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Towards Development: The Yellow River project and UNRRA's technical assistance to China, 1944–1947

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Abstract

This article examines an international endeavour to manage the 1938 Yellow River dyke breach and to bring mechanized farming to the flooded area, as part of the UNRRA China Programme (1944–1947). It reveals why a Chinese Nationalist vision of international aid entailed technical assistance, and how this call for development was received by UNRRA's multi-national, albeit predominantly American, cadre of experts at a transitional period from war to reconstruction. This article argues that technical assistance is integral to understanding the history of UNRRA and its role in negotiating different visions for the post-war world, especially a developmental one. Development did not emerge as a united concept; instead, the ambiguity created a space for experts with different backgrounds to fit themselves into the post-war programme. Focusing on those recipients and fieldworkers that shaped the UNRRA aid on the ground, it offers a non-European perspective for understanding how development thoughts gained momentum through a post-war programme, leading the way to global proliferation of development projects.

Keywords: internationalism; development; post-war China; expert; the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

In September 1947, J. Franklin Ray, formerly chief of UNRRA's Office of Far Eastern Affairs, presented the UNRRA China Programme, which was approaching its conclusion, as a case of 'international aid to an undeveloped country' at a conference held by the Institute of the Pacific Relations.¹ The language of development frequently appeared in the final phase of the UNRRA China Programme. Cleveland Harlan, third and last Director of the UNRRA China Office, said in a speech that UNRRA's task was to bring industrial and scientific techniques from the west to China so as to boost 'an economic revolution'.² Historians, who are increasingly aware that UNRRA operated in very different Asian and European contexts and coped with more than just refugee issues, tend to assume that UNRRA was discouraged by the complexity of post-war problems and thus turned from 'restorative' efforts of relief and rehabilitation to the 'transformative' pursuit of economic development in the long run.³ This assumption, presumably a product of today's predominant scholarly focuses on UNRRA's European history, and, more broadly, on trans-Atlantic actors in the early UN, overlooks the strong and long-standing appeal

¹J. Franklin Ray, *UNRRA in China: A Case Study of the Interplay of Interests in a Program of International Aid to an Undeveloped Country* (New York: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1947); similar expression, see Poeliu Dai, *Summary Report on UNRRA Activities in China* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1947), 8.

²'Mr. Cleveland's Speech', 20 June 1947, S-0528-0003-0001, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, New York (hereafter cited as UNARMS).

³See Amanda Kay McVety, 'Wealth and Nations: The Origins of International Development Assistance', in *The Development Century: A Global History*, ed. Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 33–4.

of development as a state project to non-western actors and especially to twentieth-century Chinese state-builders.⁴

Using the case of the Yellow River project and associated technical assistance, this article seeks to understand how development thinking gained momentum through a post-conflict programme in a non-western context. It reveals how a Chinese developmental vision of international aid and technical assistance was received by UNRRA's multi-national, albeit predominantly American, cadre of experts at a transitional period from war to reconstruction. Fieldworkers in rural China did not see a sharp turn to development; instead, UNRRA's self-help agenda allowed for the incorporation of development projects into rehabilitation tasks from the start.

In 1938, during the first year of the Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945), the Chinese Nationalist government under the Guomindang (or Kuomintang), which had evacuated from the capital, Nanjing, to Wuhan, decided strategically to break the Yellow River dyke at Huayuankou, Henan province, to 'buy time' for the government and its troops to go further west.⁵ This tactic successfully delayed the Japanese by creating a vast flooded area across farmland in three provinces, Henan, Jiangsu, and Anhui, with the river leaving its original northern course at the breach. The flooding was catastrophic: more than 800,000 people died immediately, four million were displaced, and approximately two million people starved to death in the following Henan Famine of 1942–1943.⁶ After Japan's surrender in August 1945, the Nationalist government in exile returned to Nanjing but failed to take full control of China, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) expanded its influence across north and north-eastern China. The Chinese civil war (1946–1949) soon resumed and intensified rampant inflation, which had a destructive influence across the country.

At this time of political and social crisis, the UNRRA China Programme unfolded. Based on an agreement between UNRRA and the Nationalist government, the nationwide programme encompassed a wide range of relief and rehabilitation undertakings, including providing food, clothing, medicine, and shelters to tens of millions of people; repairing and rebuilding urban, rural and transport infrastructure; and managing the Yellow River problem. The Nationalist government called the project of closing the Huayuankou crevasse 'uniting the dragon [*helong*]'. The cultural symbol attached to the Yellow River, well known as the cradle of Chinese civilization, embodied Chinese hope for reconstruction, through which China would be a strong, united nation and a leading power in the international order. In March 1947, the mile-wide breach at Huayuankou was closed, with the successful re-diversion of the river to its pre-1938 waterway. Closure aside, the international effort of water control also helped rehabilitate the flooded area. The influx of UNRRA farm machinery turned certain parts of rural China into a laboratory for development projects. However, neither success nor rural experimentation could save the Nationalist government. Decisive military campaigns occurred in 1948, and the Nationalists were swept away from mainland China in 1949.⁷

⁴Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jessica Reinisch, 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA', *Past & Present* 210, supplement 6 (2011): 258–89; Jessica Reinisch, "'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation": UNRRA, Internationalism and National Reconstruction in Poland', *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008): 451–76; Tara Zahra, "'A Human Treasure": Europe's Displaced Children between Nationalism and Internationalism', *Past & Present* 210, supplement 6 (2011): 332–50; Silvia Salvatici, "'Help the People to Help Themselves": UNRRA Relief Workers and European Displaced Persons', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 428–51; for an exception to Eurocentric focuses, Rana Mitter, 'Imperialism, Transnationalism, and the Reconstruction of Post-war China: UNRRA in China, 1944–7', *Past & Present* 218, supplement 8 (2013): 51–69.

⁵Diana Lary, 'Drowned Earth: The Strategic Breaching of the Yellow River Dyke, 1938', *War in History* 8, no. 2 (2001): 191–207; Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937–1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 157–62.

⁶Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 107.

⁷Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

Historians have shown that the Yellow River project was deeply implicated in the civil war.⁸ Since the area affected by the closure was politically divided, both parties attempted to use the project to their military or political advantage. While scholars have explored the political transformation from Nationalist to Communist China, only limited attention has been paid to international actors in this episode. UNRRA's provision of supplies and equipment – valued at 2.5 million US dollars, the same as total UNRRA aid to Finland⁹ – from overseas to the breach-closing project has been celebrated.¹⁰ However, UNRRA's institutional agency and the role of foreign experts remain obscure, regarded as siding with the Nationalist government or part of the US presence in China. But UNRRA acted in its own right, and like its interwar precedents, it was motivated by the desire to achieve visible success and thereby to showcase the value of internationalism in the post-war world, for which politicians and humanitarians in Washington, Europe, colonial states, and China shared some, but not all, visions. While the Arab-Asian group 'brought an anticolonial tenor' to the UN's daily activities in its early history, imperial hierarchies continued to exist in the new international organization.¹¹ The UN also confronted Chinese nationalists' longstanding aspiration for building a developmental state, at a time when China emerged as one of the 'Four Policemen' in a US-envisioned world order and reclaimed its full sovereignty.¹² In this regard, this article argues that technical assistance is integral to understanding the history of UNRRA and its role in negotiating different visions for the future world. Building on the existing scholarship that explores how foreign experts helped build the military and fiscal strengths of the Chinese state, and more widely, helped China integrate into the global economy from the late Qing, this article underscores the centrality of foreign experts to the history of development in China.¹³ Whilst tracing UNRRA's technical assistance as part of China's quest for a modern, industrialized future, it looks beyond China, stressing the capacity of UNRRA's multi-national experts to see their own usefulness in a wider less industrialized world. It is also acknowledged that though not leaving Chinese accounts out, this article focuses more on perspectives of UNRRA employees, especially concerning the execution of technical assistance.

Moreover, this article contributes to a research trend that highlights the multilateral history of global development. Development was more than a Cold War project or an opportunity for negotiation between (post-)imperial metropolises and (post-)colonial states.¹⁴ After the abrogation of the so-called 'unequal treaties' which regulated Sino-foreign relations since the 1840s, China faced the task of re-negotiating relations with foreign powers. Chinese nationalists and their post-war vision played a strong part in this story. The Yellow River project was never imagined as a remedy or an alternative to European imperialism, nor was it designed as part of the Great American Mission. It was the Chinese request that rendered UNRRA an answering service, an

⁸Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, 'A River Runs Through it: The Yellow River and the Chinese Civil War, 1946–1947', *Social Science History* 41 (2017): 141–73; Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 201–35.

⁹'50 Facts about UNRRA', S-1304-0000-0249-00001, UNARMS, 27.

¹⁰For UNRRA supplies on the Yellow River breach-closing project, Edgerton-Tarpley, 'A River Runs Through it', 159; Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*, 201–4.

¹¹Cindy Ewing, "'With a Minimum of Bitterness": Decolonization, the Right to Self-Determination, and the Arab-Asian Group', *Journal of Global History* 17, no. 2 (2022): 270; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 71–2.

¹²Van de Ven, *China at War*, 172–8.

