

# ‘The common aim of the Allied Powers’: social policy and international legitimacy in wartime China, 1940–47

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## Abstract

*This article examines why Western programmes of social security became a topic of interest for Chinese Nationalist (Guomindang) policy-makers during the early 1940s. It traces a generation of sociologists and civil servants, often trained abroad, who used wartime exigencies to make the case for New Deal-style reforms. While offering a route to professional advancement, social insurance was primarily intended to serve the needs of the government. Embedded in, and dependent on, the Anglo-American alliance, Nationalist party planners embraced the internationalist social agenda of the Atlantic Charter – advanced by institutions such as the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – to solidify their nation’s status as an aspiring great power, and to legitimize to foreign sponsors their hold on the state. In this regard, fascination with the likes of the Beveridge Report and the Social Security Act was a performance, intended to show how China was in keeping with the spirit of the age.*

**Keywords** China, International Labour Organization, internationalism, Second World War, social security

## Introduction

During and immediately after the Second World War, Chinese social scientists and civil servants used international social policy as a nation-building tool. Cosmopolitan in training and outlook, and shaped by their experience of working in new multinational organizations including the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), they imagined a reconstructed China, fusing indigenous traditions of relief with foreign models such as the UK’s Beveridge Plan and American Social Security. Their designs have rarely attracted scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> Preoccupied with explaining the

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1 For exceptions, see Janet Chen, *Guilty of indigence: the urban poor in China, 1900–1953*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2012; Andrew Nathan, *A history of the China International Famine Relief Commission*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1965; Joshua H. Howard, *Workers at war: labor in*

Communist victory of 1949, scholars tend to look backwards from the fall of the Republic, rather than forwards from the war years. Recent work, however, has stressed both the endurance and heterogeneity of the wartime state, and suggests the benefits of shifting our perspective. Doing so illuminates a moment in the Republic of China (ROC)'s past in which the boundaries between domestic and foreign policy blur.

Historians of Chinese nationalism are well aware of its debt to foreign precedent. Many republican leaders studied abroad, and borrowed readily from Japan, Germany, the US, and the Soviet Union in striving to establish legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> But the outbreak of war in 1937 threatened to slow the pace of exchange. With Japanese troops overrunning the main cities, and Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang (GMD; formerly Kuomintang) government committed to an attritional struggle for survival, the state-building programme of the preceding 'Nanjing Decade' fell by the wayside. The familiar interpretation, indeed, is that the war made the GMD more brutal, corrupt, and incompetent. To the American general Joe Stilwell, writing from China in 1943, the Nationalists were a 'gang of thugs with the one idea of perpetuating themselves and their machine'.<sup>3</sup>

In the last two decades, however, revisionist historians have challenged Stilwell's characterization of Nationalist China in peace and war. Frank Dikötter has argued that Republican China benefited from a relatively open civil society, a progressive cohort of leaders, and vigorous intellectual exchange through academic life and international institutions.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Hans van de Ven, Rana Mitter, and others have shown how the state that presided over 'Free China' from the remote wartime capital of Chongqing provided a laboratory for policy-makers, eager to continue the work that they had undertaken over the preceding years.<sup>5</sup>

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*China's arsenals, 1937–1953*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2004, pp. 146–7; Mark W. Frazier, *The making of the Chinese industrial workplace: state, revolution, and labor management*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002, pp. 14–15, 26–7. These accounts, however, do not cover the concept of social security in depth, and only briefly analyse specific policies such as labour insurance.

- 2 Chinese borrowing of foreign models was commonplace. See, for instance, William C. Kirby, 'The internationalization of China: foreign relations at home and abroad in the Republican era', *China Quarterly*, 150, 1997, pp. 433–58; William C. Kirby, *Germany and republican China*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1984; Margherita Zanasi, *Saving the nation: economic modernity in republican China*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2006, pp. 106–11; Margherita Zanasi, 'Exporting development: the League of Nations and republican China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 49, 1, 2007, pp. 143–69; Chang Li, *Guoji hezuo zai Zhongguo: Guoji lianmeng jiaose de kaocha, 1919–1946 (International cooperation in China: study of the role of the League of Nations, 1919–1946)*, Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1999; Chen, *Guilty of indigence*, pp. 22–4; Vivienne Shue, 'The quality of mercy: Confucian charity and the mixed metaphors of modernity in Tianjin', *Modern China*, 32, 4, 2006, p. 425; Helen Schneider, *Keeping the nation's house: domestic management and the making of modern China*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2011, ch. 1; Jia-chen Fu, 'Society's laboratories: biomedical nutrition and the modern China body, 1910–50', PhD thesis, Yale University, 2009, ch. 3; Yung-chen Chiang, *Social engineering and social sciences in China 1919–1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001, ch. 2.
- 3 Joseph Stilwell, ed. Theodore H. White, *The Stilwell papers: General Joseph W. Stilwell's iconoclastic account of America's adventures in China*, New York: Schocken Books, 1972. See Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of destruction: Nationalist China in war and revolution, 1937–1949*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984; Suzanne Pepper, *Civil war in China: the political struggle, 1945–1949*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978, ch. 1.
- 4 Frank Dikötter, *The age of openness: China before Mao*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008.
- 5 Hans van de Ven, *War and nationalism in China, 1925–1945*, London: Routledge, 2003, ch. 7; Rana Mitter, *Forgotten ally: China's World War II, 1937–45*, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013; Morris L. Bian, *The making of the state enterprise system in modern China: the dynamics of institutional change*, Cambridge,

Breaking down the monolithic impression of the Nationalist government, their interpretation presents the wartime state more as a loose coalition of competing interests and agendas than Stilwell's caricature. Approaching it in this way allows us to ask new questions about social policy, which are not shaped by the imperative of explaining the ROC's eventual collapse.

This article shows how plans for China's post-war reconstruction drew on international discussions of social policy. Over the past two decades, historians have traced the transnational connections that linked Bismarckian Germany, Liberal Great Britain, and the New Deal US, among other countries, revealing how, even as the nation-state established itself as the dominant form of political organization, its agents looked beyond its borders to bring order to the social realm.<sup>6</sup> This period of exchange – which dates roughly from the 1870s to the Cold War – rested on several factors, including the converging experience of industrial and urban transformation; the annihilation of space by railways, steamships, and aeroplanes; and the rise of the social as the domain of knowledge of cosmopolitan, credentialed experts. Towards the end of the period, multinational bodies such as the League of Nations and its successor, the UN, offered institutional spaces for deliberating and disseminating policy. To one historian, indeed, the League's Economic and Finance Organization served as a 'clearing house for intelligence, expertise, and experience'.<sup>7</sup> Such agencies enabled borrowing and established norms, becoming, for instance, powerful agents for the dissemination of ideas about social and economic rights.<sup>8</sup> It is tempting, indeed, to suggest that by transcending nation-states, they should refocus historians' attention away from the nation, but, in China's case, participation in the likes of the League became a means of nation-building.<sup>9</sup>

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MA: Harvard University, 2005. See also the special issue of the *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 11, 2, 2012, on 'Relief and reconstruction in wartime China'; and essays by Rana Mitter, Andres Rodriguez, and Felix Boecking in a special issue on 'China in World War II' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 45, 4, 2011.

- 6 Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings: social politics in a progressive age*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998; Daniel T. Rodgers, 'The Age of Social Politics', in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American history in a global age*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 250–273; Axel R. Schäfer, *American progressives and German social reform, 1875–1920: social ethics, moral control, and the regulatory state in a transatlantic context*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000; James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain victory: social democracy and progressivism in European and American thought, 1870–1920*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1986; David Ekbladh, *The great American mission: modernization and the construction of an American world order*, Princeton: Princeton University, 2010.
- 7 Patricia Clavin, 'Defining human security: roads to war and peace, 1918–1945', in Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, ed., *Rethinking history, dictatorship and war: new approaches and interpretations*, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 72. Sandrine Kott and Jia-Chen Fu have made similar arguments about the League and its affiliates: see Sandrine Kott, 'Constructing a European social model', in Jasmien van Daele et al., eds., *ILO histories: essays on the International Labour Organization and its impact on the world during the twentieth century*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2010, pp. 181–2; Fu, 'Society's laboratories', p. 157.
- 8 Sunil Amrith and Patricia Clavin, 'Feeding the world: connecting Europe and Asia, 1930–1945', *Past and Present*, Supplement 8, 2013, pp. 30–2, 48–50.
- 9 Xu Guoqi shows that behind China's multiple attempts to ally with the Entente powers in the First World War was a desire to bolster its international position in a manner that shows the 'nationalism of internationalism' at play early on. Meanwhile, Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning have pointed out how policy-makers across the world sought to 'enhance the image and status of the nation in the international world' through adopting progressive social policy. That said, even in its eagerness to enhance its international position, China was not a passive agent. Margherita Zanasi has shown that, in spite of the colonial overtones of the League's Program of Technical Cooperation with underdeveloped nations, the collaboration between the National Economic Council and the League's technical experts took place on terms agreeable to China. Advice was only taken when it aligned with the regime's corporatist

