

## **Civil War on the Central Plains: Mobilization, Militarization, and the End of Nationalist Rule in Zhengzhou, 1947-1948**

### **Abstract**

The railroad junction city of Zhengzhou in Henan Province was a key Nationalist strongpoint in China's Civil War, a well-guarded city that would be "defended to the death." But what did the encroaching conflict mean for the city and its inhabitants? This article breaks new ground by exploring the tense relationship between local authorities and residents during the last months of Nationalist rule. Using eyewitness accounts, newspapers, and sources surviving in the municipal archive, it uncovers struggles over refugees, taxes, *corvée* labor, and the militarization of the city. In each case, state-society relations in Zhengzhou were damaged by both Nationalist misgovernance and the sheer cost of total war in an exhausted region. By the long, hot summer of 1948, the authorities had little to offer Zhengzhou's residents and were concerned only with their own institutional survival. The Nationalist government had become what we might call a "state-for-itself".

**Keywords:** Chinese Civil War, Henan, Zhengzhou, urban, GMD, state-society relations

### **<A> Introduction: Cities and Civil War**

There are many ways for cities to change hands in wartime, and the Chinese Civil War (1946-50) saw a whole range of processes of urban takeover. The defenders of a city sometimes surrendered without a fight, as Fu Zuoyi (傅作義 1895-1974) demonstrated at Beiping 北平 in January 1949. Conversely, the occupiers of a city sometimes capitulated after a long siege, as occurred after five brutal months of suffering in Changchun (May-October 1948). And although there was less truly urban – as opposed to suburban – warfare in the Chinese Civil War than we might expect, attacking Communist forces were sometimes forced to fight for a city street-by-street (Tianjin, January 1949 and, after the long siege, Taiyuan that April).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See respectively Joseph K. S. Yick, *Making Urban Revolution: The CCP-GMD Struggle for Beiping-Tianjin*,

Most commonly, though, cities fell in less dramatic ways. In a swathe of cities across North and Central China during 1948-49 – Zhengzhou (October 1948), Shenyang and Baoding (保定) in November, Xuzhou (徐州) in December, and ultimately Nanjing (April 1949) and Wuhan (May) – the Nationalist strategy was to pull the main force out of a city intact, leaving a small residual unit to try to escape at the last moment. This study ends with just such a bathetic takeover, the fall of Zhengzhou, Henan Province, on October 22, 1948, when this strategic railroad junction was abandoned by Nationalist forces without a fight.

But what happened in the run-up to the fall of the city? How had Civil War affected life in Zhengzhou? How did the Nationalist authorities govern the city and mobilize its resources with the tide of war turning against them? How did civilians in the city – both refugees and permanent residents – react? And how did a city that Nationalist commanders swore would be “defended to the death” come to be abandoned without a fight?

This answers to these questions re-focus our attention on the local dynamics of China’s Civil War. Although we are blessed with several excellent studies of cities in this period, their focus has usually been on issues faced by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after the takeover;<sup>2</sup>

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1945-1949 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); Harold Tanner, *Where Chiang Kai-shek Lost China: The Liao-Shen Campaign, 1948* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), esp. pp. 218-235; Dominic Meng-Hsuan Yang, “Noble Ghosts, Empty Graves, and Suppressed Traumas: The Heroic Tale of ‘Taiyuan’s Five Hundred Martyrs’ in the Chinese Civil War,” in *Historical Reflections*, 41, No. 3 (2015), pp. 109-124.

<sup>2</sup> See Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-52* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980); James Zheng Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949-1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004); Frederic Wakeman Jr., “‘Cleanup’: The New Order in Shanghai,” in Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz, eds., *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s*

where we do have a perspective on the last days of Nationalist urban rule, it is a generalized understanding derived largely from the experience of Beiping and Shanghai;<sup>3</sup> studies in English of Nationalist mobilization are similarly missing a local perspective.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps more important still, for all the welcome growth in research straddling the 1949 divide, historians have rather lost sight of the Civil War itself, which is at risk of becoming a coda to the Resistance War of 1937-45, now re-centered as the crucible of China's twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

This article uses the example of Zhengzhou to explore the crucial period the Civil War, from summer 1947 to the fall of 1948. At first glance, Zhengzhou might seem an unpromising site for

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*Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21-58. For a study of Communist urban rule in very different circumstances, note Christian Hess, "Sino-Soviet City: Dalian between Socialist Worlds," *Journal of Urban History*, 14, No. 1 (2018): 9-25.

<sup>3</sup> The most detailed study on the urban civil war before Communist takeover focuses on CCP activity. See Yick, *Making Urban Revolution*.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Yugi Sasagawa, "Characteristics of and changes in wartime mobilization in China: A comparison of the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War," *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 9, No. 1 (2015): 66-94.

<sup>5</sup> For recent survey work, see Christopher Lew, *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War, 1945-1949: An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Diana Lary, *China's Civil War: A Social History, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). More focused research has been rare in recent years, though some work with a longer timeframe is shedding new light: see, for instance, Ying Jia Tan, "Revolutionary Current: Electricity and the Formation of the Party-State in China and Taiwan, 1937-1957" (PhD Diss., Yale University, 2015), 157-199; Philip Thai, *China's War on Smuggling: Law, Economic Life, and the Making of the Modern State, 1842-1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), chapter 6.

such an inquiry. As a fast-growing railway junction, this was an unprepossessing city: one visitor of the period remarked that “even if you brought the scenery of Guilin, the imperial palace of Beijing and even the modern girls of Shanghai to Zhengzhou, it probably still wouldn’t make it likeable.”<sup>6</sup> Zhengzhou did not even have a municipal government, being administered instead as part of rural Zheng County. From the historian’s perspective, surviving archival sources are few and fragmented, and the print runs of local newspapers are patchy. Zhengzhou was not the site of a major siege or battle, and its capture by the CCP marked only a prelude to the colossal struggles of the Huaihai campaign in November 1948.

Yet it is the very ordinariness of Zhengzhou which makes it a fruitful site for understanding the local impact of Civil War. With 112,000 residents in October 1947, this was a medium-sized city, one of many regional centers still held by the Nationalists going into the key struggles in North and Central China between mid-1947 and early 1949.<sup>7</sup> We have very few studies in any language of how the Nationalist authorities tried to mobilize such cities for this crucial period of Civil War, or how residents dealt with its impact.

