

Analysis on the Development of the History of Chongqing in the Perspective of Western Region of China

SHU Ying^{[a],*}

^[a]Doctoral Candidate, Senior Engineer, Institute of Historic Geology, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 24 March 2015; accepted 19 May 2015
Published online 26 June 2015

Abstract

In the old times, the city of Chongqing has been benefiting in a great deal from the ancient northwest region, which has laid the material and resource basis for Chongqing to develop and prosper, depending on the economic belt of Yangtze River Basin, since modern times, and thus making Chongqing a central city influencing the balance development of social economy and the political stability in the strategic layout of the country. And with the Development of West China and the deployment of “One Belt and One Road”, Chongqing has been playing a more important role in connecting the east and west region, supporting the economy of mid-lower reaches of Yangtze River and affecting the central west region, meanwhile, Chongqing is called upon to repay to the economic development of the west region, and to take the historical mission in cultural guiding, political stability, etc..

Key words: West region; Chongqing; History; Development

Shu, Y. (2015). Analysis on the Development of the History of Chongqing in the Perspective of Western region of China. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 6(3), 73-78. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/7203> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7203>

INTRODUCTION

Yangtze River Basin and the western region are different in terms of both environmental and social development conditions, and such differences in geographical

environment, social economy and historical culture have made the city groups in those areas develop in various ways throughout history. Those cities' specific expansion, spatial arrangement as well as their abstract economic status, social division and educational level is all formed in their very own geographical environment, which eventually leads to the current unbalanced development of the east and west region. Chongqing, located in the joint area of the Yangtze River Basin and the western region, has been affected by factors from both sides in its course of development. Surrounded by mountains and rivers, Chongqing can be more evocatively described as the cultural product of the mountain environment of the western region as well as the water environment of the Yangtze River Basin. Those two distinct natural environmental conditions bring about totally different social environmental conditions and influences, which are the key reason leading the development of the city group in the west and east region and the major factor which have caused the great changes of Chongqing in history.

Chongqing is a megacity developing in the mountains and rivers of the Yangtze River Basin and the western region. In ancient times, the prosperous northwestern region of China has managed the area of Chongqing for a long time, which promotes it a head start in its development in the multi-cultural background of the southwest region, and in the modern times, the thriving economic belt of the Yangtze River Basin has incorporated Chongqing in its open economic system, changing it from a border city of the empire to the core of upper reaches of Yangtze River and a central city in the west region. At present, Chongqing is playing an important role in connecting the east and west region, supporting the economy of mid-lower reaches of Yangtze River and affecting the central west region, and is a central city influencing the balance development of social economy and the political stability in the strategic layout of the country. And as Chongqing keeps developing itself and

providing strong resource support to the southeast coastal area using the platform of the Yangtze River economic belt, its historical mission of repaying to the west regional economy, leading the culture and supporting political stability has become the developmental theme of the present and the future.

1. THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY GROUPS IN THE WEST REGION.

West China, geographically, is the west area to the Qinling Mountains and the Yellow River; while economically, it means the underdeveloped and even backward area in the southwest and the northwest region, where, except for few comprehensive big cities in the Central Shaanxi Plain and Sichuan Basin like Chengdu, Chongqing and Xi'an, both economic and educational level in most western China area are greatly inferior to the east region of China. However, in the early civilizations in the very beginning of Chinese history, the western region was the cradle for Chinese culture, the political and cultural center from Xia-Shang-Zhou period to Sui and Tang period. In term of material basis, the western region is the where the Land of Abundance was, as the saying goes, the field of the Central Shaanxi Plain "was a third of all the lands with less than a third of the population, while the resource was about two thirds of the total", and Chengdu in the southwest was a place where "the water and the droughts were all under control, people there didn't even know what famine was" (Jin-Changqu, 2006). Even the currently average Longyou area was, in the ancient time, prosperous as "people there live in peace with abundant resources"¹. While in terms of social civilization, the western region has in the past thousands of years nurtured great nations and cultures, it's the great corridor of the cultural migration of the ethnic groups in the ancient southwest and northeast region, and other than the splendid civilization of the Han people, there are also exchange and integration of several ethnic groups.

