<sup>49</sup> in this case with the emergence of Drum and Gong Troupes. Folk music in south-west and south-east Shanxi had long centred around the playing of drums, though each locality has its own traditions of drum, drumming and accompanying percussion. A more structured and marketable approach to this kind of folk drumming, albeit related to North Shanxi, had first been demonstrated in the film *Yellow Earth* during the 1980s. In Beijing the organization of *yangge* folk-dance teams was promoted during the 1990s as a popular, community-building form of participatory culture, and Shanxi saw the emergence of gong and drum troupes. They rapidly proved themselves to be a very popular and fairly lucrative activity, with their public performances, especially at weekends outside stores and restaurants, and for special occasions. For example, a dozen gong and drum troupes each in action separately participated in the opening ceremony for the newly built

44. Li Binhui, “Jincai de xingcheng yu fazhan” (“The formation and development of Shanxi cuisine”), *SXJR*, 19 November 1998, p. 3.

45. Li Jianyong, “Cujingshen” (“Vinegar spirit”), *Huohua (Spark)*, No. 6, (1998), p. 86.

46. *Zhongguo xiqu juzhong dacidian (China Encyclopedia of Opera and Drama)* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1995), p. 129.

47. Shi Xiao and Zhi Ming, “Zhijiang Guangzhi de Shanxi minsu diaoyan” (“Zhijiang Guangzhi’s Shanxi folkways”), in *Cangsang (Vicissitudes)*, No. 3 (1996), p. 62.

48. Zheng Xiaoyu “Qiantan Shanxi ‘sida bangzi’ ” (“A brief talk about Shanxi’s ‘Four theatres’ ”) in *Datong wanbao (Datong Evening News)*, 28 December 1996, p. 7.

49. In Bali, for example, the demands of tourism led to the reconstruction of the *Legong* dance. Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Hong Kong: Periplus Editions, 1997).



Yingze Road Bridge over the Fen River in the centre of Taiyuan on 1 October 1998.

*Province and nation.* As these examples of the newly emergent provincial identity indicate, the whole process of identity formation was very ad hoc. While there clearly was some attempt to create a single Shanxi cuisine during the 1990s, and to elevate some aspects of local culture around the province to a provincial status, the promotion of Shanxi distinctiveness also simply encouraged the pluralism of more local identities. This was particularly the case in the literary and culture magazines. However, neither provincial nor more local identities were promoted in opposition to each other nor against any wider Chinese nationalism. The editor of *Shanxi Literature* – the province’s leading magazine of that kind – spelt out the case for emphasizing localism in a 1996 article: “Works from a particular place about that particular place usually have something unique to offer, and for that reason the more native their works are, the more national and international they become.”<sup>50</sup> Those comments were part of a discussion of literature, but nevertheless indicate the essential framework for the provincial leadership’s construction of Shanxi identity more generally. Certainly, all the other elements in the definition of Shanxi identity as it emerged through the 1990s stressed the province’s central role in the development of Chinese culture and the Chinese state, at least as currently interpreted, even when this was anachronistic.

As in the pre-reform era, the emphasis in the exploitation of Shanxi’s natural resources was on the province’s contribution to the national economy. This had always been the case, especially with respect to the development of heavy industry, and this pattern continued during the 1990s, not least with the expansion of the electricity generation industry and aluminium production.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Shanxi’s role as a major contributor to the formation of CCP traditions continued to be publicized, especially those related to the period of the War of Resistance to Japan. Stories and articles, such as that which highlighted the high number of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) generals to come from Yuanping county,<sup>52</sup> appeared in the electronic and print media; and the provincial publishing houses produced numerous volumes on this theme.

The final element in the conceptualization of a new provincial identity was the promotion of Shanxi as a major source of Chinese tradition. As is typical in the construction of collective identity, the attempt was made to establish an uninterrupted history from an earliest often mythic age to

50. Duan Chongxue, “Guanyu nongcun tical xiaoshuo” (“Notes on fiction of rural themes”), *SXWX*, No. 5 (1996), p. 75.

51. For example: Zhao Shurong, “Shanghai gongye huoju shi Shanxi meitan gongye dianran de” (“The torch of Shanghai’s industry is lit by Shanxi’s coal”), *SXRB*, 15 November 1996, p. 4; Zheng Fengqi, Gao Xiangxin and Chang Jingquan, “1996: wo sheng caisheng shouru chao’e wancheng fengdou mubiao” (“1996: Shanxi’s public revenue surpassed the desired target”), *SXRB*, 19 January 1997, p. 1.