This article begins by showing how the emerging Civil War affected Zhengzhou in 1946-47, before turning to three key issues at the center of state-society conflict during 1947-48: first, tensions around the influx of refugees; second, the deepening militarization of the city and control over its residents; third, and most importantly, the appropriation and mobilization of

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<sup>6</sup> Fan Shiqin, “Mantan Zhengzhou” [Discussing Zhengzhou], *Zhengyi* 4, no. 4 (1948): 15.

<sup>7</sup> See Liu Yongli, “Minguo shiqi Zhengzhou chengshi renkou bianqian yanjiu, 1912-1948” (Population changes in Zhengzhou city during the Republican period) (MA. Diss., Zhengzhou University, 2010), 38. Note that this figure excludes refugees.

civilian resources. In each case, surviving local newspapers and archival documents show vigorous civilian resistance to total war. The local Nationalist authorities emerge not as simply incompetent or malevolent caricature, but clumsy, at times arbitrary, and simply unable to win over a weary city to the war effort. Taken together, it was not so much the familiar story of monetary inflation or official corruption which alienated urban residents on this Civil War frontline, as the grinding pressure of a local state living off dwindling civilian resources and providing little in return.<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that the fall of the Nationalist regime on the mainland had long been inevitable, but worsening state-society relations help account for its swift collapse north of the Yangzi in 1948.

### **<A> Zhengzhou from Resistance War to Civil War**

Zhengzhou owed its significance – in military, as well as commercial, terms – to the construction of the railroad in the early twentieth century. In 1905-06, the opening of the north-south Beijing-Hankou (京漢 Jing-Han) and the east-west Long-Hai (隴海) railroads turned this small administrative center into the most important railroad junction in inland China. Stimulated by the processing and wholesaling of tobacco, cotton and other agricultural products, the population expanded some fifteen-fold in a decade.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For an emphasis on inflation and corruption, see Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 118-131; 147-158. This focus on the pressures of the Nationalist war effort is closer that of Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), esp. 11-12; 73-83.

<sup>9</sup> See Zhu Junxian, *Yin ge zhi bian: Zhongyuan quyu zhongxin chengshi de jindai bianqian* [Transformations of Inheritance and Renovation: Modern Changes in the Central Cities of the Central Plains region] (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2013), esp. 156-172; Xie Xiaopeng, *Jindai Zhengzhou chengshi bianqian yanjiu* [Studies in the

Yet despite its significance in China's transport system, accounts of Zhengzhou from the late 1940s describe a city that had not quite fulfilled its potential.<sup>10</sup> Long-term problems of weak urban governance and a reputation for crime were exacerbated by the ravages of China's War of Resistance (1937-45). The Nationalist breaking of the Yellow River dikes in June 1938, just ten miles to the north, had prevented the city falling under Japanese occupation, but the proximity of the frontline and damage from air raids meant that Zhengzhou "virtually became a dead city" (幾乎變成了死城 *jihu biancheng le sicheng*).<sup>11</sup> Worse was to come: in 1942-43, Zhengzhou was the epicenter of the "Henan Famine," attributed in part by contemporaries and historians to military requisitioning and a dilatory relief effort. In Japan's Ichi-Go offensive of April 1944, Nationalist authority simply collapsed, with Chinese troops apparently attacked by civilians angry at Nationalist misrule. Zhengzhou the first city to fall. During sixteen months of Japanese occupation, the city's remaining residents faced corvée labor duties, requisitioning of production, and restrictions on movement – all techniques of control which would be reproduced by the Nationalist authorities during 1947-48.<sup>12</sup> By August 1945, some 70% of buildings in Zhengzhou had been destroyed, the worst destruction of any major town in the war-torn province of Henan,

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modern transformations of Zhengzhou city] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 2016), chapter 2.

<sup>10</sup> Fan, "Mantan Zhengzhou," 15.

<sup>11</sup> Quoting from Xu Lianshan and Wang Zongmin, eds., *Zhengzhou kangzhan jianshi* [Short History of the War of Resistance in Zhengzhou] (Zhengzhou: Zhonggong Zhengzhou shiwei dangshi yanjiushi, 2005), 18.

<sup>12</sup> On the province's wartime travails, see esp. Micah Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

and the remaining population of around 50,000 was less than a third of the pre-war peak.<sup>13</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> August, four days after Japanese surrender, Nationalist civil authorities returned to a devastated city.

Perhaps unexpectedly, though, Zhengzhou enjoyed a short period of post-war prosperity. While Nationalist legitimacy had been seriously damaged by the wartime sacrifices demanded of Henan residents, return and reconstruction of 1945-46 offered a chance for rehabilitation, at least in those parts of the province which ended the war under Japanese rather than Communist control. Japan's surrender restored movement between the city and its hinterland and, once the railroads had been repaired, Zhengzhou regained its role as a logistical hub, not least as Henan's most important processing point for the return of war refugees. Although most pre-war businesses did not reopen, new workshops, trading houses and flour mills took their place.<sup>14</sup> By the time journalist Wang Shoumei (王瘦梅 1913-1994) visited in the fall of 1946, he found a lively city beginning to recover from the trauma of war: "after having had chance to stay here two days and take a good look at the city, I felt very happy. It is 'chaotic' and 'dirty', but is

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<sup>13</sup> The immediate post-war population was counted at 54,000. See "Zhengxian ge xiangzhengzhang xingming bangong dizhi baojia hukou shumu yilan biao" (A table of names, work, addresses, *baojia* and *hukou* totals from each township and town head in Zheng County), January 1946, file *jiu* (old) 03-028-001, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive. For more on Japanese occupation, see Xu and Wang, *Zhengzhou kangzhan jianshi*, 169-179.

<sup>14</sup> On the closure of large businesses, see Wang Guanglin, "Wunianlai gongzuo jiyao" [A summary of work in the last five years], July 1, 1947, file *jiu* 03-38-001, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive, 102; on the growth of smaller traders, see Zhengzhou shi dang'anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang* [The Liberation of Zhengzhou] (Zhengzhou: Zhongguo dang'an chubanshe, 2009), 30.

everywhere being improved and is full of vigor.”<sup>15</sup> A city planning committee launched an ambitious design for urban expansion, with new industrial zones, green spaces and public housing.<sup>16</sup>

It took some time for the emerging Civil War to stymie Nationalist post-war recovery and thwart the reconstruction of Zhengzhou. The conflict at first boosted the city's importance, with the establishment in December 1945 of the Zhengzhou Pacification Command (鄭州綏靖公署 Zhengzhou suijing gongshu) under former provincial governor Liu Zhi (劉峙 1892-1971), tasked with eliminating Communist unit across North-Central China.<sup>17</sup> More than a year later, in early 1947, Nationalist forces had enjoyed notable if inconclusive advances both east and west of Zhengzhou.<sup>18</sup> In March 1947 a joint government-UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) effort finally closed the 1938 breach in the Yellow River dikes and eliminated the vast flood zone east and southeast of Zhengzhou. On May 4, 1947, Chiang Kai-shek himself arrived in Zhengzhou to celebrate the restoration of the river to its former

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<sup>15</sup> “Zhengzhou lüeying” [Glimpses of Zhengzhou], *Shenbao* (Shanghai), October 15, 1946.