¹³For example, see Felix Boecking, *No Great Wall: Trade, Tariffs, and Nationalism in Republican China, 1927–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2017); William C. Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); Ghassan Moazzin, *Foreign Banks and Global Finance in Modern China: Banking on the Chinese Frontier, 1870–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹⁴Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Cyrus Schayegh, 'Imperial and Transnational Developmentalisms: Middle Eastern Interplays, 1880s–1960s', in *The Development Century*, ed. Macekura and Manela, 61–82; David Webster, 'Development Advisors in a Time of Cold War and Decolonization: The United Nations Technical Assistance Administration, 1950–59', *Journal of Global History* 6 (2011): 251–5.

agent for disseminating expertise. In turn, although Nationalist officials were depressed by the civil war context, UNRRA officials enthusiastically participated in the UNRRA China Programme. Their zeal, which in some cases encouraged them to continue to work as development experts in the post-war world, was fuelled more by their experiences with an international organization in rural China than by the spread of anti-communist anxieties from remote Washington or Europe. Recipient countries in the current literature often appear as merely advocates for development aid, or as fortunate, if not entirely passive, beneficiaries. Their ‘hunger for industrialisation’ needs to be re-read.¹⁵ This less-told episode of UNRRA in China urges us to rethink one of the most important phenomena in the second half of the twentieth century – the proliferation of development projects – and its relations with the rise of non-western actors in the sphere of international organizations.

Bringing foreign experts to China

In May and June 1944, Jiang Tingfu, the Nationalist government’s delegate to UNRRA, visited the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and its river basin development projects.¹⁶ At that time, Jiang was responsible for preparing for China’s post-war needs, coordinating between his exile government at Chongqing and UNRRA, which was based in Washington, DC. Whilst contemplating how China could best benefit from internationalism, Jiang was deeply impressed by the TVA, a US government agency that already presented ‘a model for the world’ in turning rivers into ‘engines of economic growth’.¹⁷ When he first met Benjamin H. Kizer, who would soon be appointed Director of the UNRRA China Office, they enthusiastically talked about the TVA and the potential of utilizing hydro-electric power in China.¹⁸ While Jiang was attracted to a set of American ideals embodied by the TVA, he also was encouraged by the fact that this success was brought about by a state agency. In fact, his faith in the transformative power of science and machinery was inseparable from his state-building ambition. Several months later, both UNRRA and the Nationalist government accepted Jiang’s proposal for creating a state agency responsible for distributing UNRRA supplies within China. The Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRRA) was established in January 1945, and Jiang was appointed its first director.¹⁹ This was among the earliest steps Chinese state-builders took to incorporate their ambitions into the UNRRA China Programme.

Before Japan posed a lethal threat to China in the 1930s, a cadre of western-educated Chinese intellectuals had come to see a centralized, powerful government as a solution to China’s modernization question. In 1916, American-educated Chinese scholar, Liu Dajun (or Dakuin K. Lieu), published an article titled ‘The Industrial Transformation of China’ in the newly founded English-language journal, *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* (1916–1941). Liu sought to divert the attention of readers, mostly western-educated Chinese, from China’s ‘foreign debt problem’ to ‘industrial development’.²⁰ At a time when Yuan Shikai’s monarchy had just been abolished and China was divided among regional military leaders, Liu perceived the unification of China and the establishment of ‘a system of national economy’, borrowing from the theories of German economist Karl Buecher, as a prerequisite for transforming the country’s ‘industrial regime to the stage in which the European and American nations now are’.²¹

¹⁵Webster, ‘Development Advisors’, 252.

¹⁶Jiang Tingfu Diary, 30 May 1944 to 2 June 1944, Guo Tingyi Library, Academia Sinica, Taipei.

¹⁷Jiang Tingfu Diary, 31 May 1944; Christopher Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution: Large Dams, Cold War Geopolitics, and the US Bureau of Reclamation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015): 16–17.

¹⁸Jiang Tingfu Diary, 3 October 1944.

¹⁹T. F. Tsiang [Jiang Tingfu], *China National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration: What does it do? How does it do it?* (Shanghai: International Publishers: 1946), 7.

²⁰Dakuin K. Lieu, ‘The Industrial Transformation of China’, *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* 1, no. 4 (1916): 66–7.

²¹Lieu, ‘The Industrial Transformation of China’, 72, 80.

Five years later, Sun Yat-sen, in *International Development of China*, envisaged how modernising 'state-owned' undertakings, such as water-power projects and iron and steel works, could bring development to China. Since this book was drafted to seek support from the League of Nations, Sun argued that China's development would benefit the whole world. He also stressed an international element in these projects:

foreign capital have [sic] to be invited, foreign experts and organizers have to be enlisted, and gigantic methods have to be adopted. The property thus created will be state owned and will be managed for the benefit of the whole nation. During the construction and the operation of each of these national undertakings, before its capital and interest are fully repaid, it will be managed and supervised by foreign experts under Chinese employment. As one of their obligations, these foreign experts have to undertake the training of Chinese assistants to take their places in the future. When the capital and interest of each undertaking are paid off, the Chinese Government will have the option to employ either foreigners or Chinese to manage the concern as it thinks fit.²²

Sun saw the use of foreign experts as a government strategy not just to acquire advice but further to train Chinese 'assistants' for a future in which China would no longer rely on foreign experts. He formulated this idea in a context where the Qing government had greatly benefited from foreign experts, such as Robert Hart, who turned the Chinese Maritime Customs Service into a modern, centralized bureaucracy.²³ Late Qing reformers justified the employment of foreign experts as advisors and instructors, often in military affairs, with a widely spread slogan: 'Chinese for the essence, foreign for the practicality [zhongxue weiti xixue weiyong]'.²⁴ Indeed, before Sun published this influential book, Chinese industrialist and politician Zhang Jian had struggled to attract foreign capitals and experts to a newly established centralized water control administration under Yuan Shikai's government, but failed, in part due to the outbreak of the First World War.²⁵ Sun, too, failed to win over the League of Nations, but the new Nationalist government, which was founded in 1927, began the modernization project in the spirit of Sun, and benefited widely from German military advisors, Anglo-American economists, and multi-national (mainly British) Customs staff.²⁶ In the early 1930s, the League of Nations sent a cadre of public health experts, economists, and engineers to China through its technical cooperation programme with the Nationalist government. These experts, as William Kirby has pointed out, consistently provided advice in favour of a centralizing approach to economic development.²⁷

These pre-war cases epitomized how foreign experts were integral to the efforts of strengthening the Chinese state, and more broadly, to a discourse on China's development. In the first issue of *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review*, the editorial note explained why this journal was published in English: 'it is the intention of the staff to invite foreign co-operation by way of contribution of articles and to extend the circulation of this magazine'.²⁸ The journal was

²²Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 11–12.

²³Hans van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 64–102.

²⁴William Ayers, *Chang Chih-tung and Educational Reform in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

²⁵David Pietz, *Engineering the State: The Huai River and Reconstruction in China, 1927–1937* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 30–37.

²⁶James C. Thomson, *While China faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*.

²⁷William C. Kirby, 'Engineering China: Birth of the Developmental State, 1928–1937', in *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond*, ed. Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 144–8; also see, Margherita Zanasi, 'Exporting Development: The League of Nations and Republican China', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (2007): 143–69.

²⁸Yan Heling, 'Editorial Notes: The Origin of the Organization', *The Chinese Social and Political Science* 1, no.1, (1916): 5.

born to be international and transnational. It was the US Minister at Beijing Paul S. Reinsch's suggestion that inspired Chinese diplomats, including Yan Heling, to create a counterpart (which was named the Chinese Social and Political Science Association) to the American Political Science Association and to issue an academic publication with focuses on 'politics, law, administration, economics and sociology'.²⁹ Within this framework, Sino-foreign relations and China's industrialization became key themes in the journal. British, American, German, and French diplomats, advisers, and scholars in China – some of whom had participated in the Nationalist government's pre-war modernization project – were invited to the association, and many wrote for the journal, including Oliver J. Todd and Harry B. Price, who later joined the UNRRA China Programme.³⁰ These foreign experts helped promote a transnational intellectual discourse on China's development, which, in turn, shaped Chinese state-builders into firm developmentalists.

As a chief editor of *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* in the early 1930s, Jiang Tingfu had also engaged in this intellectual discourse on China's modern future. Unlike many western-educated Chinese who received training in science, Jiang distinctively approached the question of China's modernization by studying history. In his 1938 monograph, *Outline of Modern Chinese History*, Jiang asked a series of questions: 'Can we Chinese people become modern? Can we catch up with westerners? Can we make use of science and machinery? Can we abandon our family and hometown ties and form a modern nation-state?'³¹ In Jiang's view, these questions were interconnected. He saw building a strong, modern state as a historical task that entailed the spread of science and technology. Throughout his academic and political careers, Jiang was always a strong nationalist – and anti-imperialist, as Rana Mitter has reminded us.³² He joined the Nationalist government at a time of national crisis in 1935, and later became the most important figure in making the UNRRA China programme.

Among Chinese state-builders' approaches to modernity, managing the Yellow River, notably its periodic flooding, had a particular historical significance. For centuries, Chinese rulers had seen taming the Yellow River as a state duty and a source of legitimacy.³³ In the late nineteenth century, Yellow River floods and associated famines became known as 'China's sorrow' in the west, a cultural symbol of how natural disasters impoverished Chinese. To end the circle of natural disasters on the North China Plain thus emerged as a political goal to the Nationalist government, which, in 1933, established the Yellow River Conservancy Commission (YRCC) to centralize water control.³⁴ During the Sino-Japanese war, the ruthless decision to break the dyke without showing sufficient care for the riverine population further gave the Nationalists a moral responsibility for concentrating resources on the Yellow River. In 1942, well before UNRRA became involved, YRCC officials began to plan the closing of the Huayuankou breach and the rehabilitation of the Yellow River flooded area.³⁵ Their plan was later incorporated into China's post-war plans to UNRRA.

