
[FIGURE] [Insert map 2: if prologue ends on recto, place on verso facing first page of ch. 1; if prologue ends on verso, place on 3rd page of ch. 3]

ONE

WUHAN BEFORE THE WAR

LINKED ONLY BY FERRY CROSSINGS over hundreds of yards of treacherous river, each of Wuhan's three cities—Wuchang, Hanyang, and Hankou—had a distinct identity and history. The relationship between the communities was often tense, aggravated perhaps by the infamously bad weather—hot and steamy in the summer, cold and clammy in the winter. Yet the metropolis we now call Wuhan dominated the economic and political life of the central Yangzi River region for well over a millennium.

Twentieth-century Wuhan's economic center was the bustling port of Hankou, whose pursuit of Western-style commercial and cultural modernity rose to a new level after it became a railroad terminus early in the century. Across the Yangzi River, Wuchang, while clinging to the urban morphology of the traditional administrative capital, led the search for political identity: in 1911–12, 1927, and 1938 it thrust Wuhan onto the center stage of national politics. The tension between the crass commercial modernity of Hankou and the fervent political posturing of Wuchang gave twentieth-century Wuhan a split personality that is still evident today in differences in local dialect, culture, and architecture. Caught in the middle was a smaller, working-class third city, the down-to-earth industrial center of Hanyang.

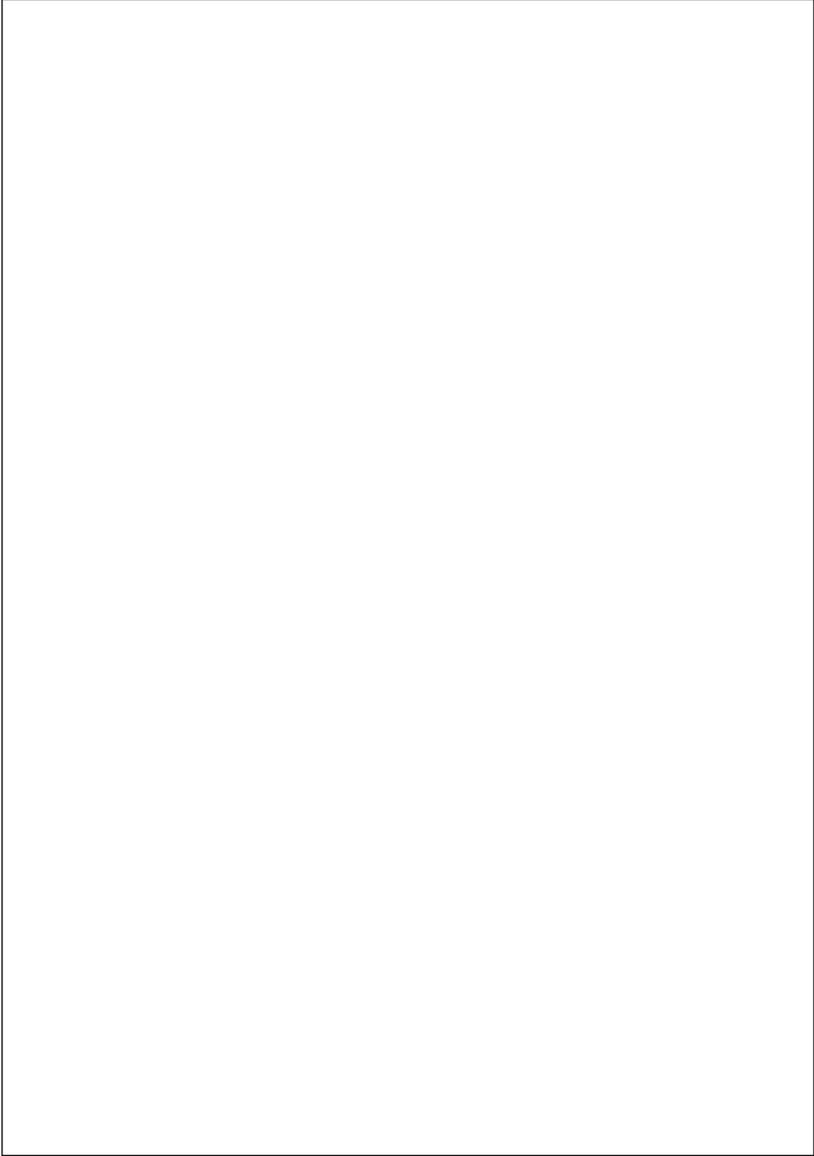
Thus, taken as a whole, the urban sprawl of Wuhan during the Republican period was amorphous, unplanned, and difficult to define. Spatially and administratively, it had no center: no unified police force, school system, waterworks, fire department, or city administration. The major