<sup>16</sup> “Zhengzhou shi fuxing guihua zhidao weiyuanhui chubu jianshe jihua gangyao” [Outline of the preliminary construction plan of the Zhengzhou city revival plan guidance committee], *Zhengzhou ribao*, June 23, 1947 (continuing daily to June 29, 1947).

<sup>17</sup> On Zhengzhou's military importance, note “Zhengzhou suijing gongshu xiajing quyü tu” [Map of the region under the jurisdiction of the Zhengzhou Pacification Command], n.d., file M68-01-337, Henan Provincial Archive.

<sup>18</sup> For a useful discussion, see Lew, *Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War*, 44-55.



course, leading a lavish ceremony on the restored dikes.<sup>19</sup>

With hindsight, this marked the pinnacle of Nationalist achievement in post-1945 Zhengzhou. Soon after Chiang left the city, a series of stunning military reverses left Zhengzhou isolated and exposed to Communist attack. The Nationalist focus on Shaanxi to the west and Shandong to the east had left Henan weakly defended, and in June 1947, more than 100,000 soldiers under Liu Bocheng (劉伯承 1892-1986) and Deng Xiaoping crossed the Yellow River at Puyang (濮陽) and counterattacked southwards towards the Dabie Mountains (大別山). At the same time, as a diversionary tactic, forces under Chen Yi's (陳毅 1901-1972) East China Field Army began thrusts towards Zhengzhou from their bases southeast of the city at Taikang (太康) and Weishi (尉氏).<sup>20</sup> By late 1947, both Liu and Chen's forces were able to maneuver across much of the province, and in December the fighting came close to Zhengzhou for the first time. One eyewitness, a staff member of Claire Chennault's Civil Air Transport, described the scene: "it was filled with the noise of clamor and fear in people's hearts. The people pouring into the city from the surrounding countryside (四鄉 *sixiang*) and the residents trying to get outside the city filled all the roads. The appearance of the city took on a military state."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*, esp. 201-204; Kathryn Edgerton-Tarpley, "A River Runs Through It: The Yellow River and the Chinese Civil War, 1946-47," *Social Science History* 41, No. 2 (2017): 141-173. On Chiang's visit, see "Jiang zhuxi xunci" [Chairman's Jiang's instructions] *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 5, 1947.

<sup>20</sup> For more detail, see Lew, *Third Revolutionary Chinese Civil War*, 75-85.

<sup>21</sup> Lu Yunsheng, "Cheli Zhengzhou" [Pulling out of Zhengzhou], *Xingzong kongyun dadui banyuekan* [China National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration Air Transport Fortnightly] 1, no. 8 (Jan. 1948): 6.

On this occasion, Nationalist reinforcements pushed back the Communist thrust, but the panic of December 1947 set the tone for the next ten months. Just as the better-known battles in Manchuria, the balance of power on the Central Plains was shifting during the 1947-48 winter, and by the end of January Communist People's Liberation Army (PLA) units were once again within a few miles of Zhengzhou's airfield.<sup>22</sup> What had been restored in 1945-46 – the trade connections that were key to Zhengzhou's prosperity – were once again cut off by war, and Nationalist troops found themselves sabotaging roads that had only recently been repaired. In early 1948 a whole series of towns on the Jing-Han line south of Zhengzhou fell to Communist forces. Like Japanese occupation before it, Nationalist-controlled territory on the Central Plains was shrinking to urban strongholds, with the authorities struggling to exploit the resources of the diminishing areas still under their control.

#### **<A> Mobilization, Militarization and Protest**

What was the impact of the approaching Civil War? How did it affect patterns of politics, society and space in this newly isolated city? This section focuses on three key issues during 1947-48: the fate of refugees, the militarization of the city, and the extraction of civilian resources. All three issues had already damaged state-society relations during the War of Resistance, when in flood, famine and flight, Zhengzhou's residents had borne heavy sacrifices in the name of protecting the nation against Japan. After a breathing space of less than two years, they once again faced similar demands, now couched in the rather narrower appeal of protecting the Nationalist state against the Communist threat. Unsurprisingly, these pressures did not go

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<sup>22</sup> On the January PLA advance, see "Special Correspondent: Nightmare in Chengchow" [Zhengzhou], *China Weekly Review*, January 31, 1948, 263.

uncontested. Civilians used formal appeals, the semi-free press and the local “Advisory Council” (參議會 *Canyihui*) to protest against the demands being placed on residents. With Zhengzhou’s military headquarters (指揮部 *Zhihuibu*) in the driving seat, residents enjoyed only fleeting successes in changing local policy, but such resistance underlines that even away from China’s largest cities and famous student movements of these years, the Civil War was a period of independent protest and a politically engaged urban society.

### <B> Refugees

With the important exception of the 1949 exodus from the Chinese mainland, the issue of refugees in China’s Civil War is still little-known compared with that of the War of Resistance.<sup>23</sup> In Zhengzhou, the two refugee crises merged into one another. The resettlement of those displaced during 1937-1945 was ongoing when thousands of refugees from Communist advances in northern Henan poured south into Zhengzhou during the second half of 1946.<sup>24</sup> Fighting in spring and summer 1947 brought more refugees from across the province, and by the end of July almost 100,000 refugees had arrived in the city.<sup>25</sup> Zhengzhou’s various authorities – the military

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<sup>23</sup> For brief discussions, see Pepper, *Civil War in China*, 173-175; Lary, *China’s Civil War*, 127-128.

<sup>24</sup> See Henan sheng zhengfu tongjichu [Henan Provincial Government Statistics Bureau], ed., *Henan sheng tongji nianjian: minguo sanshiwu nian* [Henan province statistical yearbook: 1946] (Kaifeng: Henan zhengfu tongjichu, 1947), 158.