This was particularly true in the realm of social policy, a field shaped by transnational debate, competition, and exchange, and an area in which multinational organizations played an important role in disseminating knowledge. Yet until recently the literature has largely focused on the Atlantic World. From Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic crossings* to recent scholarship on the role of the UNRRA, the emphasis is usually on the relationship between the US and Europe.<sup>10</sup> When it has moved further afield, as in Elizabeth Borgwardt's excellent *New Deal for the world*, the central problem has typically been explaining the projection of American power.<sup>11</sup> Despite some recent work, how social policies were received, debated, and formulated beyond the West is less well understood.<sup>12</sup> Yet if Dikötter is right to call China's Republican era 'a golden age of engagement with the world' – one in which the nation sought 'full participation in the international community' – then there is good reason to explore how debates over social policy played out in East Asia.<sup>13</sup>

Turning to the Chinese wartime state, indeed, sheds light on why non-Western governments took such an interest in the plans and programmes underway in the US, the UK, and elsewhere. As the forgotten member of the 'Four Policemen', China's government participated readily in the ILO, lauded the values of the Atlantic Charter, and received more UNRRA money and goods than any other nation.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry of Social Affairs, a wartime creation, closely followed foreign designs for social policy and by 1944 was discussing 'China's Beveridge Plan' in party publications.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the sociologists and planners that it employed explored the applicability of overseas models to a nation supposedly marked by historical and cultural distinctiveness, locating China spatially and temporally in relation to its allies.

While this article does explore the appropriation and indigenization of social policy, it focuses primarily on why programmes designed for very different settings held such appeal in China. Civil servants in the Ministry of Social Affairs and elsewhere in the government

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- nation-building project. See Guoqi Xu, *China and the great war: China's pursuit of new national identity and internationalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 63; Aiqun Hu and Patrick Manning, 'The global social insurance movement since the 1880s', *Journal of Global History*, 5, 1, 2010, p. 128; Zanasi, 'Exporting development'. On the merits of studying transnational institutions, see Akira Iriye, 'Internationalizing international history', in Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American history in a global age*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002, pp. 47–62.
- 10 Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings*. See also the special issue on 'Relief in the aftermath of war' in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43, 3, 2008.
- 11 See Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the world: America's vision for human rights*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005.
- 12 One notable exception is the recent work of Aiqun Hu, who thoroughly documents the development of social insurance in China from the early 1920s to the present. Her work demonstrates the international influence on China's schemes, though she focuses more on the specifics of policy than the politics of exchange. Jeremy Seekings, meanwhile, has written on social welfare debates that took place in the Global South. See Aiqun Hu, 'Social insurance in twentieth-century China: a global historical perspective', PhD thesis, Northeastern University, 2007, esp. chs. 2 and 3; Jeremy Seekings, 'The ILO and welfare reform in South America, Latin America, and the Caribbean, 1919–1950', in Van Daele et al., *ILO histories*, pp. 146–72.
- 13 Dikötter, *Age of openness*, pp. 3, 30.
- 14 Katrine R. C. Greene, 'UNRRA's record in China', *Far Eastern Survey*, 20, 10, 1951, p. 100.
- 15 Tehyun Ma, 'A Chinese Beveridge Plan: the discourse of social security and the post-war reconstruction of China', *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 11, 2, 2012, pp. 329–49; Hu and Manning, 'Global social insurance movement', p. 141.

sometimes admitted that China was years away from implementing the kind of social insurance programmes already commonplace in Europe and the US. Why then, in the midst of a war of attrition, did they spend so much time talking about them? This article suggests that their embrace of social policy was in part a performance on the international stage, designed to demonstrate the GMD state's legitimacy, which, as Stilwell's criticism suggests, was by no means obvious to Western governments. This is not intended to impugn the motives of Chinese sociologists, who, as part of an epistemic community of professional experts, saw social security as a laudable objective. However, the article will argue that the fluency of government officials in a discourse that tied together welfare provision, democracy, and international cooperation reveals both their domestic and their diplomatic preoccupations. It was a language of legitimation, which showed that China shared the aspirations of planners in the Allied powers, making its government a more viable proposition to support, and warding off any hopes the victorious powers might have had of carving up the nation after Japan's eventual defeat. Social policy here was about much more than questions of industrialization, urbanization, and labour unrest, though of course these played a significant part. It was also about strengthening the nation on the international stage.

## War and welfare

Pioneers of the social sciences in China pursued nationalist ends through international means. As the Qing dynasty faltered in the late nineteenth century, reformers began to embrace Western approaches to knowledge, and the exiled Liang Qichao translated Japanese editions of social scientific texts into Chinese.<sup>16</sup> In the decades after the 1911 Revolution, US sociologists, with ties to missions such as the YMCA or the Rockefeller Foundation, helped establish the academic study of the discipline, founding departments such as that in Yenching University in 1922.<sup>17</sup> When Chiang's Northern Expedition extended GMD power across most of the nation in 1927, party leaders recognized the utility of the subject for nation-building, but privileged the study of economics and politics. Nevertheless, one historian has called the 1930s 'the heyday of the Chinese social sciences', with students returning with degrees from major centres such as London and Chicago. Despite working in a European and American scholarly tradition, these experts sought to make their findings useful for China.<sup>18</sup> In keeping with their counterparts elsewhere in the world, they recognized social science's importance to government, and participated eagerly in the task of national construction. But the emergence of social science as an academic vocation hinged on epistemological as well as political shifts. The study of the domain that sociology would annex had deep roots in Confucian tradition, but it fulfilled a normative rather than critical function, as scholar-administrators defined proper social relationships through

16 Bettina Gransow, 'The social sciences in China', in Roy Porter, Theodore Porter, and Dorothy Ross, eds., *The Cambridge history of science: the modern social sciences*, vol. 7, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003, p. 500.

17 Chiang, *Social engineering*, pp. 5, 223–9; Linda Wong, *Marginalization and social welfare*, New York: Taylor & Francis, 1998, pp. 33–4; Zheng Hangsheng and Li Yingsheng, *A history of Chinese sociology*, Beijing: China Renmin University, 2003, p. 108.

18 Chiang, *Social engineering*, p. 9. Tong Lam, *A passion for facts: social surveys and the construction of the Chinese nation state, 1900–1949*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, p. 151.

reference to the classics.<sup>19</sup> The task of transforming a dynastic empire into a nation-state, however, demanded a new orientation for Nationalist academics, who saw social surveys, censuses, and a new scientific method as a way of validating 'a set of emerging claims about society, nation, culture, and history'.<sup>20</sup> To know China became a precondition for governing it.<sup>21</sup>

Chinese sociologists and planners took an interest in social policy overseas well before the outbreak of war. After the Nationalist takeover in 1927, the new government set up a committee for drafting a Labour Code, which was an openly anti-communist measure.<sup>22</sup> Legislation in 1929 brought union activity under government supervision, but, in keeping with the corporatist ethic, the final chapter of the Labour Code draft promised to provide workers with sickness and injury insurance: an adaptation of German policy.<sup>23</sup> Insurance provisions appeared again in a 1932 draft, but in each case the measures were never implemented, and rarely registered on the public radar. Discussion of social insurance proved relatively rare. By 1928, a branch of the Ministry of Finance in Shanghai had translated several chapters of the book by the University of Wisconsin Progressive John R. Commons, *Principles of labor legislation*, including 'Hours of labor', 'Factory safety and hygiene', 'Unemployment', and 'Social insurance'.<sup>24</sup> Commons' chapter on individual and collective bargaining was a noteworthy absence from the run of pamphlets, but the branch soon reproduced other works on German mediation, Japanese health insurance, and Soviet labour law.<sup>25</sup> The official who oversaw the translations, Sheng Jun, saw the case studies as a body of knowledge that China's leaders could draw on when their country industrialized.<sup>26</sup> It was no coincidence, in fact, that the pamphlets appeared in Shanghai, the most economically developed of China's metropolitan centres.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, through the 1930s, discussions of social

19 Gransow, 'Social sciences', p. 499.

20 Lam, *Passion*, p. 3.

21 *Ibid.*, *passim*. See also James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998.

22 According to Hu, 'Social insurance', p. 175, Ma Chaojun, a labour leader on the GMD right, had openly declared in 1927 that the motive for drafting a labour code was not just to fulfil the Three Principles but also to 'uproot the Communist influence on labor movements'.