The Nationalists' plan for the Yellow River project exemplifies how a developmental element was added to a post-war rehabilitation programme. Closing the Huayuankou gap would have, Nationalist planners argued in 1944, at least two practical benefits to China's overall relief and

²⁹Yan, 'Editorial Notes', 7.

³⁰For example, 'Editorial Notes', *The Chinese Social and Political Science* 14, no. 1 (1930): 149.

³¹Jiang Tingfu, *Zhongguo jindaishi dagang* (Outline of Modern Chinese History) (Chongqing: Qingnian Shudian, 1938), 1–2.

³²Rana Mitter, 'State-Building after Disaster: Jiang Tingfu and the Reconstruction of Post-World War II China, 1943–1949', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 1 (2019): 176–206.

³³Randall A. Dodgen, *Controlling the Dragon: Confucian Engineers and the Yellow River in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 1–3.

³⁴David A. Pietz, *The Yellow River: The Problem of Water in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 15–16, 89–91.

³⁵*Huayuankou helong jinian shouce* (Commemorative Handbook for the Dyke Closure at Huayuankou), undated, Y12-1-197, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Shanghai, 31.

rehabilitation effort. First, the flooded area, also one of the ‘most densely populated farming regions in China’, could be reclaimed. Second, the two major railways across China – the north–south Tientsin–Pukow railway and the west–east Lunghai railway – could be put into use again, further facilitating the transport of supplies. Ambitious Nationalist planners were not satisfied with merely having the river returned: the next tasks were to repair and ‘improve’ the existing water and drainage systems, which were, or would be, burdened by the diversion and future re-diversion of the Yellow River.³⁶

To accomplish this flood control project, the Nationalist government hoped that UNRRA could provide not only material aid but also technical support – ‘one or two engineers experienced in closing crevasses, building dikes, and dredging channels, and 20 master mechanics experienced in operating draglines’.³⁷ This request was part of the Nationalists’ deliberate attempt to incorporate technical assistance into the UNRRA China Programme. Despite the ongoing war, the Nationalist government continued inviting foreign experts, such as American river engineer John L. Savage of the US Bureau of Reclamation, to Nationalist-controlled China as advisors.³⁸ This continued transnational flow of expertise encouraged Chongqing bureaucrats and experts to envisage technical assistance as a crucial component of China’s post-war needs, particularly in the fields of health and industries, where 885 and 1,080 experts were requested from UNRRA, respectively.³⁹ In September 1944, Jiang Tingfu formally submitted to UNRRA China’s post-war requirements, including the services of more than 2,000 foreign experts and fellowships for several hundred Chinese technicians to receive further training abroad.⁴⁰ This call, itself, was certainly ‘a performance on the international stage’ to exhibit a developmental vision of post-war China to the Allied nations, and in this way it demonstrated the desire of the government to further consolidate its new international position as a leading power.⁴¹ Yet, this perspective should not blind us to the fact that the Nationalists were truly about shifting emphasis away from military-industrial development, which had been dominant since the 1930s.

At an institutional level, the Chinese request for foreign experts aligned with UNRRA’s explicit goal of ‘helping people to help themselves’.⁴² Built on a perception that relief merely as a soup kitchen was pointless, UNRRA emphasized the need for ‘necessary technical services’ in its provisions.⁴³ In two ways, Nationalist officials justified their requirements as a ‘necessary’ component for post-war relief and rehabilitation. First, China’s lack of expertise was emphasized as a hindrance to the full use of UNRRA supplies. In December 1943, when Jiang Tingfu proposed a wartime training project, he stressed that China ‘would not be interested in degrees and academic education, but rather in short-term practical training’.⁴⁴ By doing so, he cast China as an active participant that adapted its own enormous needs to UNRRA policies, rather than as a passive recipient of international aid. Second, Nationalist planners argued China remained

³⁶Program and Estimated Requirements for Relief and Rehabilitation in China’, September 1944, S-1129-0000-0095, UNARMS, 28–9.

³⁷Program and Estimated Requirements for Relief and Rehabilitation in China’, 29.

³⁸Sneddon, *Concrete Revolution*, 38–9; Covell F. Meyskens, ‘Dreaming of a Three Gorges Dam amid the Troubles of Republic China’, *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 15, no. 2 (2021): 176–94.

³⁹Program and Estimated Requirements for Relief and Rehabilitation in China’, 11.

⁴⁰*China’s Relief Needs* (Washington DC: National Planning Association, 1945), 5.

⁴¹Tehyun Ma, ‘“The Common Aim of the Allied Powers”: Social Policy and International Legitimacy in Wartime China, 1940–47’, *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 2 (2014): 258.

⁴²United Nations Information Organization, *Helping the People to Help Themselves: The Story of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1944).

⁴³Ben Shephard, ‘“Becoming Planning Minded”: The Theory and Practice of Relief, 1940–1945’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (2008): 412; *A Compilation of the Resolutions on Policy: First and Second Sessions of the UNRRA Council* (Washington DC: UNRRA, 1944), 11.

⁴⁴Minutes of the Second Meeting, UNRRA Committee of the Council for the Far East’, 10 December 1943, S-1129-0000-0093, UNARMS, 4.

'less-developed' in such fields as health to justify the requirements which went beyond 'the pre-war standard of China':

It is evident that the primary consideration [of the UNRRA Council] was European conditions. This was particularly true in reference to 'restoring minimum adequate health services'. The adequacy of health services may broadly be gauged in terms of the number of physicians and hospital beds available per thousand persons. The number of physicians in occupied Europe varied from 1 to 3,500 of population in some countries to 1 to 1,700 in others; hospital beds ranged from 3 to 7 per thousand of population. In China, there is approximately 1 physician to 40,000 of population and 1 hospital bed to about 10,000 of population. China had never developed a 'minimum adequate health service'.⁴⁵

Nationalist planners grumbled that UNRRA assigned uneven importance to Europe and to China. Yet, rather than merely complaining about UNRRA's asymmetric efforts, they called attention to China's conditions and convinced UNRRA officials that China's war losses should take into account how the government's modernization projects had been interrupted by the war. In UNRRA's official history, published in 1950, the Nationalist government's 'gigantic task of encouraging modernization and new economic development' was fully recognized.⁴⁶

Eventually, although European (notably, British) diplomats tended to be critical of China's post-war needs, UNRRA officials generally sympathized with the Nationalist request.⁴⁷ This was underpinned by the Chinese-American-British military alliance, China's position in a new world order, individual diplomats, and the pre-existing transnational flow of expertise. Officials were aware that China needed relief, 'but not charity', and some even regarded China's welfare demands, including 230 specialists, as 'extremely modest, – if not, in fact, too modest'.⁴⁸ After receiving China's request, UNRRA officials extensively consulted 'Far Eastern specialists' both within and outside UNRRA. These experts were 'all in substantial agreement on the major point [made by the Nationalist government] – namely, that UNRRA's program in China should be a broad one, with considerable emphasis on rehabilitation'. Further, the League of Nations' effort to control Yangtze River flooding through technical assistance was recalled to demonstrate the value of international aid.⁴⁹ While the League of Nations was then widely perceived as a failure for not preventing the war, its partial success as a platform for disseminating expertise displayed how international organizations could assert their usefulness.

From 1944 to 1947, UNRRA recruited for China more than 2,000 experts of 38 nationalities and a stateless group.⁵⁰ The Americans, nonetheless, constituted the largest national group. A glimpse of UNRRA's staff composition in China is seen in Tables 1 and 2. These tables present detailed data on the distribution of nationalities and areas of expertise among UNRRA employees in China in February 1947, before UNRRA prepared to shut down its China-based operations. Whereas over 17 per cent of the personnel specialized in health and welfare, nearly one fourth worked for China's agricultural, industrial, transportation, and economic rehabilitation, with the rest taking care of administration, supply, and finance of UNRRA's China operations. Only a small cadre were recruited for the management of displaced persons.

⁴⁵Program and Estimated Requirements for Relief and Rehabilitation in China', 20–21.

⁴⁶George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 372.

⁴⁷J. F. Brennan to D. A. Routh, 2 April 1943, F 1470/72/10, Foreign Office 371/35773, The National Archives, London.

⁴⁸Conrad Van Hyning to Edwin G. Arnold, 18 October 1944, S-1546-0000-0090, UNARMS, 2; Edwin G. Arnold to Benjamin Kizer, 19 May 1945, S-1545-0000-0101, UNARMS.

⁴⁹Bureau of Areas to Herbert Lehman (Director General of UNRRA), 'Chinese Program and Requirements', 25 October 1944, S-1546-0000-0090, UNARMS, 8.

⁵⁰Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, 371; monthly reports in S-1546-0000-0109, UNARMS.

Table 1. Nationality distribution of UNRRA employees in China in February 1947

Nationality	Number of staff	Percentage (%)
United States	720	60
United Kingdom	160	13.33
Australia	113	9.42
Canada	64	5.33
New Zealand	25	2.08
Denmark	19	1.58
Others	99	8.25
Total	1200	100

Data source: no. 5980, 5 March 1947, S-1546-0000-0109, UNARMS.