52. Shuai Zhen, Xiao Zhong and Gao Han, “Shanxi you ge jiangjun xian” (“Shanxi has a ‘Generals’ county”), *SXRB*, 22 November 1996, p. 1.

the present-day. The essence of the message was to emphasize Shanxi's long-term centrality to the project of China, as well as to appeal to local pride.<sup>53</sup>

In this case, the origin of Chinese civilization was found in the large number of prehistoric settlements – a quarter of all those known in the PRC – located in Shanxi's south-west, in particular around Linfen. No attempt was made as part of this process to define China or the Chinese tradition. On the contrary the theoretical underpinning of the argument was that “Chinese civilization was not a single event, nor was it limited to one particular area and one particular time. Rather it is a process by which various cultures stimulated, absorbed and impacted on each other.”<sup>54</sup> According to this analysis, the earliest contributory cultures had been located in today's Zhejiang, Shandong, Gansu, and the middle and lower reaches of the Chang (Yangtze) River, as well as most importantly in Shanxi, because of its geo-political situation.

From these origins, Shanxi's place at the heart of the later development of Chineseness was repeatedly emphasized in a number of ways. For example, a “Three Kingdoms City” was built in Qingxu (to the south of Taiyuan) as a theme park to commemorate the Chinese classic *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* written by Qingxu native Luo Guanzhong about the period in Chinese history from 220 to 265. Inside a temple was built and dedicated to one of the heroes of the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Guan Yu (later immortalized and widely worshipped as Guan Di) who was also a native of the current provincial area, from Haizhou in present-day Yuncheng. Moreover, the temple's giant modern statue of Guan Di was funded by donations from units of the party-state and state sector enterprises. Elsewhere, Hongtong county, in the Linfen district of southern Shanxi, was promoted as the mythical site of origin of Han Chinese, building on its role as a source of migration to the rest of China.<sup>55</sup> More generally, Shanxi's architecture, especially in its smaller towns and villages, was publicized as “traditionally Chinese,”<sup>56</sup> and its villages and rural landscapes used in television programmes and films for that reason. Most notably, the award-winning *Raise the Red Lantern* was filmed at the Qiao family mansion in Qixian.

Despite the obvious anachronism, the construction of a new provincial identity laid claim to the Tang dynasty on behalf of Shanxi, playing down the roles played by people from surrounding areas now in other

53. The most comprehensive provincially produced statement to this end is Tian Qizhi, *Dangdai Shanxi shehui kexue (The Social Sciences in Modern Shanxi)* (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1993).

54. Hou Yin, “Shanxi shiqian wenhua yu Huaxia wenming qiuyuan” (“Shanxi's pre-historic culture and the origin of Chinese civilization”), *Cangsang*, No. 4 (1994), p. 33.

55. “The spirit of people in Hongtong Country,” *SHCB*, 22 March 1996, p. 6; and Zhao Fulong “Shanxi yiminshi” (“Shanxi emigration history”), *SFD*, 11 November 1999, p. 4. After the An Lushan Rebellion and during the Ming dynasty the repopulation of parts of China was officially organized in Hongtong. The names of those who migrated are recorded on its Scholar Trees (*Lao huaishu*) that are now a place of pilgrimage for many Chinese.

56. For example Li Yuxiang (ed.), *Laofangzi: Shanxi minju (Old Houses: Shanxi Folk Architecture)* (Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 1994).

provinces.<sup>57</sup> In a practice which seems universal to all provinces during the reform era, the number and quality of individuals from Shanxi who had served in the former Imperial government, been noted writers or poets, or otherwise achieved national distinction was an almost constant matter of comment and source of stories and articles in the provincial media,<sup>58</sup> as well as of books and biographical dictionaries.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Shanxi's role as a "living museum" of Chinese culture was repeatedly stressed, partly in line with the provincial leadership's goal of developing tourism in the province but partly too to emphasize Shanxi's role in the development of Chinese culture. The more obvious sites of historical and cultural interest include Wutaishan, the entry point of Buddhism into China; the internationally heritage-listed walled city of Pingyao; the Yun'gang Grottoes outside Datong; the Daoist frescoes of the Yongle gong; and the life-size funerary figures at Jinci. In addition, the claim was often made that Shanxi had more temples, frescoes and pagodas than other provinces.<sup>60</sup>