force that connected these communities also pushed them apart on occasion: the unpredictability of the two fast-moving, giant river systems (Yangzi and Han) and their wildly fluctuating water levels. The cities were frequently cut off from one another by periodic flooding or political upheaval. Even under the best of conditions, the distance to be covered against the swirling pull of the current down- or upstream made ferry crossings seem hazardous to the newcomer. Not until 1957, with the construction of bridges linking the three cities of Hankou, Hanyang, and Wuchang, did Wuhan become the more integrated municipality it is today.

Another distinguishing feature of Wuhan's modern history was the recurrent physical destruction and rebuilding that its inhabitants came to expect. The trading center of Hankou, in particular, was repeatedly laid waste by war after the middle of the nineteenth century. It was razed and seized three times by Taiping rebels in the 1850s, burned to the ground by Qing troops in 1911, badly damaged by war and revolution in 1926–27, and pummeled by Japanese bombing raids in 1938 and U.S. B-29 raids in 1944. Wuchang was spared until the 1920s and 1930s, when the city's new commercial and industrial districts were badly damaged: first by rioting warlord troops in 1921, then by fighting in 1926–27, and finally by wartime bombing raids. Hanyang suffered a similar fate. Yet out of the ashes of war, the Wuhan cities quickly rebuilt and reemerged more confident, prosperous, and optimistic about becoming the most progressive of China's interior cities.

THE INVENTION OF MODERN WUHAN

Modern Wuhan's identity grew out of a deeply rooted but divided history that began with the political centrality of Wuchang. Since at least the Han dynasty, Wuchang had been strategically important because of its location at the Yangzi's juncture with the Han River. Wuchang was the capital of Hubei Province, one of China's richest and most populous provinces, and since the Ming period, its scholar-officials had overseen the entire Huguang region (Hubei and Hunan). The Huguang governor-general was arguably the third most important provincial official in the Qing empire (the first being the Zhihli governor-general, who oversaw the region around Beijing). Political importance made Wuchang an intellectual and educational center as well, the place where student candidates prepared for and took the civil service examinations. Laid out as an administrative city on the southern bank of the Yangzi, its towering walls projected political power and protected the city from flooding. By



MAP 2. WUHAN, CA. 1927. BASED ON MAPS IN SU YUNFENG (1981), PI MINGXIU (1993), AND *SHINA SHOBETSU ZENSHI* (1917-20). REPRODUCED FROM MACKINNON, "WUHAN'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY" (2000), WITH PERMISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS.

function and design, it fit the traditional Chinese urban model in which the role of commerce was secondary.

Across from Wuchang, at the northwest juncture of the Han and Yangzi rivers, lay Hanyang. Although also walled and almost as old as Wuchang, Hanyang remained a much smaller, sleepy county seat throughout the nineteenth century. During the Qing period, Hanyang's new sister, Hankou, to the northeast across the Han, was the primary focus of growth, transforming itself from a fishing village into the commercial hub of central China. When Hankou was razed by Taiping troops in the 1850s, it had a population larger than Wuchang's: half a million residents sprawled along the banks of the Han and Yangzi. In 1862, though nearly deserted and in ruins, Hankou was declared a treaty port, and it soon became a hub of the lucrative international tea trade. Backed by rich tea merchants, the port quickly recovered as the primary exchange center for domestic and foreign trade in the central Yangzi region. Hankou was large and unruly again by the end of the century, and its social and economic life was almost purely commercial. Not directly governed from Wuchang, it stood on the periphery of the administrative orbit of neighboring Hanyang, the county seat across the Han River with a population of only twenty thousand inhabitants. By the 1890s the tricity region's population was over a million, with the majority split between Hankou and Wuchang.