For thousands of years, in the unique natural environment of the west region, several city groups with regional characteristics, such as the Central Shaanxi plain city group, the Hohhot-Baotou-Ordos city group, the Central Yunnan city group, the Central Guizhou city group, the Lanzhou city group, the Yinchuan city group, the Lhasa city group, the north slope of Tianshan Mountains city group and the Nan-Bei-Qin-Fang city group, all of which are equipped with distinct conditions in a relatively closed environment. Judging from the natural land forms only, these city groups can be clearly

divided into basin city groups, hill city groups, prairie city groups, plateau city groups, etc.. Compared with other city groups, these in the west region, other than their natural environmental features, are more complicated and diverse than those in the Yangtze River Basin in terms of culture, custom and economy. The Yangtze River Basin city groups are economic belt connected by the water and shipping, and members in the upper, middle and lower reaches have a relatively clear division of labor, while the interaction between members in most of the western cities groups are quite different.

The declining of the social, political, economic and cultural status of the western region failed from the prosperous ancient time resulting in natural environmental causes, and furthermore, deeper social causes.

In terms of natural environment, most areas of the western region are in arid or semi-arid climate zone, and the main land form is mountainous. Huge mountain ranges like the Altai Mountains, Tianshan Mountains, Kunlun Mountains, Qilian Mountain, Himalayas, Yinshan Mountains and Qinling Mountains that run east-west are widely spread in the west region, leaving the land with countless ravines, which make the traffic blocked and the land resource scarce. In those more moist years with more plentiful water resource, the early agricultural economy can somehow develop with advantage; however, with the worsening of natural conditions and the changes of the cold and drought, the advantage of traditional agricultural and animal husbandry is gone, and the economic advantages of the western region gradually fade away due to the changes in natural conditions.

Nonetheless, social factors, as an important reason accounting for the declining of the west region, have a greater influence. Anshi's Rebellion in Tang Dynasty is the ending point of this dynasty's thriving as well as the starting point of the west region's declining. The seven-year-long rebellion has caused great damage to the society and economy of the northwest region, with the fact that the productivity was already in a slump and the state of development was not as sound, the new dynasty can never remedy the western region to its previous state even the war has ended. After the establishment of the Song Dynasty, the political and economic center was inevitably moving southeast, where there were warm and wet lands for agriculture and convenient water transport for export and import. And it is worth extra mentioning that the convenient canal, water transport and overseas shipping have opened up a new door of social economic development, therefore, the rising southeast region took over the central position in social economy while the western region kept lagging behind because of the relatively lower productivity level.

Certainly, previous dynasties and central governments have all taken measures to develop the western region politically and economically, and some achievements have been made. Although most areas of the west

¹ *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government (volume 216)*.

region, except for the Central Shaanxi Plain, have long been called the “original land”, in Han, Tang, Ming and Qing dynasty, the central governments have adopted several measures like the comfort measures, Chieftain system and bureaucratization of native officers to manage the southwest and northwest region, and, through the permeation and combination of the ethnic regional organization and the central government, to form a joint force that can strengthen the central government’s management and promote the combination and development of the cities in the Central Plains and the border area of the west region. And as the facts have shown, some areas that communicated more with the cities in the Central Plains and had a better economic and cultural intercommunity were better developed in productivity, examples are: in the Warring States period and Qin dynasty, the digging of Ling Canal, the connecting the South of the Five Ridges, and the establishing of Hainan County, Guilin County, Xiang County, etc., have promoted in great deal the agricultural economy in the southern region; in the Han Dynasty, the exploiting of the southwest, opening of the Baoxie Road, and Zhang Qian’s diplomatic mission to the western region and hence the opening of the “Silk Road” have activated the commercial exchanges in the southwest and northwest area and prospered the regional economy, which lasted for quite a long time; in the Tang Dynasty, Hetao and Hexi area were established, a complete water conservancy system was built, and the northwest area has provided 90% of the food using only 10% of the lands, which made it the main source of the national grain depot; while in the Ming Dynasty, there was a boom of garrison reclamation, which was further reinforced in the Qing Dynasty and has had a great effect on developing Xinjiang, Tibet and the southwest area, in the Hexi area, “every household had a full barn and people were living a fulfilling life”, and the Ili area was “almost like the south region of the Yangtze River”; all those above measures taken by the central governments to actively connect and develop the western region have contributed a lot to the economic and cultural development of the region, which, after exploiting, has acquired better developmental conditions. Therefore, in the period of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen put forward the “plan of industrial development” in the *General Plan of Founding the State*, and he stressed that the country should strive to develop the western economy, improve the transportation, construct railways, make full use of the resource advantage in the west region, promote the immigration and reclamation to develop Xinjiang, provide financial support, cultivate talents, etc. Although those plans fell through due to reasons of society and times, the scientific foresight behind them still has referential and guiding significance to the various strategies in today’s Development of the West.