To a considerable extent this emphasis on Shanxi's historical centrality to the development of Chineseness was the necessary counterweight, from the provincial leadership's perspective, to its emphasis on a provincial identity and its appeal to the local. In addition though, the emphasis on the past also allowed for the selection and development of aspects of Shanxi's history more concerned with the modernist causes of the reform era. For example, Shanxi under Yan Xishan was credited with having developed the first, albeit limited, native Chinese automobile industry.<sup>61</sup> More significantly, the provincial leadership was also able to resurrect the native Shanxi banking tradition – the exchange shops (*piaohao*) – originally based in Pingyao, Taigu and Qixian from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries, who dominated the provincial economy at that time and supported the Qing government financially. The exchange shops provided credit and financial services throughout China, as well as to customers in Japan, Russia, Mongolia and Afghanistan. This was a ready-made tradition of commercialism that the provincial leadership attempted to mobilize in support of reform. It suggested very firmly not only that there were no apparent cultural impediments to commercial activity in Shanxi, but also that despite a period of isolation, emphasized

57. Zhang Jiefu, "Shanxi zai Tangdai de diwei" ("Shanxi's position in the Tang dynasty"), *Cangsang*, No. 3 (1995), p. 30.

58. One fairly comprehensive account may be found in Wang Zhichao, "Shanxi chujiang ye chuxiang" ("Shanxi produces ministers and politicians as well as generals"), *TYWB*, 11 July 1996, p. 8. A more local example is, Wen Xuwang and Ma Jianjun, "Wenxi youge zaixiang cun" ("There is a 'prime ministers village' in Wenxi county"), *SHCB*, 8 January 1997, p. 1.

59. For example Li Yuanqing and Sung Anbang, *Sanjin yibai mingren pingzhuan (Biographies of 100 Famous People in Shanxi)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1993); and Liu Weiyi, *Shanxi lishi renwuzhuan (Shanxi Historical Biographies)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1995).

60. Tian Lei, "Rang Shanxi wenwu fang yicai" ("Let Shanxi's historical relics develop greatly"), *Shanxi zhengbao (Shanxi Gazette)*, 13 September 1996, p. 1.

61. Jiang Lianbao and Hao Xiaobin, "Jinren zhaoche" ("Shanxi's people-made automobile"), *SHCB*, 25 December 1997, p. 4.

during the warlordship of Yan Xishan, the province had also had significant national and international interactions, especially in economic development.”<sup>62</sup>

### *The Discourse of Localism*

One lesson to emerge very clearly from the analysis of the reconstruction of Shanxi's identity is that national, provincial and more local levels of identification have been intended to be very porous. To a large extent identification with one's native place is presented as entailing both a provincial and national identification. This may prove to be a strength but also a weakness for the political system. It is a strength for the way in which it encourages people to invest and act locally. However, it can be a weakness when there are fewer resources to go round, or even more acute competition for scarce resources. Under those more competitive circumstances, a strong local identification might lead to conflict over political identities between the local and the provincial, or the provincial and the national.

The evidence from interviews undertaken in Shanxi during the late 1990s not only with cadres but also more significantly with various different kinds of business people is that for the most part the provincial discourse of development has been well understood and internalized. Given the absence of a provincial elite outside the party-state, there were necessarily limits to the manifestations of political provincialism that were going to result. Under current circumstances the articulation of an open separatism was never a possibility. At the same time, it would seem likely that the discourse of localism has already started to have an impact on the dynamics of politics, both for provincial leaders in national politics, and at the more local levels within the province, even if the end results are far from certain.

*National interactions.* The clearest evidence of change was in the province's dealings with other provinces and with central government. The style of Shanxi politics certainly changed greatly during the leadership of Hu Fuguo, not least with his appeal to a populist localism. His openness and portrayal as the common Shanxi worker made good would appear to have been very successful. The reaction seems to have been a genuine popularity, which far exceeded that more usually afforded those in similar positions of authority and leadership, as evinced by the crowd in excess of 100,000 who turned out to bid him farewell from Taiyuan Railway Station when he left office at the end of June 1999.