Thus, in Chinese urban history, Hankou's blatant commercial culture was unorthodox, which makes it of interest to modern scholars in search of a budding civil society or sprouts of capitalism.¹ Needless to say, Hankou and Wuchang did not always get along. Twice, in 1855 and 1911, Wuchang's officials refused to commit troops to Hankou's defense, and the city was burned to the ground as a result. But like their European counterparts in London, Amsterdam, and Paris, Hankou's burghers turned the devastation of their city into an opportunity for growth and renewal.

The clash of cultures between Hankou and Wuchang and the story of how necessity brought the two cities together at the turn of the century can best be told through the careers of two leading citizens: Wuchang's late Qing scholar-reformer Zhang Zhidong and Hankou's entrepreneur and real estate developer Liu Xinsheng. Their different visions ran parallel and then merged around railway-construction projects during the first decade of the twentieth century.

The scholar-official Zhang Zhidong was appointed Huguang governor-general in 1893. From his palatial *yamen* at Wuchang, he wielded direct political authority over three provinces and had influence through-

out central China as the highest-ranking official in the region (including Shanghai). By the time of his appointment, Zhang Zhidong's Self-Strengthening reform agenda was a well-known national model.² His career had followed the classic bureaucratic pattern, beginning with winning the top *jinsi* degree and drafting a series of important memorials to the emperor (for action by the Empress Dowager Cixi) on the need for unprecedented economic, educational, and military institutional reform. From Wuchang he was able to put into practice much of what he preached. His first action in 1893 was to establish the Wuchang Textile Bureau. A series of reform measures followed, including the creation of a large state-sponsored steel and munitions complex at Hanyang and the establishment of new schools at Wuchang that taught Western scientific subjects. The state encouraged and financed study abroad under certain circumstances (largely for military training). The government hired German advisers to train and help equip a modern Self-Strengthening Army and run the munitions factory at Hanyang. It encouraged joint stock-trading companies and initiated explorations into the financing and construction of railroads.³

Also in the 1890s, Wuchang and Hankou began to forge a symbiotic relationship in pursuit of economic growth. Domestic and foreign trade at Hankou jumped up because of the rapid expansion of steamship traffic up the Yangzi. The foreign-concession area that had been designated in the 1860s suddenly filled out, with newly established German, Russian, French, and Japanese zones bustling with activity after 1895 (chiefly because the Treaty of Shimonoseki granted foreigners the right to open factories in treaty ports). Customs receipts indicate a tripling of foreign trade between 1890 and 1910, to 135 million taels a year.⁴ The strategic importance of Hankou in domestic commodity trade increased in 1905 with the completion of one of Zhang Zhidong's pet projects, the Beijing-Hankou railway, China's first north-south line. At the same time, the existing heavy-industry complex at Hanyang prospered. And across the river in Zhang Zhidong's bailiwick at Wuchang, light industry (textile factories in particular) appeared after the inauguration of that city's first commercial zone. Thus Zhang Zhidong's bureaucratic stewardship of reforms in Wuchang encouraged the rise of an environment genial to foreign trade at Hankou, which then created opportunities for aggressive Chinese entrepreneurs. One of the most successful was Liu Xinsheng, who within two decades rose from rags to riches as comprador, merchant baron, and finally real estate developer.

Liu Xinsheng's career began simply and unpleasantly in the hide mar-

kets of Hankou. In addition to possessing sound entrepreneurial instincts, he had good timing or excellent luck. For reasons that remain obscure, in the 1880s, just when foreign trade began to expand rapidly in the treaty-port zones of Hankou, young Liu left the hide trade, converted to Christianity, learned French, and became a comprador for a leading French trading company. He quickly made a fortune in commissions by arranging deals for the French. By the turn of the century he was a local tycoon, branching out into real estate and forming partnerships with scions of Hankou's old trading elite: families who had enjoyed national renown since the eighteenth century for their civic virtue, as founders of charitable social welfare societies, or *cishan hui*.