23 On the regime's curtailment of strikes and control of labour in the 1920s and 1930s, see Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on strike: the politics of Chinese labor*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993; Parks M. Coble, *The Shanghai capitalists and the Nationalist government, 1927–1937*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980. On the 1927 Labor Code draft, see Hu, 'Social insurance', p. 176; Shi Taipu, 'Wo guo ying ruhe shixing laogong baoxian? (How should our country implement labour insurance)?', *Shehui jianshe (Social Construction)*, 1, 3, 1945, p. 27.

24 Guomin zhengfu caizheng bu zhu hu diaocha huojia chu (Ministry of Finance, Shanghai Pricing Bureau), *Shehui baoxian (Social insurance)*, Shanghai: Guomin zhengfu caizheng bu zhu hu diaocha huojia chu, 1928, pp. 1–2.

25 *Deguo laodong zhenyi tiaoting fa zhi yanjiu (A study of German labour dispute and mediation law)*, Shanghai, 1927; *Su'e xin laodongfa (Soviet Russia's new labour laws)*, Shanghai, 1928; *Riben jiankang baoxian faling (Japanese health insurance laws and regulations)*, Shanghai, 1927; *Geguo laogong yundong gaiguan (A survey of labour movements in other countries)*, Shanghai, 1928.

26 Sheng Jun, 'Laogong wenti congshu xu (Introduction to the labour problems series)', *Shehui baoxian (Social insurance)*, Shanghai: Guomin zhengfu caizheng bu zhu hu diaocha huojia chu, 1928, p. 3.

27 On growing public discussions of labour welfare after the First World War, see Rao Donghui, 'Minguo Beijing zhengfu de laodong lifa chutan (A preliminary exploration of labour legislation under the republican Beijing government)', *Jindaishi yanjiu (Modern Chinese History Studies)*, 1, 1998, pp. 147–8.

insurance were generally confined to the city, and tended to appear in the professional journals of financial organizations rather than in academic or government circles.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than shutting down debate, however, the 1937–45 Sino-Japanese War brought social policy to the attention of academia and government. Though Chiang's government had long anticipated a struggle with Japan, and had made preparations for the coming conflict through military modernization and economic planning, China remained unready to combat a more technologically advanced foe. With large parts of the nation quickly overrun, and millions fleeing the Japanese forces, traditional providers of relief, such as lineages and charitable associations, proved unable to meet the demand for aid. Meanwhile, manpower requirements spurred Nationalist ministries to craft ever more detailed regulations to mobilize labour.

Many of these tasks fell to the Ministry of Social Affairs, which, as Yan Ming has suggested, was modelled in part on social security administrations elsewhere, with the US the main example in mind.<sup>29</sup> Established in 1940, the ministry brought together several departments of the party and the state under one umbrella, with oversight of labour relations, civil society, and social policy. Under the auspices of its German-educated minister, Gu Zhenggang, it took on the important role of managing – and, if necessary, disciplining – the home front.<sup>30</sup> When explaining its purpose in 1942, Gu claimed that the ministry pursued Sun Yat-sen's 'dream' of 'uniting a disorganized society', by using social work to 'turn private individuals into citizens willing to sacrifice for the public good'. His preoccupation here lay in coordinating the war effort, as the ministry aimed to 'strengthen manpower mobilization' through extending its control over labour and improving the operation of conscription laws.<sup>31</sup> Gu's methods were in keeping with the corporatist ethos of the GMD state, but many of the academic experts whom he employed were well versed in transatlantic liberalism, having studied in the US and Europe, and fully understood the culture of planning ascendant across much of the globe. The aim, however, was nation-building. Having witnessed the construction of institutions such as the New Deal's Social Security Administration, GMD planners hoped that, by working with sociologists, their government too could put in place the mechanisms required for the peaceful development of the country after the war.<sup>32</sup>

28 See, for example, 'World economic news: French parliament ratified three important items: (1) budget; (2) tax cuts; (2) social insurance', *Yinghang zhoubao (Bankers' Weekly)*, 14, 22, 1930; 'Lun shehui baoxian ce: laodong baoxiang zhengce (A discussion of social insurance policies: labour insurance measures)', *Yinye yuebao (Native Bankers Monthly)*, 10, 5, 1930; 'Guoji yaowen: luoshifu xuanbu jiang li shehui baoxian zhi (Important international news: Roosevelt announces the establishment of a social insurance system)', *Yinghang zhoubao (Bankers' Weekly)*, 18, 23, 1934. *Bankers Weekly* was sponsored by the powerful Shanghai Bankers' Association, while the *Native Bankers Monthly* was the publication of the city's Native Bankers Guild.

29 Yan Ming, *Zhongguo shehuixue shi: yi men xueke yu yige shidai (A history of Chinese sociology: a discipline and an era)*, Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 2010, p. 261.

30 Chinese Ministry of Information (CMI), *China handbook, 1937–1945*, New York: Macmillan, 1947, p. 665.

31 Gu Zhenggang, 'Di yi ci quanguo shehui xingzheng huiyi (weiyuanzhang xunci) (The director's speech at the first National Social Administration Conference)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun (Bulletin of Social Work)*, 1, 1, 1944, p. 2.

32 Yan, *Zhongguo shehuixue shi*, p. 261, argues that part of the significance of institutions such as the Social Security Administration was to demonstrate to Chinese planners how the administrative power of the state could be put to use to advance welfare projects.

The ministry either gave work to or collaborated with a cosmopolitan cohort of social scientists, who during the war ‘found some involvement with the existing political order a practical necessity’.<sup>33</sup> Yan Xinzhe, for example, was a native of Hunan province who studied sociology at the University of Southern California before returning to China, first as a professor at Yenching and then at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. He ran a social work training class for party members during the conflict, and in early 1944 helped organize the publication of *Social Construction (Shehui jianshe)*, a collaboration between the ministry and academia that drew around sixty leading social scientists to its editorial board.<sup>34</sup> Chen Da, who received a PhD from Columbia in 1923, taught with Yan at Yenching before spearheading a national census in the early 1940s, and in 1943 became deputy leader of the China Society of Sociology.<sup>35</sup> Another Yenching academic, Zhang Hongjun, took an MA at Chicago, and, after a spell as a magistrate, secured a post as the head of the Social Welfare Department of the ministry.<sup>36</sup> One of his younger colleagues, Huang Dehong, never had the chance to study abroad but, after graduating from Sun Yat-sen University in 1942, found work in the ministry translating social policy into Chinese.<sup>37</sup> He had probably worked under Shi Taipu (1892–1960), a Japanese- and German-trained economist who taught at Sun Yat-sen, helped draft the GMD’s design for social insurance in 1927, and then served on a policy committee at the ministry between 1940 and 1942.<sup>38</sup>

War prevented Huang and others from studying abroad, but it also opened new opportunities. The entry of the US and Britain into the struggle against Japan in 1941 strengthened ties with two nations already familiar to many Chinese sociologists. Both countries had been at the forefront of social policy experiments over the preceding half century, and in the Atlantic Charter, issued before the attack on Pearl Harbor, their leaders had linked national self-determination and social welfare to the struggle against fascism.<sup>39</sup> The alliance also cemented institutional ties, for civil servants in the Ministry of Social Affairs and their allies in Chinese universities had the chance to participate in new and reinvigorated multinational organizations such as the UNRRA, which, as Mitter has recently shown, played a vital role in carrying relief to China.<sup>40</sup> The Chinese National Relief and

33 John Israel, *Lianda: a Chinese university in war and revolution*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1998, p. 185; Xuan Chaoqing and Wang Bohui, ‘Yi jiu si ling niandai Zhongguo shehui jianshe sixiang de xingcheng (The formation of Chinese social construction thought in the 1940s)’, *Zhongguo shehuixue (Chinese Sociology)*, 6, 2009, p. 132; Zheng and Li, *History of Chinese sociology*, pp. 108–10, 131–2; Lin Wanyi, *Dangdai shehui gongzuo: lilun yu fangfa (Modern social work: theory and method)*, Taipei: Wunan, 2006, p. 132. Yan, *Zhongguo shehuixue shi*, pp. 261–2.

34 Zheng and Li, *History of Chinese sociology*, p. 132.

35 Chiang, *Social engineering*, p. 55; Israel, *Lianda*, p. 198; Chen Ta (pinyin Chen Da), *Towards a modern census in China*, Kunming: 1943.

36 Chiang, *Social engineering*, pp. 52–3.

37 Huang Dehong, *Huang Dehong zi xuan ji (Self-selected works of Huang Dehong)*, Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2007, p. 3.

38 Liu Guoming and Huang Jinming, eds., *Zhongguo Guomindang bainian renwu quanshu (A comprehensive volume on a hundred years of Guomindang figures)*, Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2005, p. 390.