<sup>25</sup> This does not necessarily mean there were 100,000 refugees in Zhengzhou at any one time. *Zhengzhou Ribao* reported 55,000 *new* refugees in the city, but some of those registered earlier may have already left. See “Yubei liuwang Zhengshi nanmin: dengjizhe yi jin shiwan” [Refugees exiled to Zhengzhou from Northern Henan: almost 100,000 already registered], *Zhengzhou ribao*, July 26, 1947.

garrison, the county government and the city police – tried to provide some aid and, in a sign of the times, redirected grain and cash resources earmarked for post-war reconstruction and drought relief to these new refugees.<sup>26</sup> However, as local official Wang Yongchuan (王永川 b. 1913) later recalled, the authorities struggled to support this influx, with the refugee relief committee only able to help some 5000 people. Unless they could get support from native-place associations (同鄉會 *tongxianghui*) refugees had simply to beg on the streets.<sup>27</sup> Zhengzhou, never properly rebuilt after 1945, faced a desperate housing shortage. Some refugees found shelter in abandoned areas of the south side of the city, the neighborhood whose population had been most drastically reduced during 1937-45. Across the city, the local newspaper reported that there were “many gathered in earth holes on the northern part of the city wall.”<sup>28</sup>

Although those escaping areas of Communist control could and perhaps should have provided a reservoir of support for Nationalist rule, there is little evidence of this in Zhengzhou.<sup>29</sup> Such a possibility was foreclosed by poor living conditions, tension with local residents, and clumsy

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<sup>26</sup> “Shizheng jianxun” [Brief news on urban governance], *Henan shezheng yuekan* [Henan society and politics monthly], no. 11-12 (combined issue, Aug. 1947): 31.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Yongchuan, “1945 nian zhi 1948 nian Zhengzhou jianwen” [Things Seen and Heard in Zhengzhou, 1945-1948], *Henan wenshi ziliao* 32 (1989): 91-120, esp. 112-114; “Zheng nanmin jizhen choubeihui zuori zhaokai huiyi” [Zhengzhou refugee aid preparation committee convenes meeting], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 11, 1947.

<sup>28</sup> “Xian zhengfu wei nanmin zhao zhudi” [County government looks for places for refugees to live], *Zhengzhou ribao*, July 27, 1947. On the south side of the city, see Zhengzhou shi dang’anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang*, 4-5.

<sup>29</sup> For a similar point, see Pepper, *Civil War in China*, 173-175. Newspapers *did* use refugees to narrate stories of CCP brutality. See, for instance “Zhengzhou fengguang” [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, August 27, 1947.

handling by the authorities. A series of incidents in the autumn and winter of 1947-48 underline these issues. First, a group of two hundred refugee students had been sleeping in the Confucius temple (文廟 *wenmiao*), but were asked by priests to make way for ceremonies marking the birthday of the Sage. They duly left, but later returned to smash up the temple and reclaim the space for themselves.<sup>30</sup> Second, eight refugees were killed when the embankment of the former city wall collapsed after heavy rain, crushing the holes in which they had been living. In reporting the tragedy, *Zhengzhou Daily* (鄭州日報 *Zhengzhou ribao*) hinted darkly that the authorities had done little to help: “there are some organs which, from beginning to end of this, haven’t paid any attention.”<sup>31</sup> Finally, the authorities tried to move refugees away from Zhengzhou’s city center. In November 1947, at the onset of winter, the military ordered the civil authorities to tear down refugee shacks behind the main streets, while later that winter refugees were barred from selling goods in this commercial district around the railroad station. The latter directive ended in refugee street protests, but eventually the county government and District Commissioner’s office (專員公署 *Zhuanyuan gongshu*) worked together to force refugee peddlers off the streets and into designated sites away from the city center.<sup>32</sup> The pressures of a

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<sup>30</sup> “SiKong? Zunshi? Anyang xuesheng erbai yu ren daohui Zhengzhou wenmiao dadian” [Offer sacrifices to Confucius? Revere the Master? 200+ Anyang students smash up the main hall of the Zhengzhou Confucius temple], *Shenbao*, September 1, 1947.

<sup>31</sup> “Zhengzhou fengguang” [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 29, 1947. See also “Zhengzhou nancheng dong tanxian, nanmin baming zao yabi” [Hole collapses on the south side of Zhengzhou city wall, eight refugees crushed to death], *Shenbao*, November 4, 1947.

<sup>32</sup> “Zhuyi dongfang guanli nanmin” [Pay attention to winter defense and manage the refugees], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 17, 1947; “Zhengzhou tanfan shijian keneng xun yu jie jue” [Zhengzhou peddler incident could soon be

large refugee population had worsened fissures both within Zhengzhou's civilian population and between state and society, particularly given the peculiar tensions of an increasingly militarized city.

### **<B> Militarization and Control**

The military setbacks of summer 1947 triggered a series of measures to defend Zhengzhou. The civil authorities established a city militia (市區自衛隊 Shiqu ziweidui), giving military training to some six thousand residents. Later that year, the military authorities ordered further paramilitary training and propaganda work among both unemployed young people and workers in the service sector.<sup>33</sup> This was accompanied by the construction in fall 1947 of new city defenses. While in some cities Civil War brought strengthening of brick walls and checkpoints at city gates, Zhengzhou's wall had largely been torn down in 1928, leaving only some sections of the earth mound, as repurposed by the city's refugees.<sup>34</sup> Instead, the city was surrounded by trenches, embankments, gun emplacements and cement blockhouses – more than 400 of them, according to a map spirited out of Zhengzhou by Communist agents.<sup>35</sup> An outer ring connected

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resolved] *Shenbao*, January 19, 1948. Note that Zhengzhou did not have a separate municipal government, and came under the jurisdiction of Zheng County.

<sup>33</sup> “Zhengzhou zhihuibu dingding zuxun minzhong banfa” [Zhengzhou headquarters draw up measures for the organization and training of the masses], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 13, 1947; “Benshi gongren zuxun, xian you chuyuye renliche banqi” [Workers in this city to be organized and trained, starting with kitchen and bathhouse staff and rickshaw pullers], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 26, 1947.

<sup>34</sup> For a comparison with a walled city, see “Kaifeng Eyewitness,” *China Weekly Review*, July 10, 1948, 179.