The most important of Liu's allies was Cai Fuqing, the patriarch of the highly respected Cai clan, whose commercial interests in Hankou dated back to the sixteenth century. Together with other leading tea, silk, tung oil, and hide merchants, in the early 1900s Liu and Cai drew up plans for expanding infrastructure and constructing new buildings, banking centers, and hospitals in the Hankou metropolitan area. Two large structures had particular symbolic value. The first was the Chinese-managed Huasheng racetrack in Hankou, built to rival the British track in the foreign-concession area. The second, completed in 1909, was a six-story Western-style water tower near the Bund. These structures competed for attention with the heavily colonnaded Western and Japanese banks as well as with the large Victorian-looking customs house in the foreign-concession area to the north of the Chinese city. Finally, in concert with Zhang Zhidong, Liu and Cai, with several gentry-merchant friends, began to plan a southern extension of the Beijing-Hankou railway, to run from Wuchang to Canton.⁵

Thus by 1911 Hankou had risen from the ashes of the Taiping debacle to become a major domestic trade center and treaty port. Then, on October 10, 1911, fighting broke out in the tricity area between Qing-dynasty units and mutineers as self-proclaimed republican rebel forces. Although the mutiny began with the capture of Wuchang, the city and its scholar-bureaucrats managed to remain safe and unscathed behind its high walls by siding with the "revolution." The destructive violence occurred elsewhere. Before a cease-fire was negotiated, Hanyang became a war zone, and in late October Hankou was burned to the ground by Qing troops advancing down the railway from the north. Hankou reportedly burned for four days and four nights. The only large structures left standing in the smoldering ruins outside the foreign-concession areas were the racetrack and the water tower. Yet within a few months, in a

very public endorsement of the new Republic of China, the chamber of commerce and merchant associations of Hankou, led by the Cai clan and Liu Xinsheng, inaugurated a campaign to raise money for an ambitious reconstruction plan.

Their efforts paid off almost immediately, and between 1912 and 1927 Wuhan experienced a golden age of growth and prosperity. Fed by an international environment that benefited Chinese business interests during World War I, foreign trade accelerated well into the 1920s, and the domestic commercial economy of Wuhan recovered and reached new heights. The introduction of sophisticated large-scale processing and manufacturing facilities for overseas markets was on the rise. The enterprises at Hanyang that Zhang Zhidong had started—the Hanyeping Iron and Steel Works, the brick factory, and the wire and nail factory—as well as the ceramic-tile works at Wuchang, moved from official supervision (*guandu shangban*) to merchant control. Steam-powered manufacturing processes (in cotton-textile mills, wheat-flour mills, rice mills, cigarette factories, tea-processing plants, oil presses, and cotton-packing plants) became widespread after 1911. One measure of Wuhan's competitiveness was its success in driving foreign yarn and cloth products out of the middle Yangzi market. In 1915 Wuhan had more than 300 privately owned cotton-weaving mills in Wuhan that collectively employed nearly twelve thousand workers.⁶ Scholars note that by the late 1920s 13,017 manufacturing and commercial establishments were operating in the Wuhan area, of which 236 reportedly were mechanized. This number included 6 cotton mills (5 Chinese owned, 1 Japanese owned), which together employed more than twenty thousand workers.⁷ In heavy industry, by 1922 the new Yangzi Ironworks at Hanyang was the largest operation of its kind in central China outside of Shanghai. Finally, Hankou had become a major financial center, with a stock market and banking sector important enough by the 1920s to influence Shanghai and Tianjin. In 1924 a feature article in the important Shanghai journal *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany) described Wuhan as a successful example of how a strong merchant-driven effort could quickly modernize economic and civic life.⁸

Not surprisingly, such rapid growth concentrated money and power in the hands of a small group of Hankou businessmen, led by Liu Xinsheng, the richest and most powerful of the city's merchant barons. As a real estate mogul, Liu now played an even greater role in directing the physical growth of Hankou's Chinese city. Under his auspices, Hankou acquired a new look, with a string of buildings going up in the heart of

the old commercial district. Streets were rerouted, thoroughfares widened, and plans laid out for a grid-patterned district west of the railway line. East of the railway line, around Jiangnan Road on the border of the foreign-concession area, the New Market complex was erected and became the heart of the Chinese city. Indeed, most of the major buildings of republican Hankou, Wuchang, and Hanyang were built between 1912 and 1927. Often designed by foreign architects from Shanghai, they produced a decidedly Western look, particularly in downtown Hankou.