When reviewing the historical background of the west region’s flourishing to decline, we can see that the

vast western region has a complex natural environment and abundant natural resources, and it used to have frequent external communication and close ethnic exchanges. However, due to the inherent insufficiency in environmental resources, the economic and cultural development levels of the ten city groups are greatly unbalanced, and such unbalance resulted from the cultural environment, economic level, transportation development, language and culture, custom, etc., has directly influenced the coordination and complementation between and inside these city groups, which is a major reason hindering the development of the west region.

In comparison, cities in the Central Shaanxi Plain like Xi’an and cities in Sichuan area like Chengdu and Chongqing, other than their own relatively better production conditions, have been in constant social and economic exchange since the ancient times, and under such influences, their city groups’ economy are therefore better developed. Nowadays, amongst the west city groups, it is the Chengdu-Chongqing city groups that have the most significant advantage, and together with the closely connected Central Shaanxi Plain city group and the Central Yunnan city group, they form the core area of the “golden quadrangle” in the current Development of the West². Compared with the frequent resource complementation, political support, cultural compatibility and economic connection between and inside the city groups mentioned above, other west cities are more confined by the geographical barrier, poor transportation and the convergence of social culture and custom, which leads only to the more frequent communication inside the city group, but much less outside. Such limitation and passivity in external communication have left many western city groups in isolation with insufficient connection and communication with adjacent city groups, which in turn, hinders their own further development. In the long run, the prosperity of the west region’s economy depends to a great extent on the ten major city groups’ development, and making full use of their own advantages, attracting external resources, giving full play to their own strengths and affecting the adjacent areas are the driving force for the ten city groups to enter the highway. Therefore, the development and guiding function of core cities in the “golden quadrangle” city groups connecting the west and east region are of particular significance, and such function is further reinforced by the strategic deployment of “One Belt and One Road”. As one

² According to the statistics in *The Speeding up of Ten Potential Cities Along the Silk Road* published in *China Business* on December 23rd, 2013, the Chengdu-Chongqing city group has a population of 67 million and an ANA (annual economic aggregate) of 2433.714 billion Yuan, ranking first among the west city groups, compared with the runner up Central Shaanxi Plain city group (population 29.4 million and ANA 666 billion Yuan) and the Central Yunnan city group (population 24 million and ANA 600 billion Yuan), it has an absolute advantage.

of these core cities, Chongqing's historic mission speaks for itself in the current background of the Development of the West.

2. THE HISTORY OF CHONGQING IN THE WESTERN GEOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT

Core cities in the central and east area of the west region, under natural and social environmental influences, have gone through a downward trend in status. Before Sui and Tang Dynasty, the traditional agricultural economy was in its prime, and the Central Shaanxi Plain city group, with Xi'an being the core, was the political center of the central government; and after Tang and Song Dynasty, Chengdu, the core of Bashu economy, came into prominence; while after Ming and Qing Dynasty, with the prospering of the Yangtze River economic belt, Chongqing, taking advantage of the golden waterway, stand out and became the economic and commercial pivot connecting the western region directly with the east region. Rising in the modern times, Chongqing appears as one of the Gemini in the Chengdu-Chongqing city group. And as one of the "golden quadrangle", namely Xi'an, Chengdu, Chongqing and Kunming, Chongqing, other than its role as the core city of the upper reach of the Yangtze River economic belt, was of great importance in the western region as well. The natural environment and social and historical development keep affecting the development of Chongqing from the ancient times, and the development of Chongqing is playing a more and more important factor influencing the development of the west region.