39 Borgwardt, *New Deal*, p. 4.

40 Rana Mitter, ‘Imperialism, transnationalism, and the reconstruction of post-war China: UNRRA in China, 1944–7’, *Past & Present*, Supplement 8, 2013, pp. 51–69. See also C. X. George Wei, *Sino-American economic relations, 1944–1949*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997, ch. 3.



Rehabilitation Administration (CNRRA), created by the Nationalist government to disburse UNRRA money and goods, offered employment to dozens of native social scientists, who worked alongside foreign experts.<sup>41</sup>

This spirit of international cooperation, accentuated by a sense of wartime interdependence and the burgeoning confidence in the necessity of central planning, extended to the ILO, a holdover from the League of Nations. Created by the Treaty of Versailles, it seated national representatives from government, business, and labour in a body dedicated to raising living standards, improving working conditions, and nullifying the Bolshevik threat.<sup>42</sup> Republican China had long-standing ties to the organization. It was a founder member of the League in 1919 and established a branch of the ILO in Nanjing in 1930, four years before the US joined. The Nanjing branch performed an intermediary role, by working with ministries to collect data on Chinese labour while circulating international policy news to government departments.<sup>43</sup> Even before the ILO gained a foothold in China, however, its influence was being felt. When the GMD drafted its social insurance law in 1927, for instance, the policy-makers cited ILO recommendations.<sup>44</sup>

When Europe descended into conflict, the future of the ILO came under threat.<sup>45</sup> This was a blow to the US, as Roosevelt and his Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, saw the organization as ‘the most appropriate instrument for the internationalization of the New Deal’.<sup>46</sup> Overcoming Soviet opposition, the US took the lead in organizing a meeting in Philadelphia in April–May 1944. Delegates drew up the Philadelphia Declaration, which affirmed the dignity and rights of labour and called for the extension of social security and the pursuit of material wellbeing across member states.<sup>47</sup> Its significance to the post-war order that New Dealers envisaged was captured by *Fortune* magazine: ‘What Bretton Woods was to money, what Hot Springs was to food, Philadelphia was to the “social question”’, it argued after the conference.<sup>48</sup>

With China winning the permanent seat on the ILO executive vacated by Japan, representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs attended the Philadelphia meeting and publicly aligned themselves with its principles. The delegation included the head of the Chinese Association of Labour, Zhu Xuefan, who, despite replacing a more conservative predecessor in 1938, remained subordinate to the ministry; the government representative, Li Pingheng, a Sorbonne-educated civil servant; Xie Zhengfu, the head of the Social Welfare Department and later an official at the CNRRA; and his subordinate and eventual successor,

41 Franklin Ray, *UNRRA in China: a case study in the interplay of interests in a program of international aid to an undeveloped country*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1947, p. 3.

42 Gerry Rodgers et al., *The International Labour Organization and the quest for social justice, 1919–2009*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2009, pp. 2, 6, 8.

43 Chang, *Guoji hezuo zai Zhongguo*, pp. 282–3.

44 Hu, ‘Social insurance’, p. 176.

45 Jasmien Van Daele, ‘Writing ILO histories: a state of the art’, in Van Daele et al., *ILO histories*, p. 22.

46 Geert van Goethem, ‘Phelan’s war: the International Labour Organization in limbo, 1941–1948’, in Van Daele et al., *ILO histories*, p. 318.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 332.

48 Cited in Smith Simpson, ‘International Labour Conference: twenty-sixth session’, *American Journal of International Law* 38, 4, 1944, p. 558.

Zhang Hongjun, the head of the Welfare Unit's research department.<sup>49</sup> They were joined by staff from the Chinese embassy in Washington, which may indicate both the logistical difficulties of bringing over a larger contingent from China and the diplomatic importance attached to the conference.

Securing emergency relief preoccupied the Nationalist contingent. The employers' delegate, Li Ming, praised plans for government-funded public works 'as a means of preventing unemployment in the transition from war to peace', and hoped that demobilized Chinese soldiers could be 'utilised to the advantages of the country'.<sup>50</sup> But support for centralized planning was a common feature in the proceedings too, and Li Ping-heng was eager to show that China was alive to the spirit of the age: 'The progress that my country has achieved in social welfare has not been affected and retarded by the war but has rather been inspired and accelerated', he insisted. For him, the social democratic thrust of the resolutions echoed the ideas of the ROC's spiritual founder, Sun Yat-sen, and his principle of pursuing the people's livelihood – a link that social scientists often made in selling Western policies to a Chinese audience.<sup>51</sup> The GMD government formally endorsed the Philadelphia Declaration, and *Social Construction*, a collaboration between the Chinese Sociology Association and the Ministry of Social Affairs, printed the ILO's social security recommendation in its fourth issue.<sup>52</sup> The same year, the Ministry of Education included social policy, insurance, and relief as optional courses on a Sociology degree.<sup>53</sup>

Where the UNRRA brought money and personnel into China, the ILO delivered political capital. The Philadelphia Declaration, like the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms speech on which it drew, implied that the Allies were not bound together in a marriage of convenience but linked by a common ideological outlook, in which the social and political realms were intrinsically linked. Tying together planning, welfare, and democracy, the Declaration echoed GMD principles but was a world away from the practice of a government that had a reputation for incompetence and brutality. Yet among social scientists, both in academia and in the Ministry of Social Affairs, China's participation in the ILO encouraged the adaptation of foreign models. While they were not always especially troubled about the source – Bismarckian social policy was of particular interest, for instance, despite the course that Germany had taken since the days of the Kaiserreich – British and American plans loomed large in their thinking.<sup>54</sup>

## Searching for a new model

This changing mood was evident as the conference approached its conclusion. A few days before the delegates left Philadelphia, the GMD's official publication, the *Central Daily*

49 Liu and Huang, *Zhongguo Guomindang bainian renwu quanshu*, p. 2202.

50 International Labour Office, *International Labour Conference, twenty-sixth session, Philadelphia, 1944: record of proceedings*, Montreal: International Labour Office, 1944, p. 45.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

52 *Ibid.*, p.165; *Shehui jianshe*, 1, 4, 1944, pp. 15–42.

53 Zheng, *History of Chinese sociology*, pp. 109–10.

54 Huang Dehong, 'Tuixing shehui baoxian ying zhuyi de jige wenti (A few issues to consider when advancing social insurance)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 8, 1944, p. 14.

*News (Zhongyang ribao)*, published a lengthy discussion of social security plans, noting how most of China's allies had already gone some way towards implementing ILO recommendations. The author, the political scientist Ji Zechang, saw social policy converging among his nation's international friends. Taking a broad historical sweep that ran from primitive to industrial society, he repeated that 'a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions'.<sup>55</sup> Ji acknowledged that these words were not his own but came instead from Sir William Beveridge, the Liberal peer and author of the 1942 *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services*, more commonly known as the 'Beveridge Report'. A blueprint for Britain's post-war welfare state, the report became an unlikely international bestseller, with Huang – who was heavily involved in translating social policy for the ministry – noting the 'stir' (*hongzhen*) it had caused around the globe.<sup>56</sup> Beveridge's plan was translated into twenty-two languages, and by 1944 officials at the British embassy in Chongqing had passed on a Chinese edition to the GMD.<sup>57</sup>

The report's transmission to China indicates how the wartime alliance facilitated ideological and institutional exchange. In the Ministry of Social Affairs, where cosmopolitan social scientists had an avid interest in foreign social policy, its message was warmly received. The sociologist Wu Jian, for example, discussed the Beveridge Report sympathetically in considering China's plans for social security; meanwhile, in the *Bulletin of Social Work (Shehui gongzuo tongxun)*, a Ministry publication for social scientists and civil servants, one author talked about the prospects for what he called 'China's Beveridge Plan'.<sup>58</sup> Two months after the Philadelphia Declaration, the *Bulletin* also carried British commentary on the report by the social worker, land reformer, and politician Percy Alden.<sup>59</sup> By August 1944, one writer in the *Bulletin* passed over the Beveridge Report quickly in a discussion of social insurance, on the grounds that 'the plan has already been announced, analysed, and complimented by our nation's press'.<sup>60</sup> Yet it still held the attention of social scientists and government-approved journalists after the war,<sup>61</sup> and in May 1947 the keynote speaker at a large Nanjing conference that gathered government officials, social workers, academic experts, and welfare associations chose as his subject what he called the 'fashionable'

55 Ji Zechang 'Lun shehui anquan jihua (A discussion of social security plans)', *Zhongyang ribao (Central Daily News)*, 7 May 1944.