Wuchang across the river saw less dramatic change until 1918, when the completion of the Wuchang-Changsha railway line forced the dismantling of the eastern wall and a reshaping of the downtown area as well as expansion of the business district to the east of the old wall. The necessary demolition was aided by the fighting in the city, which was brief but very destructive, after the mutiny of warlord Wang Zhanyuan's troops in June 1921. This event marked the first time Wuchang experienced serious war damage; but paradoxically it provided the opportunity to reshape the city around the new railway terminus. Thus, by the early 1920s, the north-south railway connections on either side of the river were forcing economic integration. On the surface at least, Wuhan as a whole seemed to be acquiring a modern industrial façade comparable to that of Tianjin and even Shanghai.⁹ The foreign press noticed and began to call Wuhan "the Chicago of China."¹⁰

Also during the 1920s the civic and cultural life of Wuhan reached a kind of apex, which was most evident with the blossoming of a popular local press. Even before the 1911 revolution, Wuhan's press had been pioneering and controversial. Fiery anti-Qing-dynasty publications like the *Jiangnan ribao* put out by students living in Japan were influential. The number of publications exploded during the 1911–12 revolution, and a second burst followed in 1927.¹¹ Thus, throughout the Republican period, Wuhan was on a par with Tianjin, and behind only Shanghai and Beijing, in the quality and quantity of its newspapers and periodicals.

The political upheaval that produced the explosion of new publications in 1927 also brought Wuhan's "golden age" to a sudden end. In October 1926, after the Guomindang's Northern Expedition reached the Yangzi valley, the new Republican government chose Wuhan as its provisional capital. Within a few months, the first integrated municipal government for Wuhan as a whole had taken shape, with a full panoply of municipal departments. The new regime, initially dominated by Wang Jingwei and others on the Guomindang left, took a strong anti-imperialist stand under the charismatic foreign minister Eugene Chen and built

popular support around Wuhan's well-organized labor and student movements. One of the few Wuhan natives in the government at a high level was Dong Biwu, who received a ministerial appointment. Dong was a middle-school teacher who turned political activist in the 1911 revolution and then after 1919 participated in the May Fourth Movement, an iconoclastic intellectual and cultural revolution that shook China's major metropolitan areas. Dong was present at the first meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in 1921, and founded the Hubei branch in 1923. In 1924 he was invited to Canton to join the reorganized United Front Guomindang party, led at the time by Sun Yatsen and later by Chiang Kaishek. Dong remained the Guomindang's favorite Communist into the 1940s. Affable and always smiling, he was a popular local figure with strong Republican credentials and connections within the Nationalist Party stretching back to the 1911 revolution.¹²

The 1927 Wuhan revolutionary government's most notable success was the recovery of Chinese sovereignty over the British Concession zone in Hankou.¹³ Nevertheless, it received only weak support from the Hankou merchants, who especially resented the new municipal government centered in Wuchang and its interference in Hankou affairs. More important, in the late spring of 1927, Chiang Kaishek and then Wang Jingwei moved decisively to the right, first by seizing power and purging Communists in Shanghai and Canton and then in the fall by sending troops to attack the government at Wuhan itself.¹⁴ The fighting seriously damaged parts of Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang. By the end of 1927 the Wuhan government had collapsed and the tricity had fallen under the heavy-handed control of Guangxi warlords. The resulting state repression of the local press, as well as of student and labor communities, was severe. The new municipal government that had coordinated administration of the three cities was dismantled (to the relief of the Hankou tycoon Liu Xinsheng and others). Wuhan's most visible Communist, Dong Biwu, had to flee for his life, first into exile in Japan and then to Moscow.