<sup>35</sup> “Zhengzhou chengfang gongshi jiji dongyuan xiuzhu” [Zhengzhou city defense fortifications vigorously

the closest villages, which one newspaper declared “have become strong fortresses, with earth walls, perimeter trenches, tree barricades (鹿寨 *luzhai*), blockhouses, earth tunnels, and anti-aircraft emplacements.”<sup>36</sup> An inner ring linked institutions at the edge of the city, including cotton warehouses, granaries and temples, and repurposed them for urban warfare.<sup>37</sup> In April 1948, *Shenbao* (申報), China’s most prominent newspaper, reported that Zhengzhou “could be defended without any anxiety (可保無虞 *kebao wuyu*).”<sup>38</sup> Such defensive lines were reproduced across Nationalist-held cities during 1947-49, but in most cases these civilian-built fortifications made much difference. Most, including Zhengzhou’s, were never pressed into service and were

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mobilizing for construction], *Shenbao*, November 25, 1947.

<sup>36</sup> “Lengyan wang Bian Zheng,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), July 27, 1948. With the Nationalist focus on defensive points, such structures were constantly being made and unmade when territory changed hands. The pilot Felix Smith (1918-2018) remembered taking off from Zhengzhou’s airstrip: “the Nationalist Army believed in moats; the Reds didn’t. As the villages of Honan switched sides in seesaw fights for the fertile plains, the villagers labored again and again at the same moats, digging them out of filling them in... for months, flying over that sad province we saw ragged circles of peasants on the perimeters of their villages, toiling at the moats.” Felix Smith, *China Pilot: Flying for Chiang and Chennault* (Washington, DC.: Brassey’s, 1995), 77.

<sup>37</sup> “Zhongyuan junqu silingbu guanyu Zhengzhou shoudi bingli ji bufang qingkuang diaocha” [Central Plains Military Region Command: survey regarding the troop strength of the enemy holding Zhengzhou and their defensive layout], Henan Provincial Archive, reproduced in Zhengzhou shi dang’anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang*, 86-98.

<sup>38</sup> “Zhengzhou wancheng jianqiang fangwu” [Zhengzhou completes strengthening of defenses], *Shenbao*, April 9, 1948.

swiftly demolished soon after Communist takeover.<sup>39</sup>

If anything, defensive lines proved more useful for controlling the movement of people than in protecting the city from attack. Sentry posts ringed the urban area, with civilians only permitted to move after an inspection of their paperwork and confiscation of suspicious goods. Li Zhenqing (李振清, 1901-1976), the last general in charge of Zhengzhou's defenses, boasted that this prevented all Communist infiltration: "not even a little water can seep in."<sup>40</sup> This was not only demonstrably false – witness the detailed CCP knowledge of Zhengzhou's defensive infrastructure – but also ignored the problems brought by restrictions on movement. Checkpoints were tense and sometimes dangerous places, with nervous soldiers on one occasion even firing on the car of provincial governor Liu Mao'en (劉茂恩 1898-1981).<sup>41</sup> They also impeded the transfers essential to urban life. The authorities struggled to get waste out of Zhengzhou, and when police tried to move nightsoil depots out of the city, they realized nightsoil carriers would be unable to perform their duties: "because of the checkpoints, it isn't convenient to get in

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Wakeman, "'Cleanup': The New Order in Shanghai," 31-37 on another defensive debacle. Yang Zhenxing, "Zhengzhou tuoxian ji" [A record of an escape from Zhengzhou], *Pinghan lu kan*, no. 113 (Dec. 1948): 2. Yang describes how, soon after CCP takeover, the new authorities "mobilized various local ruffians and hooligans (*dipi liumang*), and some ignorant traders (*wuzhi shangmin*), to tear down the defensive walls and all the blockhouse fortifications."

<sup>40</sup> Keng Qiang (pseud.), "Beiping: Zhengzhou di er?" [Beiping: the second Zhengzhou?], *Zongheng* 1, No. 1 (Dec. 1948): 13-15.

<sup>41</sup> "Narrow Escape," *China Weekly Review*, March 27, 1948, 96.



and out” (因哨口出入不便 *yin shaokou churu bubian*).<sup>42</sup> Commerce stalled, partly due to ad valorem taxes on goods coming into or out of Zhengzhou – ironically, a surcharge imposed to pay for further defenses.<sup>43</sup> Despite the city’s rising population, swollen to almost 200,000 by summer 1948, fully half of Zhengzhou’s flour and oil merchants went out of business. Observers blamed the severing of rural-urban connections.<sup>44</sup>

Blockhouses and checkpoints formed only part of a growing coercive infrastructure in Zhengzhou during the Civil War. The process had begun in 1946, with the reassembly of household registers (戶口, *hukou*) and the restoration of the system of *baojia* (保甲, units of neighborhood control and mutual responsibility). In the same year, Zhengzhou was also one of the first cities to experiment with the Nationalist government’s new ID certificates (身分證 *shenfenzheng*), complete with the technologies of photographs and fingerprints.<sup>45</sup> In summer 1947, the fear of Communist underground activity saw further tightening of policing in

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<sup>42</sup> “Zhengzhou jingchajiu di er fenju cheng” [A petition from Zhengzhou police, sub-station no. 2], May 2, 1948, file *jiu* 07-028-004, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

<sup>43</sup> “Zhengzhou chengfang gongshi weiyuanhui zhengmuzu kaipi chengfang kuan yuan banfa” [Zhengzhou city defense fortifications conscription section: measures for opening up city defense funding sources], n.d., 1948, file *jiu* 06-006-001, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive. This measure proposed raising levies to 10% of value on most goods.

<sup>44</sup> “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), June 7, 1948. Population figure from Liu, “Minguo shiqi Zhengzhou chengshi renkou,” 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> “Benshi jiangyao choucha guomin shenfenzhang [Spot checks of citizens’ ID certificates to be conducted in Zhengzhou], *Guominbao* (Zhengzhou), June 8, 1946.

Zhengzhou, with the military headquarters ordering police, employers, and *bao* neighborhood heads to conduct strict checks on household registers and ID certificates.<sup>46</sup> Such measures may have tightened control, but were neither straightforward nor uncontested. Local ID certificates were of limited utility when refugees and visitors did not have one, and some residents complained to the local newspaper that they had been forced to pay an illegal surcharge on their household registration. In villages just outside the city, staff sent to draw up the household registers were simply beaten up, indicative of the resentment bred by the militarization and tightening control of urban life.<sup>47</sup>

### **<B> Tax, Requisitioning, and the Price of Total War**

Even more serious than the problems of refugees and urban control was the need to pay for the Nationalist war effort. The scale and distribution of the city's tax and requisitioning burden dominates surviving issues of the *Zhengzhou Daily* newspaper. The key institution organizing this process was the Zhengzhou Mobilization Committee (動員委員會 Dongyuan weiyuanhui); indicative of worsening relations with the authorities, one of its key tasks was to "mediate conflicts between the military and the people" (調解軍民糾紛 *tiaojie junmin jiufen*).<sup>48</sup> But

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<sup>46</sup> "Gaishan Zheng shi hu zheng" [Improving *hukou* policy in Zhengzhou city], *Zhengzhou ribao*, June 19, 1947.