It is no exaggeration to say that the history of Chongqing's development is an urban history benefiting from the west region. The western region has been confined by natural barriers and the traditional economy has declined due to climate changes and ecological degradation, and before that, even most the cities in the western region had relatively suitable natural conditions for agricultural economy, the closed environment and inconvenient transportation have led to weak connections with adjacent areas, inefficient cultural communication and low production efficiency. Most of the cities were developing in a small area and the social resources cannot be put together sufficiently. Such a state of independent development has been kept for quite a long time, and it's the same case for Chongqing in its early development. However, Chongqing has long been noticed by the central government in the Central Shaanxi Plain that represented the advanced northern culture. Ever since Qin and Han, every dynasty cared about the management of Bashu; during the Warring States period, the Qin State "marched south to occupy the Central Shaanxi Plain, and west Bshu"; Zhang Yi "was coveting the abundance of the Bashu area" (Jin-Changqu, 2006); supported by

the abundant resources in Bashu, Liu Bei was in possess of what it took to dominate the Central Shaanxi Plain, thus he "ruled Ba, Shu and the Central Shaanxi Plain"³ and established his own dynasty. In the Three Kingdoms period, Liu Bei was able to rule one third of the ancient China with the fertile soil of the Bashu area; in the Sui and Tang Dynasty, due to the natural barrier and the long-term social stability of Bashu area, the northern regime made it the rear area for exiled political prisoners and a place to stay during wartimes; and in the Song Dynasty Bashu area even became the strong defense against the invasion of the Mongolian army. Driven by such political forces, the external exchanges of Chongqing seem to be somehow passive for it was used as the rear area and the grain depot of the northern regime during wartimes. However, compared with other west cities, it had more opportunities of external exchanges, furthermore, the Chencang, Baoxie, Tangluo and Ziwu roads that pass though the Qingling Mountains and the Jinniu, Micang and Lizhi roads that run across the Ba Mountain have granted convenient transportation for Chongqing, which made it the channel for resource, labor and culture even before the opening of the Yangtze River waterway. In this way, Chongqing was soaked in the Central Plains culture and was taken into charged by the Central Plains regime, which set it on a steady course of development. Thus Chongqing has made connections with other cities in the northwestern region at a pretty early time, and the complementation of resources and the political communication between them have promoted their economic and cultural development. It can, therefore be concluded that Chongqing's development in the traditional times benefits from the cities in the northwest.

Meanwhile, Chongqing has been close with the adjacent Sichuan cities centered round Chengdu, and they have been sharing their culture ever since the ancient time. For a very long time, Chongqing was administrated by Chengdu (Yizhou), and they are an inseparable pair. The abundant resource, world renowned manual textile and prosperous culture of Sichuan have had significant influences on Chongqing. After the opening of the ports in Chongqing, shipping in the upper reaches of Yangtze River runs unblocked, and this "golden waterway" becomes a convenient course for Chongqing and Sichuan Basin to reach out for further development. The basin and adjacent area like Tibet, Yunnan and Guizhou all become the vast hinterland of Chongqing, which provide abundant resources like flora and fauna, mineral and agricultural products to trade for external industrial products, and large amount of manpower and material resources to develop economy, and Chongqing, therefrom, stepped into the course of modernization. To conclude this part, without the multi-sided support from the cities in and around the

³ *Records of the Grand History of China*

basin, it will be very difficult for Chongqing to function as a commercial, transportation and export city.

From a general view, the society, politics and economy of city groups in the west region, due to changes of natural environment, started to fall behind those in the western region at the end of Tang Dynasty, and in the modern times, they did not get the according developmental advantage due to the far distance from the flourishing economic belts along the coast and rivers. The western region may seem to be lagging behind in modern social development though, it did act as the material support and dumping ground when the cities along Yangtze River like Chongqing were part of the economic system of the western colony. Nonetheless, the long time of isolation has made most of the western cities subordinate to the more open city groups, and their job was to export elementary resource products and labor to the east region. Such kind of subordination is even lower than being part of the economic system of the west colony and has consequently made the development of social productivity harder. Chongqing, compared with other west cities, takes the pivotal location and with the advantages of the ancient land way and the modern waterway, it has a better chance to develop, which can certainly be accounted by its location. The change of time, the Anti-Japanese War, moving of the capital, the Third-Front Construction and the promotion to be a municipality directly under the central government have all bestowed favorable social environment on Chongqing, which on one hand is due to Chongqing's natural environment and geographic advantages, and on the other hand, it's because the unexploited natural resource and market in the vast land of the western region has always been the back-up for Chongqing, whose development, both in the ancient and in the modern times, is dependent on the joint support of the west city groups.