Table 2. Function distribution of UNRRA employees in China in February 1947

Area of Expertise	Role/sub-area of expertise	Number of staff	Number of staff	Percentage (%)
Accounting and Finance		374	374	31.17
Health and Welfare	Doctors	63	208	17.33
	Nurses	21		
	Other health personnel	41		
	Welfare personnel	83		
Administration	Staff to Office of Director	121	180	15
	Inspection and Investigation	40		
	Other services	19		
Distribution and Supply	Supply	105	129	10.75
	Distribution	24		
Agriculture	Water conservancy	20	97	8.08
	Fisheries	11		
	Other personnel	66		
Industries		91	91	7.58
Transportation		86	86	7.17
Economics		20	20	1.67
Displaced Persons		15	15	1.25
Total		1200	1200	100

Data source: no. 5980, 5 March 1947, S-1546-0000-0109, UNARMS.

In Jiang Tingfu's blueprint, UNRRA's multi-national employees should be loaned, responsible only to the Nationalist government, and UNRRA would not need to create a China Office.⁵¹ His vision echoed Sun Yat-sen's 1919 vision of using foreign experts 'under Chinese employment'. Concerns about foreign intervention in Chinese governance persisted into the post-war era, despite the enhancement of China's international status. Yet, aside from such concerns, this design also embodied a hope for more intimate international cooperation in the field. 'I would pronounce the work of UNRRA and CNRRA a failure', said Jiang in a speech, 'if we should fail to increase that sense of international brotherhood and understanding which is so important for the future of the world'.⁵² In his eyes, foreign experts would be more than a conduit for bringing technologies, further bridging between China and the west. This proposal did not become reality because of UNRRA's reluctance to sacrifice its administrative autonomy.⁵³ Ironically, UNRRA's institutional independence soon proved valuable in a civil war context, at least for the breach-closing project.

⁵¹Memorandum on the Negotiations Leading up to the Execution of the Basic Agreement between the Chinese Government and UNRRA in November 1945', UNARMS, S-1121-0000-0003, 1, 6.

⁵²Address of Dr. Tingfu F. Tsiang, Nanking', 5 September 1946, S-1301-0000-2209, UNARMS, 13.

⁵³Memorandum on the Negotiations Leading up to the Execution of the Basic Agreement between the Chinese Government and UNRRA in November 1945', 1-2, 17-21.

UNRRA's Yellow River project

After Japan's surrender in 1945, the significance of the Yellow River project to UNRRA was refashioned by the tension between the Nationalists and the Communists. The project presented an opportunity to prove the potential of internationalism as a vehicle that would bring peace to the future world, and first of all, to East Asia. As Franklin Ray recalled, 'internationally minded UNRRA officials and Chinese leaders' such as Jiang Tingfu hoped that 'effective collaboration between the two groups in the execution of a project clearly beneficial to the national economy might diminish the political and military strife between them'.⁵⁴ UNRRA fieldworkers likewise believed that allocating supplies to the Communists would be 'a very potent factor in removing some of the distrust and disunity now existing between the two major parties in China'.⁵⁵

UNRRA's strategies toward civil wars in Asia and Europe were not consistent. Rather than acting as a mediator, UNRRA officials in central Europe had 'an extreme sense of caution not to get drawn into matters of local politics', while they aligned with the Greek government during the civil war, with left-wing scientists and technical staff having to leave UNRRA.⁵⁶ To understand this difference, we need to note the stance of the US government. By sending a peace-making mission led by George C. Marshall to China in December 1945, the State Department signalled that it strongly wanted to see China politically united, as a resisting force to the expansion of Soviet influence. It thus shared with UNRRA the desire to encourage cooperation between the Chinese parties on a hydraulic engineering project. At the same time, concerns grew that UNRRA's operations in central and eastern Europe would, in fact, further Soviet influence.⁵⁷ Such fears called into question US financial contributions to UNRRA. UNRRA officials thus hoped the Yellow River project would be UNRRA's 'colourful' achievement, one that could demonstrate the value of internationalism and international organizations to US national interests.⁵⁸

UNRRA linked the Yellow River project with its global mission of preventing famine. UNRRA's report to the US Congress in March 1946 argued that the world was facing a food crisis, since 'starvation and hunger are inevitable for large groups of the population of Europe and Asia'.⁵⁹ Almost simultaneously, Fiorello H. LaGuardia, the new Director General of UNRRA, told the press that UNRRA's duty was to 'take food where we can find it and take it to the people who need it wherever they are'.⁶⁰ The fact that wartime Asia experienced disastrous famines in Henan and in Bengal warranted anxieties over food security in the immediate post-war moment.⁶¹ LaGuardia presented the Yellow River project as 'the largest single UNRRA rehabilitation task', which could 'reclaim 2,000,000 acres of China's most fertile land' for 'China's starving millions'.⁶² This project was not just for the good of China: the gap-closing project could reclaim farmlands 'on so large a scale as to measurably increase the world's food supply'.⁶³ Through the UNRRA programme, China was expected to be transformed from a recipient into a supplier country.

⁵⁴Ray, *UNRRA in China*, 54.

⁵⁵Arthur G. Lowndes, 'Report on First Supplies Sent By UNRRA to the Communist Areas of Shandong Province', undated, S-0528-0014-0001, UNARMS, 11.

⁵⁶Katerina Gardikas, 'Relief Work and Malaria in Greece, 1943–1947', *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 3 (2008): 506–7; Reinisch, 'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation', 474–5.

⁵⁷'Spearhead', *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 20 June 1946, 2; Jessica Reinisch, "'Auntie UNRRA" At the Crossroads', *Past & Present* 218, supplement 8 (2013): 70–71.

⁵⁸Oliver J. Todd, *The China that I Knew* (Palo Alto: self-published, 1973), 153.

⁵⁹'Seventh Report to Congress on Operations of UNRRA', 31 March 1946, in *Reports to Congress on United States Participation in Operations of UNRRA: 1st–12th, 1944–1947* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 3.

⁶⁰La Guardia Calls for Food for World Aid', *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 March 1946, 1.

⁶¹On the post-war food crisis, see Bryson G. Nkhoma, 'World War II, Global Food Crisis and the Grow-More-Food Campaign in Malawi, 1939–1959', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49, no. 5 (2021): 940–63.

⁶²UNRRA to Reclaim Granary in China', *New York Times*, 13 May 1946, 3; '330,000 workmen will shift Yellow River to Old Course to Reclaim Vast Farm Area', *New York Times*, 20 January 1946, 20.

⁶³O. J. Todd, 'China's Yellow River', undated, S-0528-0016-0001, UNARMS, 1.

In addition to agricultural rehabilitation, the value of the Yellow River project to UNRRA lay in its potential to be a quick and measurable achievement. Other projects, such as the repatriation of displaced persons, could hardly conclude within UNRRA's limited operational period. Thus, closing the Yellow River dyke breach became more than a Nationalist programme: it became UNRRA's key opportunity to demonstrate its own usefulness beyond emerging Cold War ideological contests.

In a context where actual relief and distribution work in China was conducted by CNRRA, not the UNRRA China Office, engineers and mechanics were expected to be the primary contributions of UNRRA in the Yellow River project, alongside food and machinery. As the *New York Times* reported, UNRRA engineers would 'lead an army of 100,000 labours in the fight to bring the inundated land into production of food'.⁶⁴ American engineer Oliver Todd readily accepted the post of Chief Engineer, when he was reached by UNRRA in September 1945.⁶⁵ Since 1919 he had engaged in flood control projects in the North China Plain, and he had successful experiences of closing small dyke breaches along the lower Yellow River. With the China International Famine Relief Commission, Todd became a development expert, dealing with post-disaster relief while seeking to reduce the vulnerability of China's rural society to recurrent natural disasters.⁶⁶ Todd's knowledge of China, technological expertise, and enthusiasm made him the best person to follow UNRRA's 'emphatic instructions' to 'get the job done'.⁶⁷

When he arrived in Shanghai in December 1945, Todd surprisingly found that morale was low among Nationalist officials and engineers. They feared a combination of technical difficulties and political risks.⁶⁸ The challenge was real: closing the mile-wide dyke breach was, in the words of Todd, 'the earth moving equivalent of building the Panama Canal'.⁶⁹ Rumours also spread that the dyke 'had been so badly destroyed as to make prompt repairs impractical'.⁷⁰ Moreover, while the project's political significance to the Nationalists had brought it into the UNRRA China Programme, it now also discouraged officials on the ground from taking on the risk of failure. Todd recalled that Nationalist engineers 'all the time' felt 'fear for the future – political fear'.⁷¹

Todd immediately flew to Chongqing and spoke to Chinese engineers who claimed that the gap could not be closed and called for postponement. After he found 'little of validity to prove the contention' of Chinese engineers, Todd turned to top-level officials gathered in Chongqing for peace talks.⁷² Jiang Tingfu promised his support, but under the condition that 'investigation in the field showed there was a 50 per cent chance of success'.⁷³ Through Marshall's mission, Todd bypassed the Nationalist government and reached CCP leader Zhou Enlai who gave him a verbal promise of cooperation, 'if the engineers' investigations showed it was practical'.⁷⁴ In January 1946, Todd started the first inspection tour of the dyke, along with YRCC engineers and other UNRRA officials, including Canadian missionary Donald K. Faris, who was designated to China by the United Church of Canada in 1925. Faris had no technical expertise, but his

⁶⁴'UNRRA to Reclaim Granary in China', *New York Times*, 13 May 1946, 3

⁶⁵Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 9–11, 152.