56 Huang, 'Tuixing shehui baoxian ying zhuyi de ji ge wenti', p. 14.

57 *Bei-fo-li-zhi shehui baoxian ji qi youguan shiye (Beveridge's social insurance and related enterprises)*, [place unknown]: Yingguo zhu hua dashiguan xinwen chu, 1944.

58 Wu Jian, 'Woguo zhanhou shehui anquan chubu sheshi shishi jihua juyao (A summary of our country's social security implementation plan)', *Shehui jianshe*, 1, 4 1944, p. 4; Bian Zongmeng, 'Zhongguo de "Bei-fo-li-zhi" jihua ruhe (How is China's "Beveridge" plan?)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 6, 1944, pp. 4–7.

59 Percy Alden, 'Guanyu Bei-fo-li-zhi baogao shu (Regarding the Beveridge report)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 7, 1944, pp. 29–34.

60 Xu Changling, 'Zhanshi ge guo shehui baoxian shuyao (Important descriptions of wartime social insurance of other nations)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 8, 1944, p. 10.

61 Shi Kejing and Zhen Juying, 'Lun shehui baoxian yu woguo shishi de wenti (A discussion of social insurance and the problems of implementation in our country)', *Zhongyang ribao*, 23 July 1946; Xu Shizhong, 'Lun xianfa shehui anquan jie (A discussion on the social security section in the constitution)', *Zhongyang ribao*, 9 December 1946.

concept of social security.<sup>62</sup> As the *Banker's Magazine* had put it three years earlier, the Beveridge Plan had 'apparently caught the imagination in China'.<sup>63</sup>

Not all the discussion of the plan was so favourable, but almost every Chinese expert who commented on the Beveridge Report agreed that that nation could learn from it. The same applied to other foreign innovations in social policy. Along with the Beveridge Plan, the *Bulletin of Social Work*, *Social Construction*, and *China Daily News* reported on German, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Swiss, New Zealand, and South African schemes.<sup>64</sup> Huang was a particularly prolific translator, publishing between 1944 and 1947 'An outline of the British industrial injury insurance scheme', 'An overview of the British government's social insurance plan', 'The implementation of the Mexican social insurance bill', 'A short history of the Canadian health insurance movement', 'A summary of American social security law', 'The state of American unemployment insurance', and 'A sketch of American old age and dependents' insurance'.<sup>65</sup> By March 1945, with the end of the war approaching, the ministry gathered Chinese sociologists to discuss 'international trends' in social policy.<sup>66</sup> When the government began to draw up plans for legislation of its own a little later, officials directed embassy staff around the world to undertake further research, gathering data on programmes in other developing countries, such as Peru.<sup>67</sup> But, owing to financial and military ties, and the powerful example of the New Deal, China's position was measured most often against US programmes such as the National Resources Planning Board, the Wagner-Murray Act, and the Social Security Administration.<sup>68</sup> When Henry A. Wallace,

62 Fu Shanglin, 'Geguo shehui anquan zhengce shishi gaikuang (An overview of the implementation of social insurance policies in different countries)', *Zhongguo shehuixue xun (Bulletin of Chinese Sociology)*, 2, 1947, pp. 1–4.

63 'China's Beveridge Plan', *Banker's Magazine*, 156, 1943, p. 159.

64 Xu, 'Zhanshi ge guo shehui baoxian shuyao', p. 8; Jiang Zhi'ang, 'Xiandai shehui anquan jihua zhi tezhi (The unique quality of modern social security plans)', *Shehui jianshe*, 1, 2, 1945, p. 63; Li Guoqing 'Nan feizhou lianmeng zhengfu zhi shehui anquan jihua (The social security plan of the Union of South Africa)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 4, 3, 1947, pp. 24–7.

65 The Ministry of Social Affairs began these translations in 1941. See Hu, 'Social insurance', pp. 181–2. Huang Dehong, 'Yingguo gongye shanghai baoxian jihua gangyao (An outline of the British industrial injury insurance scheme)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 2, 11, 1945; Huang Dehong, 'Yingguo zhengfu shehui baoxian jihua tigang (An outline of the British government's social insurance plan)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 2, 12, 1945; Huang Dehong, 'Moxige shehui baoxian fa'an zhi shishi (The implementation of the Mexican social insurance bill)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 4, 1, 1947; Huang Dehong, 'Meiguo shehui anquan fa jianshu (A summary of American social security law)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 2, 8, 1945; Huang Dehong, 'Meiguo shiye baoxian gaikuang (The state of American's unemployment insurance)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 3, 1, 1946; Huang Dehong, 'Meiguo yanglao ji yizu baoxian shuyao (A sketch of American old age and dependents' insurance)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 3, 12, 1946.

66 'Shehui anquan zhidu (The social security system)', *Zhongyang ribao*, 22 March 1945.

67 Academia Historica Archives, Waijiao bu (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 020000034452A; Li Guoqing, 'Meizhou ge guo shehui baoxian jihua gaikuang (Social insurance plans in the various countries of the Americas)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 4, 4, 1947; Li Guoqing, 'Meizhou hezhongguo shehui baoxian gaishu (A survey of social insurance in the Americas)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 4, 5, 1947; Li Guoqing, 'Meizhou geguo shehui baoxian jihua gaikuang (A sketch of the social insurance plans of countries in the Americas)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 4, 6, 1947.

68 Jiang Zhi'ang, 'Xiandai shehui anquan jihua zhi tezhi (The unique quality of modern social security plans)', *Shehui jianshe*, 1, 2, 1945, p. 63; Chen Lisong, 'Ying Mei liangguo shehui anquan jihua de bijiao (Comparison between the British and American social security plans)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 2, 8, 1945, pp. 33–42; Ronald Davison, trans. Lin Zhihe, 'Meiguo "Bei-fo-li-zhi" jihua (America's "Beveridge" plan)', *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 8, 1944, pp. 33–7.

Roosevelt's vice-president, visited China a month after the ILO's Philadelphia conference, the *China handbook* – an English-language mouthpiece for the GMD – suggested that Wallace's expertise in 'agricultural development' in the US left him well placed to advise the Nationalist government on its plans to advance the 'People's Livelihood'.<sup>69</sup>

## Obstacles, legitimacy, and internationalism

By virtue of their training, China's social scientists were always open to foreign ideas, but it was wartime exigencies, as much as peacetime exchange, that put the Beveridge Plan, the Social Security Act, and other social programmes on the agenda for the GMD. Through participation in multinational organizations such as the UNRRA and the ILO, and via channels opened by military alliances, Chinese civil servants and experts were able to engage in a multinational debate about government's role in the social realm, formulating plans for social insurance schemes that would rest on the common tripartite division of contributions between the employer, the employee, and the state. Yet these plans remained on the drawing board, and even leading figures in the Ministry of Social Affairs admitted that they were unlikely to be implemented in the early post-war era. Sometimes this reluctance to translate foreign models into policy hinged on a distinction between Western 'individualism', where the need for state intervention was pressing, and Chinese Confucianism, where it was not. The political scientist Ji argued that, in a society still built around organic ties to kin and village, large bureaucratic organizations for dispensing aid were less necessary, while the 'spirit of mutualism' was too valuable an asset to abandon entirely. Ji did not reject social security in principle but suggested the need to build on long-standing traditions of provision of relief that predated the 1911 Revolution.<sup>70</sup> Writing in the *Central Daily News* a year after the Japanese surrender, Shi Kejiang and Zhen Juying agreed. China's family system, they insisted, was too different from that of Europe and America – where care for the elderly was socialized by necessity – for the wholesale adoption of social security plans to work.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, for sociologists familiar with the social survey as a research method, universal models had their limitations. As Chen Da put it, 'Rather frequently, the legislator in China, finding that a certain policy proves its effectiveness in a Western nation, copies it for application in China without first ascertaining whether it will be appropriate for the Chinese situation.'<sup>72</sup> There were few objections, however, to seeking ways to indigenize overseas programmes, and even Shi and Zhen – who argued that a national healthcare system should become a goal for the government – concluded that 'China too needs a Beveridge Plan!'<sup>73</sup>

Even if social security provisions could be adapted in a manner that suited China's historical and cultural circumstances, though, there were other obstacles in the way. The sociologist Lin Liantong, who wrote a pamphlet for the Ministry of Social Affairs on insurance programmes, implied in 1942 that the state lacked the administrative capacity to

69 CMI, *China handbook*, p. 157.

70 Ji, 'Shehui anquan jihua'.

71 Shi and Zhen, 'Lun shehui baoxian yu woguo shishi de wenti'.

72 Ta Chen, 'The foundations of a sound social policy for China', *Social Forces*, 26, 2, 1947, p. 140.

73 Shi and Zhen, 'Lun shehui baoxian yu woguo shishi de wenti'.

enforce evenly any law that it adopted.<sup>74</sup> Lin saw this as symptomatic of a wider problem of what the political scientist James C. Scott calls ‘illegibility’: the inability of a state to see its population, resources, and territory in such a manner as to be able to act upon that knowledge.<sup>75</sup> The government’s paucity of statistical knowledge was ‘not something we can just look to the laws of the West to determine’, he insisted, and, without adequate census data, measures of risk became meaningless. Chen Da, who worked with the ministry to undertake a census during the war, continually advocated ‘centralising the collection and analysis of population material in one agency under the central government’ to make up for this deficit of information.