3. CHONGQING'S FUTURE MISSION IN THE BACKGROUND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEST

Chongqing's development in the ancient and the modern times has benefited from the western region as well as the Yangtze River, and with the deployment of the "One Belt and One Road" strategy, it has been lifted to a higher status together with its adjacent city groups. Meanwhile, as one of the core cities in the west region, Chongqing's historic mission is obvious. It should be the major support for the social, economical and cultural development and the political stability of the west region.

In terms of the development of individual cities, based on the various geographic conditions like plateau, hill, basin, plain and desert, each city group has formed relatively independent city culture at different stages in history, their development are seriously unbalanced, unlike

the Yangtze River Basin, where the city groups have economic exchanges and mutual cultural communication. Cities in the western region rarely have anything in common in terms of city construction and spatial layout. However, Chongqing's development in modern times has shown increasingly its advantages in the economic and cultural transmission from the west cities to the east area. Therefore, Chongqing's future mission is to repay economically to the western region that has supported it for a long time and to maintain the social and political safety and stability.

In terms of economic repay, Chongqing's duty is to facilitate the resource complementation and information technology flow among the western city groups. In China, cities groups in different regions have their own divisions of responsibility in the social economy, besides, inside each city group, there are needs for industries like finance, transportation, information and electro mechanics. The western region will not and cannot passively and rigidly carry out ecological environmental protection, or confine itself to providing simply agricultural and tourist industry; like other regions in China, it also has needs for the development and utilization of environmental resource, the absorption of high-tech and the cultivation of talents. The Yangtze River waterway that connecting the developed areas in the western region has showed its strength hundreds of years ago, and Chongqing, with the size of a mega city in the west region, is now the trial plot of balancing national economy and the gathering place of various resource, technology and talents. They intertwined with each other, thus affecting the adjacent area and leading the reorganization of the western resource and the cultivation and flow of the talents. The opening of the international railway "Yuxin'ou" in 2011 as the connection of the southern line of Eurasian Continental Bridge is one of the concrete measures of the country's big promotion of Chongqing and the city groups in the west region, and the establishment of the strategic economic platform "One Belt and One Road" is to further strengthen the communication between the internal and external, the east and the western region while gathering the advantages of each area for a bigger development pattern. Thus, the particular geographic location of Chongqing in the Yangtze River Basin becomes salient again for its advantage in connecting the east and west regions, and its responsibility is further clarified.

And in terms of political stability and cultural development, the economic prosperity of Chongqing is what keeps the social stability of the east and west region. The unbalanced status that the economy of the southeast China is better than the west has been a long-standing problem, and is worsened after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The most prosperous economic area, namely the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta and the Circum-Bohai Sea Economic Zone are all located in the southeast coastal areas, which is

pretty dangerous for the social stability of the country. One modernized war could possibly ruin hundreds of years' management. On the one hand, the vast inland area's lack of economic and scientific strength can hardly form valid support in a short time, and on the other hand, the disparity between the east and the western region is bad for the regional balance. As is mentioned above, in the west region, there are a large number of ethnic groups with different social cultures, and the disparity of economic levels is much easier to cause social chaos. Therefore, the development of the core cities in the western region like Chongqing can serve as the buffer. Their own economic prosperity can offer protection for the social and political stability and positive demonstrative effect, meanwhile, they can gather the natural resource and labor of the

western region while adsorbing the advanced financial capital, technical information and high-tech resource from the east region; and in the blending of the exporting resource of the western region and the importing advanced productivity of the east region, those cities can form a core strength to finally facilitate the realization of a balanced social and economic development between the two regions, to eliminate the disparities and to stabilize the society.

REFERENCE

Jin·Changqu. (2006). *Chronicles of Huayang • Chronicles of Ba*.
In L. Liu (Annotated). Chengdu, China: Times Press.