⁶⁶Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 33; Hong Fu and Calum G. Turvey, *The Evolution of Agricultural Credit during China's Republican era, 1912–1949* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 238–41; also see Todd's plan for hydroelectric generation on the Yellow River, in Pietz, *The Yellow River*, 93.

⁶⁷Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 152.

⁶⁸Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 4.

⁶⁹Charles Stuart Kennedy and Harlan Cleveland, *Interview with Harlan Cleveland*, 2010, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessible at www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001530/, 6, 53.

⁷⁰Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 154.

⁷¹Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 25.

⁷²Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 4.

⁷³Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 153.

⁷⁴Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 5; also see Edgerton-Tarpley, 'A River Runs Through it', 149.

longstanding passion for preventing famine, language skills, and ‘ability in dealing with country people’ was helpful to the YRCC-UNRRA mission.⁷⁵ From the start of its recruitment, the UNRRA China Office made clear that ‘a knowledge of China and the Chinese Mandarin language is very desirable’.⁷⁶ American Harry Price served the Nationalist government as a financial advisor in the late 1920s and 1930s, while teaching economics at Chinese universities, and he was one of the first staff members secured by UNRRA for China.⁷⁷ UNRRA made use of the so-called ‘old China hands’, sometimes beyond the sphere of American influence. These area hands helped smooth cooperation between UNRRA and the Nationalist government, and some, such as Faris, functioned as ‘a liaison between the Nationalists and the Communists’.⁷⁸

Two days after the two civil-war parties reached a truce under the pressure of Marshall, Todd’s group arrived at the Heze county and approached the Communist Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu (Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan) border region government. Although cautious CCP leaders only allowed the international group to visit a designated section of the old dykes for half a day, the survey still gave engineers an impression that it was ‘highly practical’ to complete the breach-closing project by that year.⁷⁹ Todd concluded that ‘rumours concerning the damage done to the dykes were without foundation’, which gave Jiang Tingfu bargaining power against other ‘timid’ Nationalist officials.⁸⁰ Ultimately, the closure work at Huayuankou began in March 1946.

The engineering work of building a rock-fill dam was a ‘race against time’, since the arrival of summer typhoon seasons would pose a serious threat. Giving ‘top priority’ to this rehabilitation undertaking, UNRRA officials were convinced that if the breach was not closed in summer 1946, the US Congress would change ‘the attitude toward support of UNRRA and toward other measures of economic assistance to China’.⁸¹ However, Nationalist engineers did not share this anxiety, or, in Todd’s words, they did not realise the potential ‘international complication of quitting’; some of them even ‘scoffed at’ UNRRA officials’ ‘impatience’ towards the closure project.⁸²

In addition to tensions with government officials, UNRRA confronted the distrust between the two Chinese parties at the grassroots level. Edgerton-Tarpley has illustrated the widespread fears in the CCP-held zone that the closure project would cause flooding, and local protests were strong enough to complicate CCP leaders’ support for the project.⁸³ A major crisis occurred in April 1946, when regional officials on both political sides signed an agreement for the immediate suspension of the closure work at Huayuankou: the Nationalist part of the work would not be resumed until full completion of the Communists’ dyke repair work along the old course. Faced with the delay, Todd hurriedly told the press that ‘from an engineering standpoint, and aside from other factors, the job can be finished on time [by 1 July]’, urging the continuing of the closure work.⁸⁴ Negotiations thereafter moved from local to top-level venues. Using his expertise and experience, Todd convinced Zhou Enlai that, technically, there was little risk of flooding in CCP-held areas; and that the closure would bring long-term benefits to the whole country.⁸⁵ On 18 May, a new agreement was reached, enabling the closure work to proceed. In a letter to

⁷⁵Todd, ‘China’s Yellow River’, 6; Ruth Compton Brouwer, ‘Faith in Development: Donald K. Faris’s Path to a New Mission in the Postcolonial Era’, *Historical Papers* (2011): 192–3.

⁷⁶Biographical Sketches, Selected Personnel in the China Operations’, undated, S-1546-0000-0109, UNARMS, 8.

⁷⁷Biographical Sketches, Selected Personnel in the China Operations’, 1.

⁷⁸Brouwer, ‘Faith in Development’, 194.

⁷⁹O. J. Todd, ‘Memorandum’, 13 May 1946, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS; Todd, ‘China’s Yellow River’, 6–7; *Waijiao douzheng* (Diplomatic Struggle), undated, MG 3.2-2, Yellow River Conservancy Commission Archives, Zhengzhou.

⁸⁰Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 153, 155.

⁸¹Notes for General Marshall’, undated, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS.

⁸²Staff Operations Meeting, 24 April 1946, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS; Todd, ‘China’s Yellow River’, 10.

⁸³Edgerton-Tarpley, ‘A River Runs Through it’, 151–2.

⁸⁴Todd, ‘China’s Yellow River’, 27; ‘Break in Yellow River to be Sealed July 1’, 4 May 1947, *The China Weekly Review*, 216.

⁸⁵Technical Details, 5–16 April 1946’, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS.

Todd afterwards, Zhou assured him that ‘the Communist areas will exert their best efforts’ toward the work that would ‘affect the welfare of millions of Chinese people’.⁸⁶ Development, as a promise guaranteed by a foreign expert, helped rebuild the trust, at least briefly, between the rival parties.

While dealing with political difficulties in the closure project, UNRRA officials, notably American nationals, tended to hold a deep belief that the Marshall Mission would solve China’s ‘current political impasse’.⁸⁷ Advised by the State Department to consider UNRRA in relation to Sino-American matters, Marshall was willing to support UNRRA’s efforts.⁸⁸ He not only provided UNRRA with a direct channel to CCP leaders but endeavoured to secure the safe arrival of supplies, which were in severe danger of being seized by troops on both sides, in the Huayankou work site and in Communist-controlled areas. Marshall’s staff believed that while their mission should not be formally involved in the UNRRA programme, the Yellow River project was ‘worthy of every assistance’.⁸⁹ UNRRA’s close relations with the Marshall Mission blurred it with the controversial American presence in post-war China, especially when the space for a non-civil-war discourse narrowed in 1947. Following an unexpected failure of the closure due to the early arrival of substantial rainfall in summer 1946, the military, rather than engineers, began to take control of the engineering work. CCP newspapers began referring to UNRRA as ‘the Americans’, or an ‘accomplice of American imperialism’ aiding Chiang Kai-shek.⁹⁰ The Nationalist government, in contrast, stressed the multilateral nature of UNRRA aid – more than twenty engineers from seven countries worked on the closure project – but this tactic failed to cast UNRRA’s image as a neutral ‘third party’.⁹¹

In this atmosphere, UNRRA officials still hoped to complete the gap-closing project. American engineer Glen E. Edgerton, former governor of the Panama Canal zone, was appointed second Director of the UNRRA China Office in August 1946, indicating that UNRRA continued to prioritize the Yellow River project. Yet, no one, then, expected mutual understanding between the two parties to be fostered through developmental cooperation, especially after UNRRA was embarrassed by the military presence that determined the final phase of the engineering work.⁹² Marshall realized the futility of his mediation effort and announced his decision to quit China in January 1947. By then, the largest sponsor of UNRRA had lost interest in multi-lateral aid. Three days after the breach was closed, US President Harry S. Truman delivered a speech, later known as the Truman Doctrine, asking Congress to deliver bilateral aid to Greece and Turkey to fight Soviet influence. The engineering success of the closure project did not reach its initial goal of building faith in internationalism.

Between rehabilitation and modernization

Despite ultimately losing its significance to UNRRA and to the Nationalists, the closure project still served as a catalyst for the allocation of state resources and international aid to rural China in the civil war. The Nationalist government’s pre-war modernization efforts were largely, albeit not totally, focused on wealthy cities, which contributed a large amount of tax revenues.⁹³ The evacuation of the government in wartime, as many scholars have argued, encouraged attempts to modernize border regions and the countryside.⁹⁴ When the war ended, people in the interior were especially in critical need, because of the devastation caused by the 1944 Japanese

⁸⁶Zhou Enlai to Oliver Todd, 21 May 1946, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS.

⁸⁷O. J. Todd, ‘Developments in Yellow River Commission Direction’, undated, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS, 2.

⁸⁸Dean Acheson to General Marshall, 24 January 1946, folder UNRRA vol. 1, box 29, entry 1102, RG 59, National Archives and Records Administration, Maryland (hereafter cited as NARA).

⁸⁹Walter S. Robertson to General Marshall, 15 September 1946, folder UNRRA vol. 2, box 29, entry 1102, RG 59, NARA.

⁹⁰Xingshu fabiao gao qunzhong shu’ (The Administration Published a Letter to the People), *Jinjilu Ribao*, 19 March 1947.

⁹¹*Huayankou helong jinian shouce*, 31.

⁹²Todd, ‘China’s Yellow River’, 28–9; also see, Edgerton-Tarpley, ‘A River Runs Through it’, 154–8.

⁹³Boecking, *No Great Wall*, 32–5.