However, the cost of populism, even in a party-state urging self-reliance, is that provincial leaders may reduce their room for

62. Mu Yang “Jinzhong licai jingshang jiatianxia” (“Central Shanxi is the tops for business and banking in the world”), *SXJR*, 27 September 1996, p. 3; Wang Xiaoge, “Qiongze sibian” (“Poverty gives rise to a dream for change: how Shanxi was lifted out of poverty based on Shanxi's businessmen in the Ming and Qing dynasties”), *Gaige xiansheng (Reform Herald)*, July 1999, p. 37; Huang Jianhui *Shanxi piaohao shi (The History of Shanxi's Exchange Shops)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi jingji chubanshe, 1992).

manoeuvre. They create a revolution of rising expectations, and it becomes necessary for them to deliver more. Statements about provincial rights and interests, such as Hu Fuguo's earlier cited, but not untypical, comments in January 1996 about the "Shanxi people" having made "enormous contributions" for which they received very little reward before the reform era, however mildly expressed within the province, are then likely to lead to wider contestation in national politics. Indeed, it is even possible that they were expressed publicly within Shanxi in an attempt to pressure decision makers outside the province.

During the late 1990s interviews with leading provincial administrators, especially those with economic responsibilities, indicated that the arguments about Shanxi's "enormous contributions" had been forcefully but largely unsuccessfully expressed outside the province. An obvious forum for conflict of this kind was national discussion of energy pricing. As already noted, even before the onset of reform, Shanxi's coal administrations had apparently long felt that the operation of the provincial coal industry benefited the rest of the country more than it benefited Shanxi, not least because national policy had dictated both coal prices and that the province should concentrate only on mining coal, rather than its processing. The provincial administration's attitudes were then further exacerbated during the 1990s, when, after having started to develop an electricity generating capacity within the province, price controls for coal and electricity appeared to disadvantage a heavy industrial centre such as Shanxi in comparison to the light industrial centres like Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Even if these comments from provincial administrators are regarded as exaggeration or elaborated in some way they nevertheless indicate a more strongly articulated interpretation of provincial rights and interests than in the past.

*Town and county.* The provincial leadership's appeal to localism would also seem to have had a significant impact at more local levels in cities, towns and villages, and especially at the county level. Here the consequences for politics within the province are less clear, but indicate the need for further research. The new entrepreneurs and managers who were stimulated by the Shanxi reform agenda were characterized and motivated by an intense localism, as indeed, though somewhat differently, were the cadres working in the system as it began to change. Interviews with both business people and cadres suggest that the country and the town or city were considerably more significant locales for identity formation than the province.

Interviews with business people in Shanxi during 1996–98 reveal both the relative weakness of the province as a focus of identity, and the strength of interviewees' more local identification.<sup>63</sup> Few of those

63. Some 250 entrepreneurs were interviewed across a wide range of economic sectors, and in every district of the province. Further detail can be found in David S.G. Goodman, "The interdependence of state and society: the political sociology of local leadership," in Chien-min Chao and Bruce J Dickson (eds.), *Remaking the Chinese State: Strategies, Society and Security* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 132.

Table 1: **The Localism of Business People**

<i>Category of entrepreneur or manager</i>	<i>Native to country or town workplace (%)</i>	<i>Average number years working in workplace before appointment</i>	<i>Wife working in same enterprise (%)</i>
Manager, state owned enterprise	32	12.8	41.8
Manager, urban collective	25	11.3	19.4
Manager, rural collective	63	12.0	36.7
Manager, equity-based company	50	6.6	40.0
Manager, joint venture	64	6.4	36.4
Manager, private enterprise	33	3.7	n/a
Private entrepreneur	54	6.8	91.5

*Source:*

Interviews in Shanxi 1996–98.

interviewed were willing or able to comment on Shanxi's current development. Almost all maintained that they were acting in order to improve their local community, be it district, town, village or county. Moreover, where in urban areas there was a strong social and economic identification with the town or city, in the rural areas social identification was with the village but it was the county that was seen as the key economic community.

Even a preliminary attempt to create an index of localism based on the background of these business people immediately helps explain their apparent strength of feeling for the local. Localism is usually defined, not least by the business people themselves, in terms of either native place, length of living and working in a locale, or the family home. Table 1 provides information on the localism of different categories of business people in terms of three different criteria. The first identifies the proportion of those who were natives of the county or town in which they were working when interviewed. The second considers the average number of years non-natives had worked in the same location before starting their current occupation. The third indicates how many of those interviewed had spouses who worked together in the same enterprise. Taken together these data suggest a high degree of local background, probable local connections and family commitment to the locality for almost all categories of business people, even those that had a low proportion of natives in place.