Military control over civilian affairs was partly exercised through the "Zhengzhou Army-Police-Military Police Joint Inspection Office" (Zhengzhou jun jing xian lianhe jichachu). See Wang, "1945 nian zhi 1948 nian Zhengzhou jianwen," 104.

<sup>47</sup> "Zhengzhou fengguang" [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 25, 1947; November 1, 1947.

<sup>48</sup> "Zhengxian dongyuan weiyuanhui" [Zheng County Mobilization Committee], July 22, 1948, file *jiu* 17-021-008, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

despite occasional gestures of goodwill, such as giving away military grain to poor civilians, throughout 1947-48 there was no escaping the underlying conflict between state and society for Zhengzhou's resources of land, money, housing, food and labor.<sup>49</sup> With multiple bodies imposing levies, it is impossible to gauge the scale of extraction, but it is clear that the burden was growing on urban residents without being sufficient for the spiraling needs of total warfare.

Struggles over foodstuffs were a key focus of state-society conflict, particularly given the shrinking size of areas under Nationalist control. Military demand alone exceeded production of grain in Zheng County.<sup>50</sup> As well as land tax in kind – briefly lifted in 1945, but soon re-imposed for the 1946 wheat harvest – farmers around Zhengzhou were faced with heavy compulsory purchase quotas at prices rendered derisory by inflation. Everyone from county head Gao Qinglun (高晴倫, dates unknown) down to *baojia* leaders faced disciplinary action for the lack of taxes collected.<sup>51</sup> In 1947, the authorities reported poor harvests and distress all over the county, while there was a spate of petitions against the summer campaign to requisition the

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<sup>49</sup> “Dapi junliang kuan fadiao zhengxianfu” [Large quantity of military grain sent to Zheng county government] *Zhengzhou ribao*, September 30, 1947.

<sup>50</sup> “Lengyan wang Bian Zheng,” *Shibao* (Xi'an), July 27, 1948. Yugi Sasagawa makes a similar point on a China-wide scale with regard to the growing reliance on Sichuan. See Sasagawa, “Characteristics of and changes in wartime mobilization in China,” 79-80.

<sup>51</sup> “Zheng Xian xianzheng huiyi” [Zheng County government meeting], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 31, 1947. Wang, “Wunianlai gongzuo jiyao,” 37-38; 62-63. Note that additional requisitioning was now rebranded “unified purchase” *tonggou* rather than the *zhenggou* “requisitioning by purchase” of the Resistance War.

wheat harvest.<sup>52</sup>

In the city itself, disruption to transport and the influx of refugees had created shortfalls in urban supply. One *bao* head reported that refugees on the edge of the city were scavenging for fruit peel and grasses.<sup>53</sup> Nor did the city escape the struggles of the Nationalist state to feed its soldiers: in early 1948, the authorities forced anyone living on state-owned land – apparently a large proportion of property in this railroad town – to pay their rent in grain rather than increasingly-worthless cash. The measure was met with furious opposition by residents struggling to get enough food for themselves, and although the volume required was reduced there is no sign that the authorities overturned the policy.<sup>54</sup>

The most significant burden for Zhengzhou residents, though, was the demands on property, cash and labor for the city's new defenses. The cost to property was considerable. On the north side of the city, neighborhood (*bao*) head Kong Fanmao (孔繁茂, dates unknown) protested that 20% of homes had been demolished to make way for city defenses. Along the remnant of the old

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<sup>52</sup> On rural distress, see “Zhengzhou nongmin weiji yanzhong” [Zhengzhou's peasants in serious crisis], *Tianjia banyuebao* 13, no. 15 (May, 1947): 2; on petitions from rural *bao* units, see “Zheng Minquan xiang jiang bao hou, zaiqing kongqian yanzhong, gai xiang chengqing Zhengxianfu” [After a hailstorm in Minquan township of Zheng County, the disaster situation is unprecedentedly serious, and the township appeals to the Zheng County government], *Zhengzhou ribao*, July 17, 1947.

<sup>53</sup> “Zhengxian Changchunzhen di shi'er bao cheng.”

<sup>54</sup> “Cheng wei gongyou dizu gai zheng shiwu buying zengjia...” [Petition that the change of rent on state-owned land to payment in kind should not be increased...], July 19, 1948, file *jiu* 17-021-005, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

wall, three whole *jia* units (甲) were displaced to dig a defensive trench and bolster the rampart.<sup>55</sup> As for finance, although Zhengzhou's City Defense Committee (城防委員會 Chengfang weiyuanhui) received a loan of 400 million yuan from the central government for the autumn 1947 work, most of the budget was raised locally through ad hoc levies (攤派 *tanpai*).<sup>56</sup> Zhengzhou's businesses faced a hefty burden amounting to four billion yuan; those who did not pay up promptly were arrested and held in custody.<sup>57</sup> But as the local newspaper pointed out, the heaviest burden was on the labor force: "when the ordinary people (老百姓 *laobaixing*) made the city defenses, the price in sweat and in death and injuries, was more than a hundred times the burden that the businesspeople had to bear."<sup>58</sup> The workforce was requisitioned under corvée labor laws by the District Commissioner Office from Zhengzhou and nearby villages. Anyone

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<sup>55</sup> "Zhengxian Changchunzhen di shiliu bao chengwen" [A petition from *bao* no. 16 of Changchun town, Zheng county], August 9, 1948, file *jiu*, 17-001-084, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive; on the city rampart, see "Qiancheng Changchunzhen di jiu bao" [A petition from *bao* no. 9 of Changchun town], August 7, 1948, file *jiu*, 17-001-074, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive. Zhengzhou was divided into three "towns" (*zhen*) for administrative purposes.

<sup>56</sup> "Tan dian Zhengzhou chengfang gongshi daikuan si yi yuan zhunbei an" [Preparation of transfer of 400 million yuan loan for Zhengzhou city defense fortification], November 21, 1947, file *jiu* 10-032-019, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive; "Zhengzhou zunshou xianjin chongzuo zengqiang chengfang" [Zhengzhou offer birthday congratulations by contributing 9 billion yuan to strengthen city defenses], *Shenbao*, November 2, 1947. The birthday in question was Chiang Kai-shek's 60<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> "Chengfang gongshi ji xingong" [City defense construction work is about to begin], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 7, 1947.