⁹⁴Andres Rodriguez, ‘Building the Nation, Serving the Frontier: Mobilizing and Reconstructing China’s Borderlands during the War of Resistance (1937–1945)’, *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2011): 345–76; Joseph Lawson, ‘Unsettled Lands: Labour

Ichi-go Operation. Yet, the bitter reality was that Nationalist officials, barring exceptions such as Jiang Tingfu, who wished 'to make Honan [Henan] the no.1 job of CNRRA', still 'prefer[red] to pay the most attention to Shanghai and some port cities'.⁹⁵ In the eyes of Oliver Todd, Nationalist officials did not care whether UNRRA played a leading part in the closure project that they had planned for years.⁹⁶ Only a little more than 1 per cent of the Nationalist government's expenditure was allocated to CNRRA, with the large majority being directed towards military purposes.⁹⁷ At a time when the government could hardly take concrete action to fulfil any non-military goal, the arrival of UNRRA experts and agricultural equipment – more than US\$7 million worth of tractors and other farm machinery – turned the country, notably its rural part, into a laboratory for development projects, sometimes in ways that had not been envisaged by Nationalist state-builders.⁹⁸

In November 1945, Shanghai received the first shipment of UNRRA supplies. However, much of the equipment UNRRA sent to China was war surplus and in poor condition, procured from the Allied military in the Asian and Pacific theatres.⁹⁹ In March 1946, CNRRA established an Engineering Works in Shanghai to repair and reassemble the army equipment for civilian use. Later, the shortage of technical experts led to the opening of training schools for mechanics in cities including Tianjin, Changsha, and Guangzhou.¹⁰⁰ The 'gift' provided by the Allies pushed the Nationalist government towards agricultural mechanization on a national scale.

With the efforts of engineering branches in cities and the rehabilitation of transportation system, modern machinery such as pile-drivers and tractors gradually arrived in inland China after May 1946.¹⁰¹ Roy Tucker, an American tractor driver who had never been to China, was assigned to Fan-chia, a village at the centre of the flooded area. From his experience, we can see that in the eyes of UNRRA experts a post-war programme entailed rural development projects. Tucker's job responsibilities as a tractor driver were first to reclaim land so that returned refugees would have sufficient food to go through the first post-war winter; and second, to teach Chinese students how to use and maintain the farm machinery.¹⁰² Since UNRRA was designed to operate within a fixed and brief timeframe, training projects emerged as a pragmatic way to secure the best use of UNRRA equipment. UNRRA indeed embraced technological training as a step towards its institutional goal of local self-help. In 1946, an advertisement seeking tractor drivers for the Yellow River project clarified that their service would be reclaiming farmland as well as 'teaching the Chinese to help themselves'.¹⁰³ During 1947, UNRRA's tractor projects were extended to nine provinces of Nationalist China and to Communist-controlled areas.¹⁰⁴

During this process, the Nationalists consistently encouraged foreign experts to take up duties as instructors. Though CNRRA experienced a leadership change in September 1946, its staff continued Jiang Tingfu's vision of Chinese internationalist engagement. In a speech to his colleagues, Huo Baoshu, second Director of CNRRA, argued that foreign personnel would best be

and Land Cultivation in Western China during the War of Resistance (1937–1945)', *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 5 (2015): 1442–84.

⁹⁵Jiang Tingfu Diary, 19 December 1945.

⁹⁶Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 10.

⁹⁷Ding Wenzhi, *Lianzong wuzi yu Zhongguo zhanhou jingji* (UNRRA Supplies and China's Post-War Economy) (Shanghai: CNRRA Publishing Committee, and Institute of Sociology of Academia Sinica, 1948), 41.

⁹⁸Should China Use Tractor?', *The China Weekly Review*, 26 February 1949, 312.

⁹⁹Review of UNRRA Operations in China', 28 February 1947, S-0528-0008-0007, UNARMS, 8–9.

¹⁰⁰Benjamin Kizer to Franklin Ray, 'Monthly Report, no. 4', 25 April 1946, S-1121-0000-0230-00001, UNARMS, 1; Franklin Ray to F. W. Harris, 'Monthly Report, no. 6', 15 June 1946, S-1121-0000-0232-00001, UNARMS, 20.

¹⁰¹O. J. Todd, 'Report on Progress of Yellow River Project', 25 November 1946, S-1194-0000-0001, UNARMS, 2.

¹⁰²Roy S. Tucker, *Tractors and Chopsticks: My Work with the UNRRA Project in China, 1946 to 1947* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), 1–4; also see Edwin R. Henson, *Report on the Agricultural Rehabilitation Program in China* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1947), 11.

¹⁰³'Relief Picture Up-to-date', 1 May 1946, S-1268-0000-0038-00001, UNARMS.

¹⁰⁴Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, 426–7.

responsible for training projects. To illustrate this point, he raised an example: a foreign doctor can 'make more contributions' by training personnel than by delivering treatment, since trainees would remain in the field, while foreigners would leave China after the termination of UNRRA's operations in a year or two.¹⁰⁵ Intriguingly, CCP leaders had a similar expectation of UNRRA's utility. Already in January 1946, Zhou Enlai told UNRRA officials that the party wanted 'very little direct relief' but welcomed any assistance that would enable people to 'produce the thing that they needed for themselves'.¹⁰⁶ In practice, Communist officials also expected UNRRA experts to spend more time on lectures about farm machinery than on fieldwork such as guiding students to plough land for the coming spring.¹⁰⁷ As a result, there was almost no difference between UNRRA's tractor projects in Nationalist and Communist China.

Still, UNRRA's activities in Communist China were quite limited. The party remained cautious about foreigners playing a part in its territories. Lacking the remit to investigate, UNRRA officials struggled to assess war losses or judge the extent of food shortages.¹⁰⁸ In fact, UNRRA's direct relief and tractor project in CCP-held areas were both a product of negotiation regarding the breach-closing project. In mid-1947, Communist officials asked UNRRA for compensation for its failure to prevent the Nationalist military's takeover of the closure work at the final phase: 'the only just solution' was 'to mobilise all remaining supplies and technical help'.¹⁰⁹ UNRRA thereafter sent tractors and technicians to the Communist zone.

In Nationalist China, where UNRRA had a larger space to operate, development projects were often carried out in places that urgently needed relief supplies. UNRRA introduced a variety of rural industrial facilities, including bleaching powder plants, to Shaoyang, Hunan province, where the famine situation was reported to have 'reached a point of emergency'.¹¹⁰ There was no clear-cut division between development assistance and immediate humanitarian aid, which led UNRRA officials in the field to assume duties as relief workers and development experts, not just instructors. Like Oliver Todd's active role in the breach-closing project, a cadre of UNRRA officials, who had seen China's critical shortage of expertise, readily, even passionately embraced their role as development experts. To grasp their enthusiasm for China's development, we need to first understand who these experts sent by UNRRA to China were.

Because Japan surrendered earlier than expected, UNRRA's recruitment for China unfolded hurriedly. The UNRRA China Office advertised its enormous need for staff through UNRRA's regional offices across the globe and religious, diaspora networks.¹¹¹ Despite its appreciation of experts with China experience, UNRRA did not stick to this criterion, since area hands were a scarce resource. In contrast with the Nationalists' desire for foreign experts to facilitate a modernization project and to deepen Sino-foreign understanding, UNRRA's recruitment was largely driven by pragmatism. It was in urgent need of technicians to operate heavy equipment, including nearly 2,000 tractors sent to the flooded area, rather than of area experts, whose familiarity with local situation was desirable but not necessary. In May 1946, the China Office telegraphed the Brethren Service Committee, a US-based missionary society which had wide cooperation with UNRRA, and requested fifty young men with knowledge of farm machinery.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Copy of General Order of Director Huo Baoshu', undated, 21(4), 217, Second Historical Archives of China, Nanjing.

¹⁰⁶ William J. Green to Benjamin Kizer, 24 January 1946, S-1121-0000-0053, UNARMS.

¹⁰⁷ William Hinton, *Iron Oxen: A Documentary of Revolution in Chinese Farming* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 22.

¹⁰⁸ Monnett B. Davis to the US Embassy, Nanking, 23 October 1946, folder UNRRA vol. 2, box 29, entry 1102, RG 59, NARA.

¹⁰⁹ 'China Liberated Areas Relief Association', 17 July 1947, S-1121-0000-0053, UNARMS; Ling Chung to Harlan Cleveland, 15 July 1947, S-1121-0000-0053, UNARMS.

¹¹⁰ Woodbridge, UNRRA, 426-7; CNRRA Hunan Regional Office, 'Rampant Calamities in Hunan and Operations being Taken Toward Relief and Rehabilitation', 31 July 1946, S-0528-0009-0004, UNARMS.

¹¹¹ 'Recruitment of Personnel for UNRRA's China's Operations', 20 February 1946, S-1546-0000-0109, UNARMS.

¹¹² E. Joseph Wampler and D. Eugene Wampler, 'Church of the Brethren China Relief', *Digitalised Primary Resources* 6, 2002, accessible at https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/digitized_primary_sources/6/, 46.

UNRRA deliberately exploited missionary networks and those of philanthropic organizations, such as the Rockefeller Foundation.¹¹³ Aside from pragmatism, UNRRA's recruitment was justified by a prevailing belief in the applicability of social science, modern engineering, and organized relief to worldwide post-war problems. UNRRA staff were convinced that the only difference between post-war China and Europe was that the distress in China had 'greater extent and longer incidence'.¹¹⁴ This thinking pattern would soon lead them to conceptualize China's plight as one confronted by other less industrialized countries.