Even when his wishes were granted in 1945, the returns were meagre.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, even if the population could be made ‘legible’, there were still no guarantees that the state would be able to maintain its side of the bargain, for funding presented a major challenge for a government with a severe revenue problem.<sup>77</sup> Wu Jian reminded his audience in *Social Construction* that even British politicians were baulking at the bill for the Beveridge Plan, and also pointed out that American Social Security had its shortcomings in failing to cover ill-health. For him, ‘the crux of the problem’ was ‘financial’ everywhere, and if this troubled mature Western economies, then it would certainly constrain China, whose ‘national income ... is low enough to be pitiable’. ‘In terms of international ranking’, he lamented, ‘we are at the tail end’, and the nation was likely to remain so, given the difficulties that it would face at the end of the war.<sup>78</sup> He strongly supported the principle of social security, but thought that plans for a comprehensive programme would have to be deferred for ten years. Even Huang, who was one of the most devoted followers of English social insurance at the ministry, recognized that the money was not there to adapt such plans to a Chinese setting.<sup>79</sup>

But if most of the civil servants and social scientists involved in China’s wartime social policy debate recognized that China, contrary to Bian’s assurances, was unlikely to have its own Beveridge Plan anytime soon, why did they spend so much time discussing schemes formulated elsewhere and considering their applicability to the ROC? In part, there was a real policy dimension to their discussions. Late in 1943, the government did introduce a social relief law that provided some guarantees to refugees and the elderly, and in May 1945, a GMD congress committed the party to a social security programme that included insurance provisions for accidents, old age, infirmity, illness, maternity, and unemployment, with the government, citizens, and employers each contributing. While the provisions were eventually intended to be universal, priority would initially be given to demobilized troops, small farmers, workers in the war effort, civil servants, and teachers.<sup>80</sup> Public-sector coverage rewarded wartime service and proved easier to administer, for it built on existing

74 Lin Liangtong, ‘Shehui xingzheng yu shehui baoxian (Social administration and social insurance)’, *Zhongyang ribao*, 8 October 1942.

75 Scott, *Seeing*, p. 24.

76 Chen, ‘Foundations’, p. 140.

77 Lin, ‘Shehui xingzheng yu shehui baoxian’.

78 Wu, ‘Woguo zhanhou shehui anquan chubu shishi jihua juyao’, p. 4.

79 Huang Dehong, ‘Tuixing shehui baoxian ying zhuyi de jige wenti (A few issues to consider when advancing social insurance)’, *Shehui gongzuo tongxun*, 1, 8, 1944, p. 15.

80 CMI, *China handbook*, p. 52.

measures and eliminated the difficulty of enforcing private employer contributions. The scheme also helps explain the ministry's interest in social policy in other developing countries, because, as principles turned to policy, planners needed to find examples that might work in a nation at China's level of economic development. After the Japanese surrender, the ministry set up a Central Insurance Bureau, and pushed draft legislation through the Legislative Yuan, while a public-sector insurance scheme was trialled for Guangdong civil servants in 1948. But ebbing Nationalist fortunes in the renewed civil war made introducing such programmes on a wider scale almost impossible. China would not get a social security programme until 1951, by which time social science had been banned by the Communists as a bourgeois academic discipline.<sup>81</sup>

Yet the discussion of the Atlantic Charter, Beveridge Plan, Social Security Act, and Philadelphia Declaration was about politics as well as policy, and the significance of these debates may lie as much in what they reveal about the ideology and performance of modern statecraft as in what they demonstrate about the way in which policy was formulated in wartime China. Certainly social scientists, especially those educated in Europe and America, had a professional interest in initiatives undertaken elsewhere, and when they published in international journals, as they sometimes did, they were able to demonstrate their cosmopolitan engagement in one of the central questions that practitioners of their field faced. Moreover, they had pressing reasons to contemplate the 'labour question'. Marxist sociologists had been purged after Chiang turned on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1927, and while Huang at least flirted with the Left, most of the profession was Nationalist in leaning, if (especially in the later years of the war) critical of the government.<sup>82</sup> Sheng Jun, who had organized the translation of social policy in the late 1920s, did so in part because he feared that strikes in Shanghai were a harbinger of the kind of social conflict that had plagued more economically developed nations for over a century and a half.<sup>83</sup> Eager to participate in the party's goal of national reconstruction, and aware of the CCP's growing appeal to urban and rural labourers as wartime unrest grew, such figures saw social insurance as a way to cement loyalty to the state.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, building a patriotic and disciplined labour force was a central objective for the Ministry of Social Affairs, which monitored China's guilds and trade unions and regulated wages.<sup>85</sup> The apparent popularity

81 Kwong-Leung Tang and Raymond Man-hung Ngan, 'China: social security in the context of rapid economic growth', in James Midgley and Kwong-Leung Tang, eds., *Social security, the economy and development*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 142; Gransow, 'Social sciences', p. 508; Perry, 'From native place to workplace', in Xiaobo Lü and Elizabeth Perry, eds., *Danwei: the changing Chinese workplace in historical and comparative perspectives*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, p. 45.

82 Chiang, *Social engineering*, p. 146.

83 Sheng Jun, 'Laogong wenti congshu xu (Introduction to the labour problems series)', *Shehui baoxian (Social insurance)*, Shanghai: Guomin zhengfu caizheng bu zhu hu diaocha huojia chu, 1928, p. 2.

84 Howard, *Workers*, p. 147. Hu suggests that a handful of municipal governments and trade congresses held the same view, and in 1930–1 they lobbied the Ministry of Internal Affairs to do something about it. In 1948 a post-war commentator also remarked how the communist threat could effectively be neutered with 'social security' after he read the British Embassy's Information Office's Chinese language pamphlet *The British Social Security System (Yinguo shehui an'quan zhidu)*. See Hu, 'Social insurance', pp. 171–2; Gang Fu, 'Shehuibu shi gan shenme de? Du "Yinguo shehui anquan zhidu" yihou (What is the purpose of the Ministry of Social Affairs? After reading the "British Social Security System")', *Xin zhengzhijia (New Statesman)*, 1, 18, 1949, pp. 3–4.

85 Frazier, *Making*, pp. 62–3; Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on strike: the politics of Chinese labor*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, ch. 5.

of welfare policies therefore mattered, and the warmth with which the British people received the Beveridge Report, for instance, did not go unnoticed among ministry officials.

There are limitations, however, to seeing Chinese interest in social policy as merely a deliberate programme to co-opt the masses and neuter the communist threat. While this may capture the objectives of elements of the GMD leadership, it does a disservice to the social scientists, whose political ambitions, intellectual interests, and international connections converged, and who had little freedom to openly critique the state, even if they had wished to do so.<sup>86</sup> It also misses the fact that the audience for social policy was by no means purely a domestic one: while writers in the *Bulletin* and *Social Construction* eagerly drew on policies formulated elsewhere as they imagined a reconstructed China, the traffic here was not entirely one-way. Discussing social policy was also a performance on the international stage, a way for GMD planners, officials, and propagandists to demonstrate ideological convergence with the nation's allies, and in turn shape the post-war settlement in their government's favour.

This was a long-standing weapon in the Nationalists' arsenal. For Chinese officials, the ILO had been a resource to draw on since its inception, and, rather than passively borrowing policy, leaders believed that active engagement in the multinational organization had its own rewards. Participation itself offered a way for China to demonstrate fitness for global citizenship and sovereign autonomy. Before the Nationalist takeover, the Beijing government's refusal to send a delegate to an ILO convention in Geneva led the Chinese ambassador there to remind his superiors that attendance at such gatherings reflected well on the 'trustworthiness' (*xinyong*) of the state.<sup>87</sup> The GMD, in contrast, had declared its intention of participating even before consolidating power, and the party sent a full delegation to the Twelfth Conference in 1929.<sup>88</sup> Early proposals for social legislation in the Nanjing Decade (1927–37) tended to follow ILO recommendations. As the nation's chief economic planner, Chen Gongbao, put it in 1933, following such precedents demonstrated that China was 'sincere in our intention for international cooperation'.<sup>89</sup> Chen, who as head of China's National Economic Council worked closely with the League's Technical Cooperation Programme, believed that the measures would 'raise international trust and standing' while showing that his country was not 'backward in thinking'.<sup>90</sup>

When the GMD worked closely with the League's medical officer between 1929 and 1930, they reaped the benefits, winning control over aspects of public health policy that had previously been the domain of the foreign-run Maritime Customs.<sup>91</sup> Over the following years, indeed, they used the League to highlight the iniquities of China's semi-colonial status. After struggling to enforce labour laws in foreign concessions, the government called in the ILO, who sent in an observer in 1931 to check on conditions. The ILO's intervention

86 Israel, *Lianda*, pp. 345–64.

87 Chang, *Guoji hezuo zai Zhongguo*, p. 272.

88 Ibid.

89 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 287.

