

War and State-(un)making in China: Warlord Regimes as Actors (1916-1936)

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Background

The Warlord Era was a period in the history of the Republic of China (1912-1949) when control of the country was divided among former military cliques of the Beiyang Army and other regional warlords (*junfa*) from 1916 to 1936. During this period, China underwent intensive civil wars, urban protests and repression, military coups, and political assassinations. Although many warlord-controlled provinces had substantial fiscal and policy autonomy and the warlords have incentives to increase state capacity to fund the civil wars, there were substantial cross-provincial variations in state-making outcomes in 1936.

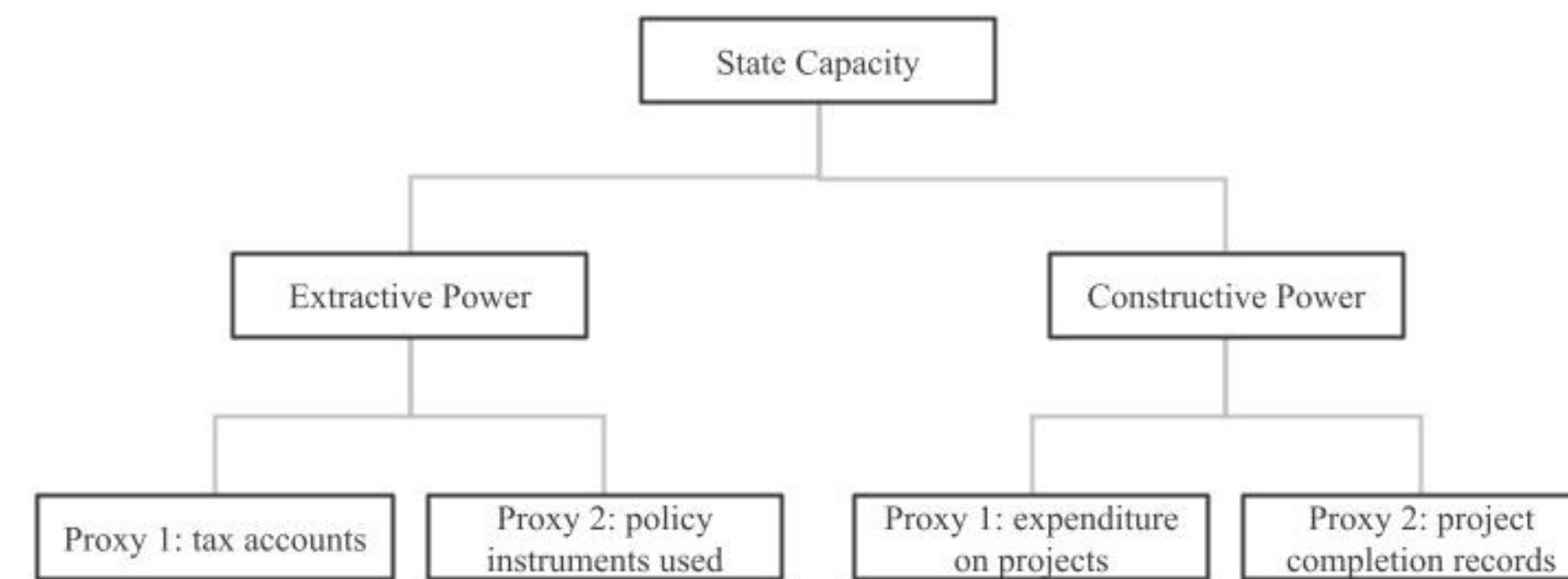
Research Question

When the initial condition, war, is present, the most parsimonious version of the bellicist account of state-making would expect the same result to happen: an increase in state capacity to extract fiscal resources. However, some warlord regimes in China invested heavily in infrastructure and other public services with the funds they extracted or acquired from foreign sources, while some did not spend the collected funds on state-building or failed to develop effective fiscal regimes altogether. Thus, to probe the puzzle with this observed phenomenon, this research asks this central question: what explains the variations among each regime's state-making outcome?

Methods

This paper proposes hypotheses in three lines: the Military Conflict Thesis, the Economic Structure Thesis, and the Regime Type Thesis. For each thesis, I use the method of process tracing to examine the historical and institutional conditions of each warlord regime and qualitatively code them into varying independent variable values. Then I establish the main dependent variable, the annual change in state capacity in a warlord regime ($\Delta\text{state_capacity}/\text{timespan}$). This variable can take four possible, categorical values: minimal model, rentier model, predatory model, or developmental model; each of these models is derived from literature on Chinese history and signifies a specific combination of values of (1) low/high extractive power and (2) low/high constructive power. Each value of $\Delta\text{state_capacity}$ corresponds to a particular path of state-making that this paper attempts to explain.

Table 1. Two Components of State Capacity.



Extractive power is the extent to which states can successfully raise tax revenues despite the possible resistance from non-state actors, and constructive power refers to the state's ability to provide public goods that are conducive to economic growth or social progress, the content of the latter depending on the ideological inclinations of state leaders.