Consequently, unlike Oliver Todd, a significant portion of UNRRA experts in China had never been to China before. Before departure, UNRRA's training school in Maryland furnished them with a session which usually lasted for several weeks.¹¹⁵ Howard E. Sollenberger, with the Brethren Service Committee, was recruited by UNRRA because of his experience as a relief worker in China and put 'in charge of training people to go to China with UNRRA'.¹¹⁶ As he recalled, there was 'great pressure' to 'get people out, as soon as possible', and those UNRRA staff were only given 'a little language, enough to deal with the social situation, the courtesies'.¹¹⁷ Little was discussed of Chinese politics. Roy Tucker complained that he was not informed that there existed a small Communist army until his arrival in the flooded area.¹¹⁸

The fact that the UNRRA China Office was dominated by people who knew little about China even gave Lin Daoyang, Director of CNRRA's office in Guangdong province, an impression that UNRRA's foreign employees were mostly 'tourists' and they just wanted to 'see China'.¹¹⁹ A tourist vision, however, could also lead to curiosity and enthusiasm, especially at a moment of post-war optimism. In 1945, the prospect of the UNRRA China programme was promising: 'in the future we would not be hampered by lack of drugs and instruments . . . but would rather be embarrassed by a wealth of supplies and too few hands to use them'.¹²⁰

Many of the newcomers with UNRRA believed that their job, especially its development aspects, was 'unprecedented' in Chinese history. Roy Tucker was excited when his students, who had never seen farm tractors or mechanical toys before, graduated after months of training.¹²¹ American William Hinton, with UNRRA's tractor project in the flooded area, also considered his work of tackling China's wastelands pioneering. He believed that his UNRRA colleagues did a better job than the previous Japanese authorities, who also sought to improve daily cultivation in north China.¹²² It remains a question to what extent UNRRA's mission was 'unprecedented', because technologies had already changed everyday life in rural China since the late nineteenth century and the Nationalist government had pursued economic development in the pre-war years.¹²³ Yet, the

¹¹³Ludovic Tournès, 'The Rockefeller Foundation and the Transition from the League of Nations to the UN (1939–1946)', *Journal of Modern European History* 12 (2014): 323–41.

¹¹⁴'Sixth Report to Congress on Operations of UNRRA', 31 December 1945, in *Reports to Congress on United States Participation in Operations of UNRRA*, 21.

¹¹⁵'Recruitment of Personnel for UNRRA's China's Operations', UNARMS; Floyd R. Goodno, 'UNRRA in China, 1945–1947: The American Role in China's Recovery' (Master diss., Oklahoma State University, 1952), 65–8.

¹¹⁶Charles Stuart Kennedy and Howard E. Sollenberger, *Interview with Howard E. Sollenberger*, 1997, The Foreign Affairs Oral History Collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, The Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 21.

¹¹⁷Kennedy and Sollenberger, *Interview with Howard E. Sollenberger*, 21–2.

¹¹⁸Tucker, *Tractors and Chopsticks*, 11.

¹¹⁹24 September 1946, *The Chinese Journals of L. K. Little, 1943–1954: An Eyewitness Account of War and Revolution*, ed. Chihyun Chang (London: Routledge, 2017), vol. 2, 34.

¹²⁰Frederick A. Jensen, 'An UNRRA Official's Parting Statement', *The China Weekly Review*, 27 December 1947, 112.

¹²¹Tucker, *Tractors and Chopsticks*, 7.

¹²²William Hinton, *Iron Oxen: A Documentary of Revolution in Chinese Farming* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 1–3; for the Japanese efforts on the Yellow River, for example, see Xiangli Ding, "'The Yellow River Comes from Our Hands': Silt, Hydroelectricity, and the Sanmenxia Dam, 1929–1973', *Environment and History* 27, no. 4 (2021): 669–73.

¹²³Frank Dikötter, *Exotic Commodities: Modern Objects and Everyday Life in China* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2006); on the Nationalist government's pursuit of economic modernity, for example, see Kirby, 'Engineering China'; Boecking, *No Great Wall*.



Figure 1. A farm tractor operated by Roy S. Tucker is watched by Chinese, Fan Chia, 1947 Source: S-0801-0005-0001-00018, UNARMS.

perception of UNRRA officials as pioneers reminds us of the slow and uneven process of modernization across China – many parts of it had not been covered by this process by the time UNRRA unfolded. Even Oliver Todd celebrated UNRRA's role in introducing 'the methods of the West into populous China that still clings to hand labour'.¹²⁴

UNRRA experts' enthusiasm was also fuelled by surrounding Chinese. While UNRRA's farm machinery was an eye-catching scene to rural communities (Figure 1), their spontaneous response impressed UNRRA experts, many of whom lacked knowledge of previous rural modernization projects initiated by missionaries, local elites, or governments. The arrival of farm machinery, however, did not always indicate an exciting step towards a bright future or a strong state. The international element sometimes raised anxieties. After foreigners arrived in the flooded area with 'iron cows [tractors]', some local residents 'were very uncertain', 'wondering whether this another type of Japanese invasion'.¹²⁵ Recipients' emotional reaction, whether in the form of excitement, shock, or concern, helped UNRRA experts assert their own usefulness in China.

Like their colleagues in Europe, UNRRA experts liked to think big for China.¹²⁶ They thought less about immediate post-war rehabilitation than how China's rural economy could be improved in the long run. Having recognized the success of the CNRRA Engineering Works in mechanizing

¹²⁴Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 15.

¹²⁵Kennedy and Sollenberger, *Interview with Howard E. Sollenberger*, 24.

¹²⁶Reinisch, 'We Shall Rebuild Anew a Powerful Nation', 475.

agricultural infrastructure, UNRRA experts envisioned its institutionalization and expansion on a national scale. Proposing to establish some 3,000 blacksmith shops in the countryside and tens of factories in cities, this farm tool-shop project, as Irving Barnett of UNRRA concluded, sought to establish 'an entire new industry in China for the manufacture of good farm tool'; the project, though only partially completed by the end of 1947, was not just aimed at infrastructural modernization but, more importantly, including education as its goal so that 'the methods suggested would gain acceptance'.¹²⁷ Tractors alone could not be the solution to China. Outside the organization, there was also debate over whether China should use tractors. A newspaper article argued that since UNRRA offered not just tractors but also fuels, lubricants, and technicians, farm machinery could be prohibitive for Chinese farmers once the UNRRA legacy was depleted; the author then proposed a wide range of development solutions to the scanty supply of fuel, such as the exploitation of hydro-electric power and northeast forests, with the whole programme of agricultural mechanisation 'preferably under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry'.¹²⁸

In August 1946, Nationalist engineer Chen Panling on the Yellow River project imagined in a journal article how modern engineering could turn the Yellow River flood into useful resources and lead to the 'increase of agricultural production, revival of the countryside, and prosperity of the north-west [of China]'.¹²⁹ The immediate post-war moment also saw Chinese engineers' ambition of transforming the country with technology. Despite his discontent with Nationalist engineers and officials who hesitated to push forward the breach-closing project, Oliver Todd found that many western-educated Chinese engineers were eager to learn from foreigners, since the war prevented them from gaining practical experiences for so long.¹³⁰ UNRRA thus led to intimate international cooperation at the grassroot level, even if not in every aspect.¹³¹ UNRRA engineers were each assigned a Chinese engineer as their 'co-worker' and interpreter. Upon his arrival in China, Oliver Todd immediately sought Zhang Jichun, whom he had worked with in the 1930s, as his assistant engineer.¹³² Through daily interaction Chinese engineers and foreign experts reinforced each other's aspiration for development.

UNRRA experts did not confine their vision to one country. From an institutional perspective, UNRRA was created as part of the UN system which was intended to be global in operational scale. It meant opportunities to exchange area-based expertise. Before leaving for China, Oliver Todd closely consulted with American flood control experts whom he had known and technical staff of the UNRRA Division of Agricultural Rehabilitation. He abandoned plans for expensive concrete work, which proved successful on the lower Mississippi, but determined to 'sparingly' use western machinery on the Yellow River closure, because of difficulties, as he assumed, in getting technical staff and in transporting the equipment into the interior.¹³³ Todd's knowledge of China triumphed, but it was a result of conversations with experts with different, though mostly, if not exclusively, US-based expertise. In a UNRRA high-ranking staff meeting on the closure project, eleven of the twelve officers were American nationals, plus a British engineer.¹³⁴ Albeit under strong American influence, UNRRA in China did not solely rely on American experience or Asian

¹²⁷Henson, *Report on the Agricultural Rehabilitation Program in China*, 12–13; Irving Barnett, 'UNRRA in China: A case study in financial assistance for economic development (with emphasis on agricultural programs)' (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1955), 146; Woodbridge, *UNRRA*, 425.

¹²⁸'Should China Use Tractors', *The China Weekly Review*, 26 February 1949, 312–14.

¹²⁹Chen Panling, 'Da shidai nei zhengli Huanghe ying shi zhi fangzhen' (Guidelines of Managing the Yellow River in a Grand Era), *Huanghe Dukou Fudi Gongcheng Ju Yuekan*, 1946, 2–4.

¹³⁰Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 23–4.

¹³¹A. C. Hou, 'Report on Problems of Organization and Operation', 20 April 1946, S-0528-0013-0005, UNARMS.

¹³²Todd, *The China that I Knew*, 75.

¹³³Todd, 'China's Yellow River', 3.