From late 1929 to December 1937 Wuhan was under the tight control of the CC (or Chen brothers) Clique of Chiang Kaishek's Nanjing government. To a degree, the heavy-handed tactics of the CC Clique in competing with the Political Study Clique for dominance of local government had a negative effect on the city's domestic economy, but more fundamental challenges came from external economic developments. By 1932 a combination of factors—including two years of devastating floods, environmental degradation, poor provincial leadership, the global eco-

conomic crisis, and protectionist trade policies—produced a deep depression in the countryside around Wuhan.¹⁵

Ironically, the floods of 1931 and 1935 that devastated the surrounding countryside and impoverished the populace benefited the Hankou merchants and the city's economy. During high-water periods, foreign freighters of eight to ten thousand tons found they could berth at Hankou, thus circumventing transshipment of their cargoes at Shanghai. The result was an upsurge in foreign trade and expansion of the foreign community to four thousand souls, about half of whom were Japanese commodity traders. And with foreign businessmen came more Western missionaries with philanthropic projects. The leader in organizing welfare programs, hospitals, and new schools was the Episcopalian bishop Logan Roots. By 1938 the YMCA and YWCA were well entrenched as social-service providers in Hankou and to lesser degree, in Wuchang and Hanyang. The enlarged foreign presence created a more cosmopolitan atmosphere around the Bund, but Wuhan was hardly turning into Tianjin or Shanghai. The foreign community remained small and brazenly fun loving. As an old Shanghai "China hand," *New York Times* correspondent Hallet Abend, quipped, "Hankow had the worst foreign hotels of any city of its size in the Far East, but boasted the largest and one of the finest country and race clubs in all of China."¹⁶

Overall, the urban economy of the tricity complex stagnated in the 1930s, but it did not crash because the tricity had a strategic position as the international commodity trade and industrial processing center for the entire middle Yangzi region. The rich merchants who had to evacuate their mansions and paddle up and down Jiangnan Avenue during the 1931 and 1935 floods continued to prosper and live comfortably. Still, the metropolitan area was swollen with refugees. Hundreds of thousands of desperately poor peasants flooded into Wuhan, living in shantytowns along its outskirts. The total urban population soon exceeded two million (with two-thirds afloat in Hankou). In a pattern similar to that in Shanghai and other large cities, social control under such circumstances largely fell into the hands of a gangster king with triad origins. In the tricity complex, the person filling this role was Yang Qingshan, who cut lucrative deals with Nationalist officials in Wuchang, notably Hubei Province chief General He Chengjun, a Wuhan native and operative for the conservative CC Clique.¹⁷

Yang Qingshan operated a large network of thugs who ran rackets and intelligence operations out of hundreds of Wuhan teahouses. Although illiterate and a product of the local secret-society underworld, Yang was

well connected and widely feared. In 1934 when Yang's mother died, General He Chengjun attended the funeral in person, and Chiang Kaishek sent condolences.¹⁸ In the mid-1930s, when the simple technique for controlling demonstrations—preventing students from using public and private ferries to cross the Yangzi from Wuchang to Hankou—was not effective, Yang led a series of violent crackdowns on anti-Japanese demonstrations in both cities. Then in the spring of 1936 he engineered a shocking assassination—in broad daylight on the streets of Wuchang—of the highest local official belonging to the Political Study Clique, Yang Yongtai.¹⁹ And finally, Yang Qingshan's violent tactics intimidated and drastically shrank the size of Wuhan's historically lively and mostly non-communist press. In one study published in 1943, the author, himself a journalist, charted the age at death of twenty-six Wuhan colleagues he had known personally: three had died in their fifties, seven in their forties, and the rest in their thirties and twenties—usually violently.²⁰

In dealing with unruly students, however, the heavy hand of Yang Qingshan was a last resort. Wuchang had been a proud center of educational reform since the time of Zhang Zhidong. In the 1920s its three universities had thrived because of strong support from local elites and a feeder system of over thirty middle schools. Students had provided shock troops to the revolution of 1927. And later, in Wuhan as elsewhere after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the attack on Shanghai in 1932, containing students' protests against corruption and unrest about the Chiang government's reluctance to go to war was a big problem. The government's answer was bold and reform minded: restructure the atmosphere on campus—literally—by rebuilding university life from the ground up. In 1930 the Nanjing government closed two of the three Wuchang universities (the third, a missionary-run university, was permitted to continue under new leadership) and began building in their place a new flagship institution under strong central government control.