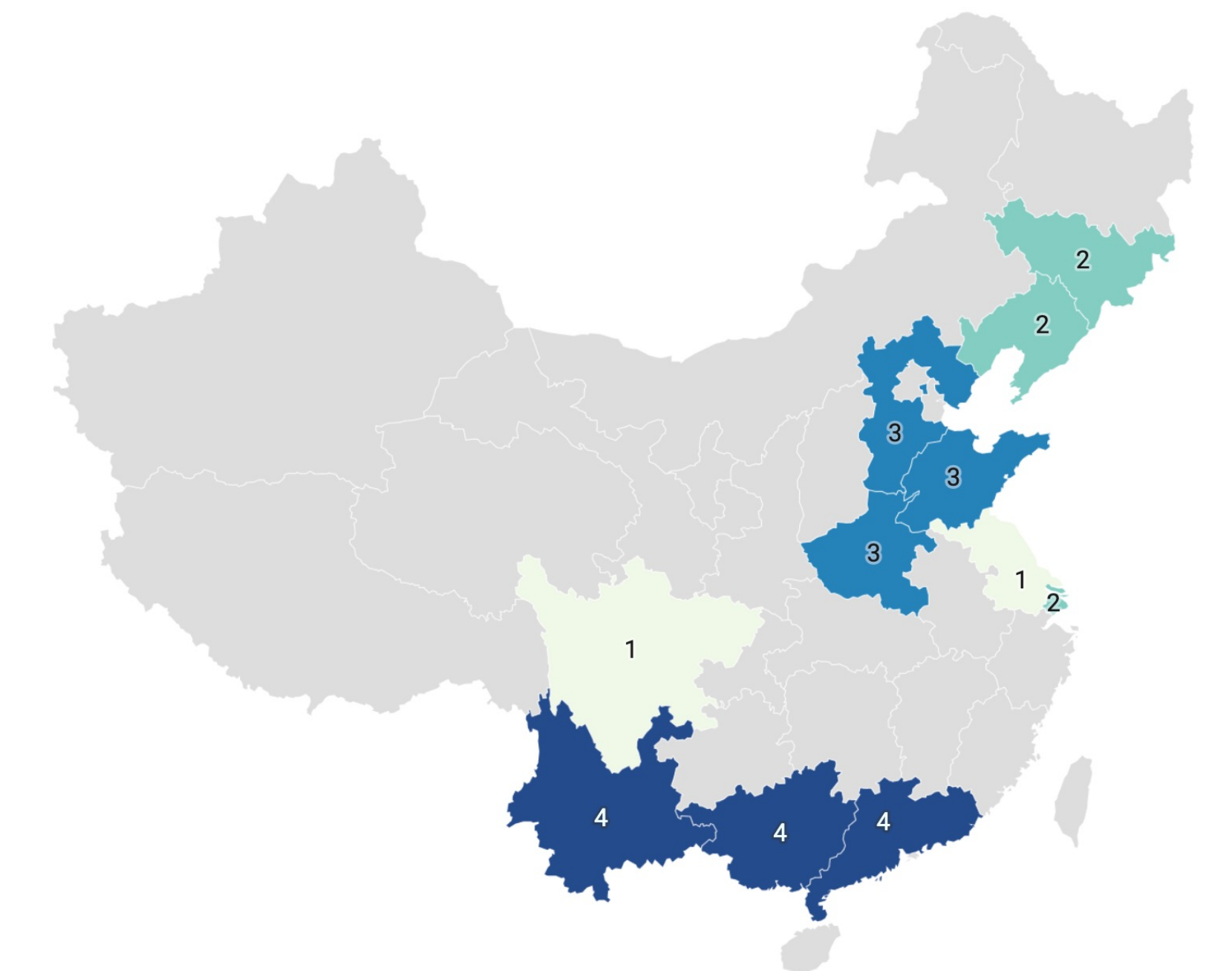
Table 2. Typology of State-Making Paths.

	Low Provision of Non-military Public Goods (DV2: $\Delta\text{constructive_power} = \text{Low}$)	High Provision of Non-military Public Goods (DV2: $\Delta\text{constructive_power} = \text{High}$)
High Level of Resource Extraction (DV1: $\Delta\text{extractive_power} = \text{High}$)	3. Predatory Model (DV: $\Delta\text{state_capacity} = 3$)	4. Developmental Model (DV: $\Delta\text{state_capacity} = 4$)
Low Level of Resource Extraction (DV1: $\Delta\text{extractive_power} = \text{Low}$)	1. Minimal Model (DV: $\Delta\text{state_capacity} = 1$)	2. Rentier Model (DV: $\Delta\text{state_capacity} = 2$)

Each box refers to a Type of change in state capacity, and therefore state-making path.

Paths of State Making in Selected Provinces

The number refers to the typology, eg. 1 refers to Type 1: Minimal Model.



Conclusions

- War stimulates state-making, but too much war makes state unable to invest in non-military sectors. If inter-provincial warfare is low, both extraction and provision will be low, and the path of state-making is Type 1: Minimal Model; if inter-provincial warfare is moderate, extraction will be high and provision will be high, and the path of state-making is Type 4: Developmental Model; and if inter-provincial warfare is high, extraction will be high while provision will be low, and the path of state-making is Type 3: Predatory Model.
- Urbanization, which was at the nexus of changes in economic structure, had a positive effect on centralized fiscal capacity. In provinces with sizable industrial and commercial sectors, the warlord regimes tend to develop high extractive and constructive powers, and thus results in Type 4: Developmental Model.
- The ideology of a warlord matters. If a warlord controlling a province has a set of coherent ideologies that is either liberal or leftist, the regime will have high extractive power and constructive power, and thus fit into Type 4: Developmental Model; if a warlord has close ties to the external great powers, the regime will end up in Type 2: Rentier Model.