¹³⁴'Staff Operations Meeting', 24 April 1946, S-0528-0016-0002, UNARMS; the British engineer was T. Hilton Hesketh, Deputy Director of Bureau of Supply in the UNRRA China Office.

specialists. The Heifer project, which was initiated by the Brethren Service Committee to restock European farm livestock that had been depleted by the war, was expanded to China in 1946.¹³⁵ China eventually benefited from a hybrid of expertise.

On a personal level, UNRRA employees were only offered employment for one or two years, due to the temporary nature of the organization. With no previous links to China, most of the staff saw their future careers in a wider world. Having worked with the J. I. Case Tractor Company in Manila, Roy Tucker and his UNRRA colleagues drew up a development plan for duplicating UNRRA's China tractor projects in Southeast Asian states such as Philippines, Burma, Siam, and Indo China.¹³⁶ These states were deemed to require agricultural mechanization in a similar way to China. UNRRA officials hoped to demonstrate the usefulness of their China experience, not in terms of local knowledge they had acquired, but as lessons to be applied to future international projects. One of the examples drawn from the UNRRA China Programme was to establish adequate 'maintenance-workshops' staffed by trained personnel 'in the earliest stages'.¹³⁷

Through the China programme, UNRRA experts became convinced of their own usefulness in what gradually came to be called 'un(der)developed countries' by politicians and intellectuals.¹³⁸ Franklin Ray was aware that the Nationalist government 'contemplated as a matter of national policy the employment of substantial numbers of foreign specialists as advisors and instructors', in such fields as agricultural production.¹³⁹ Ray was born in a missionary family in Japan, and he became involved in Chinese affairs after the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. He served as a liaison officer of the US Lend-Lease Administration's field mission in China.¹⁴⁰ Ray thus knew well how flawed and inefficient the Nationalist bureaucracy was, while close cooperation with the Nationalists also led Ray to see their development ambition, and, more broadly, a future where international organizations would widely cooperate with national governments in pursuit of development goals. Despite his previous experience with largely government agencies, Ray had faith in the multilateral pattern of aid. He suggested that international organizations should tailor their future programmes by 'adaptation to national policy objectives'.¹⁴¹

Broadly, the debate over multilateral versus bilateral aid was heated especially in the US, when the Truman Doctrine of March 1947 showed a tendency toward bypassing UN bodies. UNRRA was regarded by the US government as almost a complete failure. During the negotiations for a post-UNRRA bilateral relief agreement, the US Ambassador to China emphasized that 'we cannot afford a repetition of UNRRA-CNRRA pattern of maladministration and misuse'.¹⁴² UNRRA officials, in contrast, were in some cases critical of bilateral approaches. Aware of extensive needs in 'undeveloped' countries, Ray insisted that one 'disadvantage' of bilateral aid was 'the necessary limitation of the scope of such programs to the categories of supplies or services reciprocally available'.¹⁴³ Ray did not make it explicit, but the logic was bilateral aid would lead to more uneven power relations between receiving and supplying countries, and the former's voices and real needs were likely to be overlooked. Experts learned from UNRRA in multiple ways, and they did not narrow development to the pursuit of economic growth.

The years following the Second World War were a moment of possibility for the world and also for UNRRA experts' later careers. Some chose to return to their homes, some worked for the US government's global missions, some were retained by the Nationalist government, while

¹³⁵Wampler and Wampler, 'Church of the Brethren China Relief', 53.

¹³⁶Roy Tucker to A. D. Faunce, 31 January 1947, in Tucker, *Tractors and Chopsticks*, 35.

¹³⁷Tucker to Faunce, 31 January 1947, in Tucker, *Tractors and Chopsticks*, 40.

¹³⁸Lorenzini, *Global Development*, 92–106.

¹³⁹Ray, *UNRRA in China*, 9.

¹⁴⁰'People', 20 October 1945, *The China Weekly Review*, 8.

¹⁴¹Ray, *UNRRA in China*, 65.

¹⁴²Stuart to Shanghai, no. 531, 12 June 1947, folder 848, box 17, entry UD 2300, Classified General Records, 1945–1949, China, Shanghai Consulate, RG 84, NARA.

¹⁴³Ray, *UNRRA in China*, 2.

the UN and its sub-bodies still attracted development-minded experts. A small cadre including Franklin Ray and Donald Faris joined the UN Korean Reconstruction Agency and other UN affiliations in Asia, with continued interests in development projects.¹⁴⁴ While Truman's so-called Point Four Speech of 1949 boosted passion among UN officials for 'the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas', some already had acquired enthusiasm from their experiences in Asia, where conflict did not cease and fundamental problems had not been solved.¹⁴⁵ The disappointment they encountered in post-war China was transformed into hope for better-designed development projects in other emerging sovereign states, especially under the auspices of the UN system. The intellectual zeal for development gained momentum in both western and non-western contexts in the immediate post-war moment, all the way to an era of development.

Conclusion

In 1949, the UN created the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance as a means to fulfil the promise of development, leading to the subsequent proliferation of UN missions of circulating expertise. With an early start in the interwar years, this institutional history was intertwined with the long-existing desire to transform China with science and machinery through state apparatuses.¹⁴⁶ At their intersection stood Chinese governments' consistent use of foreign experts as a national policy. In UNRRA, the Nationalists saw the opportunity to address the basic problem that obstructed China's approaching scientific modernity: the critical shortage of expertise. If UNRRA embodied Anglo-American hopes for intimate international cooperation to bring peace to the future world, it also carried Chinese expectations of benefiting from internationalism – not just UNRRA but international organizations that were expected to play a major role in the post-war years¹⁴⁷ – and encouraging dissemination of western knowledge and technologies.

Meanwhile, we cannot separate UNRRA's developmental endeavours from where they began, as a response to post-conflict problems. The flow of food, equipment, and expertise to the Yellow River project was, first of all, a result of the Nationalist government's strong willingness to remedy its brutal war strategies, and secondly, was boosted by multi-layered promises the landscape-changing project itself embodied: agricultural rehabilitation, mutual understanding between the civil-war parties, and the transformative power of science and machinery. 'Human power conquered nature', inscribed Nationalist General Bai Chongxi to the ceremony for the final closure.¹⁴⁸ Although this success did not help build the Nationalist state or global faith in internationalism, the emphasis given to the project brought foreign experts into central China and entailed rural modernization projects across China.

The arrival of foreign experts blurred the artificial line, drawn by the UNRRA council, between 'reconstruction' and post-war rehabilitation: 'the task of rehabilitation must not be considered as the beginning of reconstruction'.¹⁴⁹ Development did not emerge as a line of prevention but as a consensual goal among various local and international actors. Still, we need to take a closer look at the diverse ways development was perceived and approached. To both Nationalists and

¹⁴⁴Brouwer, 'Faith in Development', 195; J. Franklin Ray, Jr., Diplomat, 85', *New York Times*, 26 February 1991, 23.

¹⁴⁵Eva-Maria Muschik, 'Managing the World: The United Nations, Decolonization, and the Strange Triumph of State Sovereignty in the 1950s and 1960s', *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018): 126–7.

¹⁴⁶For technical assistance in the interwar years, also see Guy Fiti Sinclair, *To Reform the World: International Organizations and the Making of Modern States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 75–110.

¹⁴⁷Before 1949, The Nationalist government also actively engaged in internationalism outside the UN system, but it advocated for using the influence of western powers to achieve scientific modernization, see Hao Chen, 'The Dawn of Asian-African Internationalism: India, China, and the 1947 Asian Relations Conference', *Transimperial History Blog*, 2022, accessible at www.transimperialhistory.com/the-dawn-of-asian-african-internationalism/.

¹⁴⁸In Chinese, ren ding sheng tian, see *Huayuan kou helong jinian shouce*, ii.

¹⁴⁹*A Compilation of the Resolutions on Policy: First and Second Sessions of the UNRRA Council*, 27.

Communists, it was a state project. The similarity of their expectations of UNRRA experts foreshadowed early Maoist China's reliance on technical assistance from the Soviet Union and eastern European countries.¹⁵⁰ To area hands, it was a worldview, with which they spent almost all their careers fighting natural disasters in north China, beyond a single imperial or national sphere of influence. In the eyes of other foreign experts who had not worked in China before, China obviously needed to be further modernized, at least to the extent that UNRRA equipment could be put to full use. Justified by China's post-war condition, development further emerged as an ideal that was best pursued in other 'undeveloped' countries. Hence, there was no single dream of development to unite internationalism. The ambiguity of development as an umbrella concept allowed continuity in North–South connections after the end of colonization and also created a space in post-war China for multi-national experts and officials to fit themselves into a post-war programme.

To be sure, the American element was prominent in UNRRA's operations in China, which can be seen from financial contributions, staff composition, and close relations with the US Marshall Mission. However, this fact did not alter the nature of UNRRA as an international organization or its provision as multilateral aid. UNRRA widely used those area hands who developed their expertise in the non-western world. More crucially, its multi-national cadre of experts strived to demonstrate the value of internationalism for the prosperity of the new UN system, and in this way to shape the post-war world, rather than exporting an American model of modernity. UNRRA in China still ended as an exemplary multilateral aid programme in a non-western sovereign state where the government was seduced by the model of a proto-developmental state. During the civil war, the Nationalists had little room to fulfil their post-war vision, but made visible their development ambition, at least to some of the UNRRA experts who adapted themselves to the needs of what would be termed as the 'Third World' or 'the global south' in the Cold War and decolonisation dynamics.

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¹⁵⁰ Anne-Marie Brady, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1–3.