The establishment of Wuhan University was an impressive achievement and is important to our story because its campus became the wartime seat of government in 1938. Carefully planned at the national level by a blue-ribbon commission and constructed by a team of Chinese architects led by the American F. H. Kales, the resulting complex combined Chinese and Western architectural and landscaping styles. Completed in 1932, the university's gardenlike campus layout and imposing "Chinese renaissance" structures sat on a hilly suburban site overlooking Wuchang to the west and Donghu Lake to the north.²¹ The new university's president, Wuhan native Wang Shijie, had been a leading academic at Beijing

University in the 1920s and had served as Chiang Kaishek's foreign minister in the early 1930s. To fill key posts in the university, as much as possible Wang conducted nationwide searches to recruit senior faculty with wide visibility and pro-Guomindang political credentials. Thus the university's creation had a clear political purpose: as a flagship institution under firm central-government leadership, it was to set a national example of how to control and rechannel student activism.²²

How effective this strategy was is open to question. Wuchang remained the seat of government while being home to a large and combustible student-intellectual community that existed quite apart from the commercial life in Hankou or the workers' quarters in Hanyang. In 1935 major student demonstrations against the government broke out at both universities and moved to the streets of Hankou in sympathy with the December 9 protests against Japanese aggression that were then taking place in Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an and elsewhere. New rounds of student arrests and assassinations of dissident intellectuals followed.²³

By December 7, 1936—at the time of the kidnapping of Chiang Kaishek during the Xi'an incident—Wuhan was in a strange kind of limbo. Firmly under the thumb of Nanjing, its political and cultural life was suffocating and heavily censored. The exception was student activism, which continued on Wuchang campuses. The government permitted demonstrations in favor of movement toward a United Front and war with the Japanese after Chiang Kaishek's release from Xi'an and return to Nanjing on December 25. The domestic commercial economy was in the doldrums because of depressed conditions in the surrounding countryside. The streets of Hankou were flooded with impoverished peasants looking for work, while tycoons like Liu Xinsheng, who continued to profit handsomely from international trade at the port of Hankou, rode around in motorcars.

Thus, on July 7, 1937, when war broke out at Marco Polo Bridge and the Japanese occupied Beijing by the end of the month, Wuhan seemed on the surface largely unprepared for the possibility that it might be thrust into the center of the conflict. Certainly the Japanese attack on Shanghai in August and its fall by November came much more quickly than expected. But at least as early as 1933 (as I discuss in the next chapter), the Nanjing government had begun to plan for the defense of the Yangzi valley, with Wuhan as the strategic, pivotal point of defense. In other words, as war clouds gathered over China after the fall of Manchuria in 1931 and the attack on Shanghai in 1932, the defense of Wuhan became

the centerpiece of an emerging strategy: to fight a prolonged war of attrition (*chijiu zhan*) against the Japanese.

September 1937 brought several overt signs that major changes were coming. High Guomindang apparatchiks, notably Vice President Wang Jingwei and Minister of Education Chen Lifu (a CC Clique leader), appeared in Wuhan on inspection visits. Military defense engineers and work teams arrived to initiate planning for the building of massive fortifications downriver at Madang and Tianjiazhen, with construction starting in December. And finally, from their capital at Yan'an, the Communist leaders sent Dong Biwu back to Wuhan, where he established a headquarters for the party in a dilapidated old building in the French Concession zone of Hankou.²⁴

The event that government leaders and the local population were not prepared for was the sudden influx of a million refugees after the capture and terrible massacre of civilians at Nanjing in December 1937. The Wuhan regional metropolis was already hard pressed to absorb the hundreds of thousands of peasant families whose livelihood had been swept away by the great floods of 1931 and 1935. Wuhan and its refugee population were living under the threat of a terrible siege. From the north and east, Japanese armored units were storming south down the north-south railway system, intent on joining the inland forces that were beginning to work their way west up the Yangzi from Nanjing. The factor that saved Wuhan for ten months was the serious resistance the Japanese encountered from reorganized units of the Chinese army, which numbered more than one million soldiers. So to comprehend the predicament of the refugees and the new sense of community that they built, we must first understand the changing military circumstances surrounding them, especially how key military figures on the Chinese side assumed political leadership roles that made possible the remarkable "Wuhan spring" of 1938.