With the exception of private enterprise managers, often young unmarried management graduates, hired deliberately from outside the environment in which they would be operating, almost all the Shanxi business people interviewed were either natives of the county where they were now working, or had worked there for long enough to have developed a considerable local profile. Moreover, with the exception

Table 2: The Localism of Cadres

<i>Category of cadre</i>	<i>Native to Shanxi (%)</i>	<i>Native to or town workplace (%)</i>	<i>Average number years working in workplace before appointment</i>
Provincial administration	81	n/a	8.2
District offices	82	n/a	7.3
County	100	0	5.0
Section-level (within county)	100	60	9.5

Source:

Interviews in Shanxi 1996–98.

again of the private enterprise managers, but this time also of urban collective managers, many of the Shanxi business people who were interviewed had wives working in the same enterprise. In the new and private sector of the economy, the high proportion of husbands and wives who worked together indicates a particularly strong family dimension to local commitment. Though previous appointment practices before reform had ensured few natives had been appointed as state sector or urban collective managers, nevertheless it would seem likely that their long tours of duty had resulted in a high degree of localization. Through interviews, those who were managers of rural collectives and of equity-based enterprises certainly confirmed the statistics in Table 1 that suggest they were noticeably the most locally oriented in their outlook.

The emphasis on the local is supported by several well-publicized cases of individual success. Perhaps the best-known entrepreneur in Shanxi was Li Anmin, of Antai Enterprises, usually regarded as the province's richest person. According to his own account, because he had wanted to do something positive for his native place, he had mobilized friends and capital to start a coke producing business. Success led to expansion and eventually the transformation of his native Jiexiu county into essentially a single corporation, though one which also has activities way beyond its borders.<sup>64</sup> There are many other similar if less spectacularly wealthy examples to be found amongst Shanxi's new business elite. Liang Wenhai, the self-proclaimed "Shanxi Boiler King" from Yuci, laid great emphasis on the development of his enterprise as service to the community.<sup>65</sup> Qiao Yijian, from Yuncheng, chose to return home after

64. Liu Liping *et al.* (eds.), *Zhongguo dangdai qiyejia mingdian – Shanxi tao* (*Contemporary Entrepreneurs in China – Shanxi Volume*) (Beijing: Gongren chubanshe, 1989), p. 305; The Inquiry into the Economies and Societies of 100 Counties and Cities (ed.), *Jiexiu quan* (*Jiexiu Volume*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaiké quanshu chubanshe, 1994).

65. Wang Yonghai, Liu Yaoming, Wang Jikang, and Zhang Guilong, "Shanxi Huanhai jitian yougongsi zhongshizhang Liang Wenhai yu ta de Huanhai shiye he huanbao zhanlüe" ("General manager of the Shanxi Huanhai Group Company, Liang Wenhai, his Huanhai business and environmental strategy"), *SXRB*, 22 September 1996, p. 4.

graduation from the Central China University of Technology in order to establish a high-technology chemical industry enterprise that would bring employment and wealth to his native place.<sup>66</sup>

Localism also characterizes the background and behaviour of Shanxi's cadres, though differently for different categories.<sup>67</sup> Table 2 provides information on the localism of cadres in terms of the proportion of those who were natives of Shanxi, the proportion who were natives of the county or town in which they were working when interviewed, and the average number of years non-natives had worked in the same location before starting their current appointment. The overwhelming majority of cadres interviewed at all levels during 1996–98 were Shanxi natives, though it was the norm for cadres above section level to be required to serve outside their native place. All the same, as Table 2 indicates, it would seem that even cadres were left in a workplace long enough to become localized to some extent. Moreover, the information in Table 2 is somewhat misleading about the background of county-level cadres. They are only rarely appointed to their native county, but two-thirds of those interviewed during the mid to late 1990s were natives of adjacent counties, suggesting that local knowledge may indeed still have been an important consideration in their appointment.

A localist dimension was also very apparent in cadres' behaviour. For those working across localities in provincial administrative departments the emphasis was on Shanxi-centred development. However, cadres working in district offices, in county-level leadership positions and at the section level in county organizations had considerably more parochial perspectives. They spoke very much as local champions, often ignoring the obvious in order to exalt the local. A leading CCP cadre in a city outside Taiyuan claimed that economic management was so much better in his city, for unlike in the provincial capital, no state-run enterprises made losses. Elsewhere a district CCP cadre argued that his area, one of Shanxi's poorest, would develop quickly because it was so poor, mountainous and an old revolutionary base area.