<sup>58</sup> "Zhengzhou fengguang" [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 22, 1948.

loitering in the city, especially around the railway station, was pressganged into service.<sup>59</sup> Yet strikingly, and indicative of a city under pressure, the resources of Zhengzhou still proved insufficient: “human strength has its limits, and the people are so poor, that we haven’t been able to finish the work.” Corvée laborers from five neighboring counties were brought in to complete the city defenses.<sup>60</sup>

As well as the sheer scale of the state’s demands, the processes and inequalities of the burden damaged relations between the authorities and Zhengzhou residents. The Chamber of Commerce allotment of levies on Zhengzhou’s businesses led to a storm of protest and some revision of quotas.<sup>61</sup> Residents displaced by the expansion of Zhengzhou’s airfield did not receive land tax relief, and the promised cash compensation was both slow in coming and much reduced by inflation.<sup>62</sup> And while *Zhengzhou Daily* dutifully put a positive spin on the city defense works, its small column of local rumor and popular opinion noted that “the staff of the requisitioning

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<sup>59</sup> “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou” [Discussing Zhengzhou in the flames of war on the Central Plains], *Shibao* (Xi’an), June 7, 1948.

<sup>60</sup> “Weiwen chengfang gongshi mingong” [Saluting the laborers on the city defense works], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 29, 1947.

<sup>61</sup> “Zheng shanghui tiaozheng shangye dankuan fenshu” [Zhengzhou Chamber of Commerce adjusts allotments of the tax burden on commerce], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 21, 1947.

<sup>62</sup> “Mindi biancheng jichang; wei de dijia, reng naliang ” [People’s land becomes airfield; they haven’t received the land prices and are still paying taxes in kind], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 18, 1947.

office have been unfriendly, and have caused a lot of people to feel dissatisfied.”<sup>63</sup>

It cannot have helped that requisitioning for city defenses coincided with a corruption scandal in the Zhengzhou tax office, where levies on cotton and medicine dealers were being embezzled by a senior staff member. Corruption was not at the root of the state’s difficulties, but in view of other demands on residents was a serious blow to public opinion, as one Mr. Liu Xingsan (or Shengsan, 劉省三, dates unknown) wrote to explain to *Zhengzhou Daily*: “here in Zhengzhou the people are so impoverished, and because the tax income doesn’t equal local expenditures, the agricultural and commercial levies now have additional fees which are squeezing the people into a state of emaciation. So we the masses must appeal for an end to this corruption.”<sup>64</sup>

Liu’s description of residents’ “state of emaciation” was thrown into stark relief by the small number of people reaping handsome profits in the war economy. As one critical Xi’an newspaper pointed out, the Civil War period in Zhengzhou was quite literally a golden age for those with power in the sex, drug and gambling industries, but the profits were spirited out of the city by air to Hankou or Shanghai. Zhengzhou commerce was marked by murky connections between politics, business, and secret society *tang* networks.<sup>65</sup> Patronage networks and rivalries occasionally burst to the surface, as when Chen Yaolong (陳耀龍 d. 1950), head of

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<sup>63</sup> “Zhengzhou fengguang” [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, November 7, 1947.

<sup>64</sup> “Zheng jizhengchu tanwu’an” [Corruption case at the Zhengzhou Inspection and Requisitioning Office], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 26, 1947. See also “Shuijuanchu tanwu duzhi” [Corruption in the tax and levy office shows dereliction of duty], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 25, 1947.

<sup>65</sup> “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), June 7, 1948.

the Trade Union Committee and prominent Green Gang (青幫 *Qingbang*) member, was arrested for involvement in the drugs trade. Pro- and anti-Chen factions mobilized across the city to urge his release or punishment.<sup>66</sup> For those not involved in this powerful underworld, Zhengzhou was a place to keep a low profile: “there is always a risk of being beaten up or of a hand grenade going off, so when people are not at work they are better off just staying at home. If they do venture out into the streets, everywhere there is just endless sand, soldiers, and the so-called ‘city tigers’ (市虎 *shihu*) – cars which tear to and fro at a deadly speed.”<sup>67</sup>

These inequalities and tensions underline the sense that the goals and actions of the Nationalist state were narrowing, that in its desperation it had become simply defensive of institutional interests, using local resources for its own survival. Tension over housing provides one example. With the surrounding rural area increasingly unsafe, more and more troops and officials were billeted in the city, often staying without compensation.<sup>68</sup> One observer described the tension when Nationalist troops arrived in Zhengzhou:

“The hustle and crowding on the streets had a strained quality. People stopped to

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<sup>66</sup> “Zhengzhou ‘yitiaolong’ zai Bian yin du an jiu dai” [A Zhengzhou ‘dragon’ arrested in Kaifeng for drugs case], *Shenbao*, August 24, 1947. Chen survived this episode, just as he had survived Japanese occupation, but was executed by the CCP in November 1950. See Chen Xiaokong, “Qingbang touzi Shang Zigan, Chen Yaolong fufa ji” [A record of the execution of Green Gang bosses Shang Zigan and Chen Yaolong], *Zhengzhou Wenshi Ziliao*, no. 8 (1990): 83-88.

<sup>67</sup> “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), June 7, 1948.

<sup>68</sup> “Li Yiping zhiwen sandian” [Li Yiping raises three questions], *Zhengzhou ribao*, October 29, 1947; “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), June 7, 1948.



stare at the strangers, and then turned and went hurriedly on their own ways. Even late at night, the air of the city was not quiet, for everywhere could be heard the incessant knocking on doors of the soldiers as they made their house-to-house examinations or searched for lodging for those arriving late.”<sup>69</sup>

As well as soldiers, the arrival of displaced civilian officials added to the burdens of ordinary residents. As they poured in from all over the war-torn province in summer 1948, one newspaper quipped that Zhengzhou had “more officials than ordinary people.”<sup>70</sup> Kong Fanmao of *bao* No. 16 complained that 30% of houses in his neighborhood had either been occupied by the authorities or were housing the dependents of military officers.<sup>71</sup> Nor was it clear the proliferation of officials and offices provided anything in return for the city housing them. “Zhengzhou has some government organs,” *Zhengzhou Daily* suggested, “which hang up their name plates for no purpose, and which don’t often do anything.”<sup>72</sup>

It is not clear whether these inequalities, corruption scandals and inefficiencies made a real difference to the fate of the Nationalist state; even without them the burdens of full-scale war may well have broken relations between state and society. What is clear is that they added to the alienation of ordinary Zhengzhou residents from the authorities. Lacking the appetite and

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<sup>69</sup> “Special Correspondent: Nightmare in Chengchow.”