90 Cited in *ibid.*

91 Jürgen Osterhammel, "'Technical co-operation" between the League of Nations and China', *Modern Asian Studies*, 13, 1974, p. 665.



did little initially, but by 1934 the head of the organization, Harold Butler, had become involved in the dispute, and he helped to negotiate a compromise in 1936.<sup>92</sup> The terms of the deal, however, may have mattered less to the GMD than the symbolic value of the Chinese government working through diplomatic channels to enforce what one sociologist and factory inspector called the ‘Western standards’ which the Western powers were flagrantly ignoring.<sup>93</sup>

China’s wartime alliance with the US and the UK held out the possibility of a further reclamation of sovereignty, but it also presented new challenges, as Western observers, such as General Joe Stilwell and UNRRA officials, reported back to their superiors on the corrupt and brutal character of the GMD regime. Participation in social policy debates promised to address these problems and answer lingering questions about the viability of the Nationalist government. At the same time, however, discussion of foreign models could serve as a veiled critique of the GMD state, by demonstrating its failure to move with the times. The issues at stake here were as much about presentation as policy, with the narrative that Chinese writers chose to tell about their nation’s place in the world always loaded with political significance. While *Social Construction* and the *Bulletin* provided one arena for these discussions to take place, they were more often played out in English-language material geared towards consumption in the US and Britain, or in grand gestures on the part of the party, such as the social security resolutions at the Sixth Congress. The China News Service, an arm of the government which had offices in New York, and the *China handbook*, an annual compendium produced by the GMD that devoted over twenty-five pages to the embryonic United Nations, boasted of the GMD’s commitment to social security, and explained that the nation’s relationship to the ILO was particularly important, but social scientists and civil servants also published in academic journals.<sup>94</sup> Dealing in specifics proved difficult because there was little in the way of concrete achievements in social policy to boast about, and the more important objective for these writers was to show the links between the GMD’s designs, democracy, and internationalism.

This entailed drawing on the language of international social policy as much as its actual prescriptions, and Xia Jinlin, the president of the China News Service in Manhattan, provided an object lesson in how to do so. Writing for an audience of political and social scientists in the US in 1942, he talked up the revolutionary potential of the conflict. China, he argued, stood at ‘the threshold of a new world, a new age, and ... there is this vision, this prospect, this high hope, that has been an unflinching source of inspiration for our people’. Victory would bring ‘freedom and independence to the nation’. But, while he skilfully interwove nationalist themes here – noting, for instance, that China could not democratize until it was ‘free from foreign domination and interference’ – he was resolutely internationalist in his aspirations, hoping that ‘this terrible world-wide conflict has ... greatly hastened the coming of a new international order and democracy that is really

92 Chang, *Guoji bezuo zai Zhongguo*, pp. 292–7.

93 T. K. Djang ‘Factory inspection in China’, *International Labour Review*, 50, 1944, pp. 284–5, 289.

94 CMI, *China handbook*, pp. 127–52. The Factory Law contained a number of regulations that applied to mechanized factories with thirty or more workers. These included restrictions on the use of child and female labour, regulation of the hours of labour, and welfare provisions such as maternity leave, worker housing, and compensation for injury, sickness, and death. See Howard, *Workers*, p. 147; Frazier, *Making*, p. 62.

universal and worldwide'.<sup>95</sup> 'Thoughtful people', he continued, 'are beginning to doubt whether the national state is the ultimate form of political organisation, and whether nationalism as a political idea has in it the strength of will for the rebuilding of the new world order for humanity.'<sup>96</sup> Xia singled out the ILO and other multinational organizations, seeing them as evidence 'that the changes of the last hundred years have created a new world society. Even the most hard-boiled of nationalists will have to admit that all peoples of the world have been drawn into a single world community which bears little resemblance to the world of separate and self-contained states upon which the nineteenth century dawned.' He said very little on specific policies, mentioning the GMD's commitment to universal education and suggesting that Japanese defeat would herald not just 'political' but 'social democracy'. But he flattered his American audience with a title that blurred the lines between foreign and domestic: the goals that his country were pursuing signalled 'A New Deal for all nations'.

Xia's stated willingness to abandon the nation-state in favour of an international 'New Deal' was intended to reassure American observers that China was on the right lines in its vision for a post-war order. Indeed, a faith in global interdependence and convergence appeared repeatedly in discussions of social policy, with social security, according to one commentator, 'the common aim of the Allied powers'.<sup>97</sup> The Chinese delegation at the Philadelphia Conference understood this message here, and tailored it to suit China's particular needs. Li Ping-heng claimed that it should be the 'obligation of every country represented at the Conference' to endorse the Declaration's principles, which he saw as in keeping with Sun Yat-sen's principle of the people's livelihood.<sup>98</sup> Zhu Xuefan, of the Chinese Association of Labour and China's workers' delegate, called for equal pay for non-whites around the world, and argued that 'without economic security, there can be no social justice'. For him, 'the attainment of the conditions in which' social justice 'shall be possible must constitute the central aim of national and international policy'.<sup>99</sup>

This carried into public discussion of foreign social policy models. Drawing on the US, Britain, and Weimar Germany as exemplars, a writer in the *Central Daily News* saw social security provision as a 'world trend' that China needed to follow. Like others, he tied it to democratic transformation, observing how Europeans and Americans had moved from subjects to citizens as individual rights came to the fore. Rather dubiously here, he suggested that the ROC had protected individual freedom in the same manner as its allies, but that, at moments of economic dislocation, personal liberty was not enough. 'If a country only covers individual security', he argued, 'it is not fulfilling the responsibilities of a modern nation', a point which 'far-sighted statesmen' elsewhere had recognized. He concluded that 'All modern countries value social security', citing the ILO's endorsement of the principle. Whereas China's ILO delegation were addressing foreign powers, the sociologist Yan Xizhe

95 C. L. Hsia, 'A New Deal for all nations', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 222, 1942, p. 142.

96 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

97 Bian, 'Zhongguo de "Bei-fo-li-zhi" jihua ruhe', p. 5.

98 International Labour Office, *International Labour Conference, twenty-sixth session*, Philadelphia, 1944, record of proceedings, p. 93.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

spoke primarily to a domestic audience, and his intervention might be read as a mild rebuke to the GMD government for failing to march faster along the Western path. But by making China's modernity contingent on its commitment to provide for the widowed, the elderly, the disabled, and other disadvantaged members of society, he indicated how international alliances helped to provide a language of legitimation for state-builders and social scientists, eager for China to take its place among the world's leading nations.<sup>100</sup>

Such claims were sensible given how poorly China had fared at the end of the First World War. The failure of the government to secure meaningful concessions at the Paris Peace Treaty spurred the May Fourth movement and helped to bring the GMD to power. Moreover, by showing a fluency in the language of internationalism, while making pointed criticisms of racial inequality and Western imperialism, Chinese representatives hoped that they would fare better next time. As early as 1940, Chiang was pushing to claim Japan's vacated permanent seat on the ILO, a status normally reserved for major industrialized powers.<sup>101</sup> After 1942, fidelity to the values of the Atlantic Charter appeared regularly in their claims, as did a faith in rational, scientific planning, and emphasizing the similarities between Chinese ambitions and Western policy strengthened the state's position.