In interviews, it was often hard to differentiate section-level cadres from local business people, especially in their attitudes towards both economic development and the locality where they worked. They saw their role as of social benefit to villages and enterprises, but identified the county as the key community of economic interaction. Given the new tasks facing the cadre force, especially at the most local levels, these attitudes were by no means surprising. These local cadres were now essentially expected to concentrate on enterprise management and local economic development, and were required to meet few political agendas. Their functions were almost exclusively production-related, and they clearly identified with the local rural and private business people with whom they were working, often very closely.

66. Lu Zhifen and Li Hong "Shanxi xiangqi fazhan" ("Village-run enterprises in Shanxi"), *SXRB*, 5 June 1996, p. 3.

67. Some 47 cadres were interviewed. Further detail can be found in David S.G. Goodman, "The localism of local leadership: cadres in reform Shanxi," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 9, No. 24 (July 2000), p. 159.



Those county-level leadership cadres who were interviewed also echoed the rhetoric of the local business people to a large extent, though in their case they usually talked about developing the whole county as if it were a business. This too was not surprising given the role of the county level in encouraging and co-ordinating economic activity that has developed under reform. For villages, enterprises and even small towns and the suburbs of the larger cities, the county level (including urban districts) has become the key point of contact between economic development and the party-state.<sup>68</sup> Those county-level leadership cadres who were interviewed recognized themselves that they were significant managers of change on the front line of economic development, and thus also politically important for that reason. Certainly their career paths would seem to indicate the overall importance of the county level. Unlike cadres at provincial, district or section levels, county-level cadres were more likely to be young, better educated and upwardly mobile, and serving as a county-level leadership cadre was the most significant testing ground for further political advance.

### *Province and County*

To some extent the emphasis on a provincial discourse of development in Shanxi paralleled experiences elsewhere in China with the introduction of reform. However, the leadership of the party-state in Shanxi seems to have promoted its identity on a scale not followed in other provinces, and to greater effect, even though the economic gains were clearly modest. In Hubei and Jiangxi, for example, attempts to implement similar provincial discourses of development proved counter-productive. The result was increased conflict within each province amongst its sub-regions, and between them and the provincial level, that in both cases led directly not only to adjustments in the provincial strategy for reform, but also to the loss of office of their provincial leaders.<sup>69</sup>

In part, explanation of Shanxi's more favourable experience may lie with the relative homogeneity of the provincial population, as well as the influence of Yan Xishan in having created a distinctive polity and Shanxi identity during the two decades before the War of Resistance against Japan. Neither can provide a total explanation of the relative, though economically modest, success of the leadership's strategy. Nevertheless, in Shanxi's case there was probably a greater sense, at least for some members of the provincial elite, of retrieval of traditions within recent memory and of the reconstruction of the provincial identity, rather than a cynical creation for immediate political purposes.

68. Marc Blecher and Vivienne Shue, *Tethered Deer: Government and Economy in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Jean C. Oi, *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Susan H. Whiting, *Power and Wealth in Rural China: The Political Economy of Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

69. Zhao Ling Yun, "Hubei: rising abruptly over central China?" and Feng Chongyi, "Jiangxi in reform: the fear of exclusion and the search for a new identity," both in Hans Hendrischke and Feng Chongyi (eds.), *The Political Economy of China's Provinces: Comparative and Competitive Advantage* (London: Routledge, 1999).

On the other hand, the 1990s provincial discourse of development did not simply replicate Yan Xishan's promotion of Shanxi's identity. Both in content and by design Yan Xishan's Shanxi had been inherently separatist. By contrast Shanxi's leaders in the 1990s may have had a distinctive provincial agenda, and may also have been prepared to stand by provincial interests in the national arena, but they remained well within and committed to the boundaries of the national party-state. Their construction of a new Shanxi identity was intended to mobilize support for the national reform agenda through creating a feeling of solidarity that transcended the more immediately local. Its focus was the identification of a social particularism, rather than a political provincialism, within a structuring of identity that privileged China.

More intriguingly perhaps, there would seem to be some evidence that the provincial leadership's encouragement of a discourse of localism has had a considerable impact on the development of collective identity at the more local, and particularly the county, level. Various interpretations of Shanxi's culture, both in the past and in the current era, have stressed the strength of local cultures to be found within the province. It seems possible that counties may still represent the fundamental building blocks of culture and identification within Shanxi, even in an era when communications and transport have improved exponentially. The structural imperatives of reform have additionally highlighted the significance of the county as a key forum of economic development. These observations all draw attention to the country level, and suggest the importance of monitoring the impact of the provincial leadership's management of identity politics on the development of the county level and its localism.