The *International Labour Review*, the official journal of the ILO, became the obvious forum for officials of the Ministry of Social Affairs and their affiliates to show how the ROC was marching in lockstep with the Allied powers. In 1943, for instance, it carried news of the ministry's plans for 'the eventual development of a comprehensive social insurance system' and lauded a 'new approach to social work which would regard it as an obligation of the State and not as mere philanthropy'. Writing in the same publication, a Nationalist general argued that the 'work of political and social reconstruction' was subject to the direction of 'representative bodies' and insisted that the 'foundations of democratic government have thus been laid, and the people have acquired political consciousness'.<sup>102</sup> 'Laissez-faire', he remarked, drawing implicit parallels with developments in Europe and America, 'has been replaced by a policy of controlled economy.' A China committed to the same values as its international friends was therefore well on the way to improving the living conditions of its people.<sup>103</sup>

By 1945, the sociologist who headed the ministry's factory inspection bureau claimed in the *Review* that GMD labour policy was 'based on the twin principles of sovereignty of the people and international cooperation', and that the party, having committed itself to welfare provision at its Sixth Congress, was now urging the government to participate in the activities of the ILO and to promote the establishment of satisfactory international labour relations with a view to building up a system of social security on an international basis.<sup>104</sup>

100 Yan Xinzhe, 'Wei shenme xianfa li duiyu shehui anquan ying you jiben de guiding? (Why should the constitution have a basic provision for social security?)', *Zhongyang ribao*, 27 November 1946.

101 China had been trying to secure a permanent seat on the ILO since 1935. When the opening came up in 1940, Chinese diplomats scurried to put a plan together with the Ministries of Social Affairs and Economic Affairs. The importance that they invested in the seat owed much to their sense that the ILO enjoyed US support in a way that the League did not. Their plan involved lobbying members, providing the ILO with missing statistics, and, if required, threatening to resign from the ILO. The plan was approved by Chiang. Chang, *Guoji hezuo zai Zhongguo*, pp. 280–2.

102 Yao-tsu Ho, 'Chinese economic policy in wartime', *International Labour Review*, 47, 5, 1943, p. 557.

103 *Ibid.*, p. 537.

104 T. K. Djang, 'Social policy in China', *International Labour Review*, 52, 1945, pp. 166, 169.

The final claim here was ambiguous, and he did not clarify what this internationalism might actually entail. Like other writers, however, he was stressing the government's willingness to use social policy as a field to demonstrate its commitment to a new world order. Their rhetorical embrace of policies designed elsewhere were ways to establish China's credentials as a strong, modern nation in a post-war global order. In doing so, they answered familiar (and not always unfair) charges about the ROC's parochialism, backwardness, and authoritarianism.

Fusing into a single discourse social policy, international cooperation, and democracy, these writers cast China's readiness to embrace foreign models as evidence of the nation's fitness for global citizenship. Participation in the ILO fulfilled a similar function. Thus the commitment to internationalism had elements of a performance staged for Western liberals. While it never succeeded in reframing the portrayal of Chiang's government, there were occasional victories in sympathetic reporting of China's plans in the *New York Times* and other Anglophone publications.<sup>105</sup> Perhaps more importantly, the tactic would prove valuable on post-1949 Taiwan, where GMD officials worked alongside New Deal experts in putting in place measures for rural reconstruction and a veterans' welfare state, which helped to sustain Chinese rule on the island.

Mitter has written recently of a 'transnational trap', in which the promises that Chinese officials made during the war years were too great to deliver on afterwards, though they benefited not just from the substance of social policy exchanges but also from showing a willingness to learn from the Allies in the first place.<sup>106</sup> It is misleading, however, to imply that this was one-way traffic. Virtually all Chinese commentary on foreign social policy – whether intended for domestic consumption by ministry officials and academics, or bound for foreign readers in American and British journals – stressed how the founder of the ROC, Sun Yat-sen, had set out to build a social democracy. His vow in 1911 to pursue the people's livelihood indicated that, if China lagged behind in its administrative capacity to implement a social security law, it was precocious in its ideological commitment to the principle underpinning such a measure. Sun's son, Sun Fo, was eager to make this point to a Western audience in 1943. Though he remained president of the Legislative Yuan and held a seat on the GMD's Executive Committee, Sun, who was on the liberal wing of the party, was no ally of Chiang. His distance from the inner core of the GMD government gave him the freedom to take a more critical perspective on his nation's allies, and he attacked Western powers for failing to deal with unemployment before the war. 'We do not want to traverse the same old way of capitalism', he argued, 'which has been trudged with so much wasted labour and heartbreak by Britain and America.'<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, he was sympathetic to the aspirations of reformers, using anti-monopoly rhetoric that would have warmed the hearts of New Dealers, and praising Beveridge not so much for his social policy as for his designs for a federated Europe bound by a common defence pact and a single currency, which Sun described as an extension of the 'social security' idea. The aims of China and its allies were one, he insisted, because they concurred with the views of his father.

105 See for example 'The new China', *New York Times*, 14 September, 1945; 'Social security plan is drafted for China', *New York Times*, 17 July 1946; 'China's plans for social security', *Straits Times*, 16 August 1946.

106 Mitter, 'Imperialism', p. 64.

107 Sun Fo, *China looks forward* (with an introduction by Lin Yutang), New York: John Day, 1944, p. 41.

In this interpretation, which, though idiosyncratic, had echoes in the views of Chinese social scientists, China was the true innovator. ‘From our standpoint’, Sun insisted, ‘the new world should be reconstructed along the lines of *San-Min-Chu-I*, the Three Principles of the People from which both the GMD and the CCP claimed their ideological inheritance.’<sup>108</sup> Sun even turned the tables on those who worried about China adopting wholesale models from overseas. Some, he suggested:

would say it is well and good to practice these principles in China; but since conditions differ in all the other countries, the guiding principles for dealing with the local situation must also vary from place to place and from China’s. It is to be feared, they might argue, that these doctrines could not be exported to foreign lands. This I believe to be utterly mistaken.<sup>109</sup>

Sun’s proposals for China to export its values suggested a very different mentality from those of his countrymen asking about the progress of ‘China’s Beveridge Plan’ or calling for a ‘New Deal for all nations’. But who took the lead matters less, perhaps, than the ideological point at which the Allies had supposedly arrived. This was made clear by Sun’s ally, another GMD liberal, Lin Yutang. Writing in the introduction to Sun’s work from the ROC’s redoubt in Chongqing, the American-educated Lin argued that ‘What the Beveridge Plan is to wartime England and what social security programmes are to the United States, the yet unfulfilled *San-Min-Chu-I* and Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s *Principles of National Reconstruction* are to this present-day fighting China.’<sup>110</sup> The nation’s ‘hopes and aspirations are not only national, but international as well’, and if Sun’s plans were carried out, ‘the New China which will emerge from the next decades will be blessed with a progressive democratic social system which is the dream of liberal Americans and Englishmen’.<sup>111</sup> Political labels mattered little here for Lin, who was suspected of harbouring sympathies for the CCP, and he did not hold back in telling his audience the implications of the Beveridge Plan: ‘Bolshevism will come to England under the garb of Tory conservatism with the English King still on his throne.’ This was not a warning, though, but high praise, for the ‘Western democracies’, he concluded, ‘as may be seen in the Beveridge Plan, are all traveling the road towards greater social security and a better social order, although we may not know it. The schoolchild scare over words like “socialism” is hardly justified in a so-called educated adult.’<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

As internal critics of Chiang’s authoritarian tendencies, Lin and Sun were pushing the GMD leadership to chart a liberal course. Like their more orthodox counterparts, however, they saw a post-war world united around a commitment to social security and argued that China had been in the vanguard of such programmes since 1911. The failure of the government to

108 Ibid., p. 54.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., p. xiii.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., p. xv.

implement such designs, though, does not make them any less interesting. For while it might not be so surprising that Chinese social scientists and planners – who were enmeshed intellectually and institutionally in international social policy debates – would follow such experiments as the Beveridge Plan, the readiness of their government to bring public attention to these discussions suggests that these deliberations played a performative as well as a formative role. In drawing up policy, the ROC aimed to demonstrate that it was following in the footsteps of its allies, and deserved the aid that it required to establish its hold on China. International reputation clearly mattered to the GMD, whose survival would be determined in Washington as well as the Chinese countryside. Jiang, who had an important role at the UNRRA, became the ROC's ambassador to the UN after 1949. When asked by an American journalist why the People's Republic of China sought his seat in New York, he responded 'There is one reason, and one reason only: for the prestige that that seat will confer on them.'<sup>113</sup> Participation in multinational organizations and engagement in international debates: these were building blocks of legitimacy for GMD officials.

The Chinese case also offers insights into the conditions under which international exchange take place. In Rodgers' monumental *Atlantic crossings*, Americans abandoned their faith in their nation's exceptional path only when class conflict and urban-industrial transformation occurred on a scale that made the US comparable to Europe. For Rodgers, then, the convergence of experience enabled borrowing. In China, few social scientists believed that their society had much in common with either Britain or America, which they acknowledged were at a very different stage of historical development. Their fascination with social policy in these countries rested less on the coincidence of phenomena and more on overlapping professional, ideological, and political interests. The embrace of overseas social policy was a statement of intent, which signposted the path that China planned to take.

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113 'Longines chronoscope with Tingfu F. Tsiang', US National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, ARC 96033, LI LW-LW-486.