<sup>70</sup> “Zhengzhou cheng guan duoyu min” [Zhengzhou city has more officials than civilians], *Wulongwang* (Guangzhou), July 27, 1948.

<sup>71</sup> “Zhengxian Changchun zhen di shiliu bao chengwen.”

<sup>72</sup> “Zhengzhou fengguang” [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, September 10, 1947.

perhaps the discipline for a full-scale reign of terror, but unable to devolve power to society without risking complete collapse, the state in Zhengzhou could only continue the messy and unpopular expropriation of the city's dwindling resources. It had little to offer in return. As the next section explores, by 1948 the ambitious post-war Nationalist local state was doing little more than trying to preserve its own existence: it had become what we might call a "state-for-itself," driven by fragmented institutional interest and protection of its own employees above any wider social goals.

### <A> Summer 1948 and the end of Nationalist rule

By the summer of 1948, Zhengzhou was a city under strain, with little sign of the curious normality of civilian life reported from the Nationalists' last days in Beijing.<sup>73</sup> A visiting journalist reported that Zhengzhou was sizzling in the "scorching sunlight" (火傘高張 *huosan gaozhang*), with wells and streams running dry.<sup>74</sup> Roads and railways were almost completely cut off by PLA forces, and the diminishing areas under Nationalist control faced growing demands on their resources – indeed, Zhengzhou was reckoned to face the largest tax burdens in the whole province.<sup>75</sup> Surviving written protests describe appalling living conditions and plead for relief from escalating tax levies, giving the sense of an urban society with little left to give.<sup>76</sup> The impoverished population of *bao* no. 6, including many refugees, was in no position to

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<sup>73</sup> Note Yick, *Making Urban Revolution*, 175-176.

<sup>74</sup> "Lengyan wang Bian Zheng" [A detached look at Kaifeng and Zhengzhou], *Shibao* (Xi'an), July 27, 1948.

<sup>75</sup> "Zhengzhou fengguang" [Zhengzhou scenes], *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 22, 1948.

<sup>76</sup> "Zhengxian Changchunzhen di shi'er bao cheng" [A petition from *bao* no. 12, Changchun town, Zheng county], August 8, 1948, file *jiu* 17-001-080, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

contribute anything: “when it comes to raising levies from the people living here,” warned *bao* head Li Dengyu (李登餘, dates unknown), “there are a whole host of difficulties.”<sup>77</sup>

These difficulties were writ large on the battlefields across the region. The Nationalist effort to mobilize for total war had been unable to prevent the deterioration of their military position. In spring and summer 1948, Liu Bocheng’s forces (newly-reorganized as the Central Plains Field Army, 中原野戰軍 Zhongyuan yezhanjun) shifted their focus away from the Dabie Mountains and back to the plains of Henan. On 5 April, Luoyang (洛陽), 75 miles to the west of Zhengzhou, became the first major center south of the Yellow River to fall to CCP forces. Zhengzhou was on high alert, and the military authorities imposed a 7pm curfew.<sup>78</sup> On 18 June, the provincial capital at Kaifeng also fell, and the remnants of the provincial government fled to Zhengzhou in disarray. Local official Wang Yongchuan, now in charge of the Nationalist Party in the city, sent a piteous report to Nanjing: “the party, the government, the military and education have all collapsed in Henan, and the officials are scattered all over the place (四下星散 *sixia xingsan*).”<sup>79</sup> Nationalist power structures on the Central Plains seemed on the brink of obliteration.

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<sup>77</sup> “Zhengxian Changchunzhen di liu bao cheng” [A petition from *bao* no. 6, Changchun town, Zheng county], August 8, 1948, file *jiu* 17-001-082, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

<sup>78</sup> “Zhengzhou waiwei dajun yunji” [Massive forces assemble in the surroundings of Zhengzhou], *Shenbao*, April 10, 1948. For a useful summary account, see Xue Qingchao, “Guo Gong liangdang zhulu Zhongyuan zhanchang” [“Battlefields of the Nationalist and Communist Parties ‘chasing deer on the Central Plains’” (i.e., vying for power)], *Dangshi Bolan* 7 (2012): 30-35.

<sup>79</sup> Wang, “1945 nian zhi 1948 nian Zhengzhou jianwen,” 119.

In the event, Nationalist forces gained a short reprieve. Chiang Kai-shek himself flew into Zhengzhou to organize the recapture of Kaifeng, and after a costly counter-attack PLA troops pulled out on 25 June.<sup>80</sup> But this was a pyrrhic victory: Communist forces were still assembled on all sides, and by the end of June almost every county seat in Henan had fallen. A month later, Zheng County itself was slipping out of Nationalist control, with the military only able to requisition from three and a half of the six rural townships. While not quite facing the tight sieges of Taiyuan and Changchun, Zhengzhou was under effective PLA blockade and food prices rose rapidly, jumping several times over the course of a single day's trading.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, tensions over coercion and requisitioning reached new heights. While in some cities the Nationalist authorities lost effective control well before the PLA arrived – Ezra Vogel describes their last few months in Guangzhou as a “government of empty decrees” – this does not seem to have been the case in Zhengzhou.<sup>82</sup> Instead, the authorities kept a tight rein until the final days, imposing further emergency levies and corvée labor duties on all able-bodied residents, including illegal pressganging for military service.<sup>83</sup> Efforts to raise further funds met with strong protest from the civilians of the *Canyihui*: “At this time when the people's strength is

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<sup>80</sup> On the re-taking of Kaifeng, see Zhengzhou shi dang'anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang*, 63.

<sup>81</sup> “Lengyan wang Bian Zheng,” *Shibao* (Xi'an), July 27, 1948; Mark M. Lu, “From Kaifeng to Chengchow,” *China Weekly Review*, August 21, 1948, 329.

<sup>82</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 36.

<sup>83</sup> “Wei zhengqu minxin dongyuan renli bude qiangla zhuangding” [To win over the people's hearts and mobilize manpower, do not forcibly pressgang able-bodied men], *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 19, 1948.

exhausted and material resources are weak... the military units, whether the people have anything or not, are forcing further demands on them, [and] this not only brings great damage to the people, but it can also easily cause serious bad feeling in civilian-military relations.”<sup>84</sup> In suburban villages, it was reported, Nationalist troops were simply seizing food and firewood at gunpoint, and inhabitants were unable to leave without showing ID certificates at military checkpoints.<sup>85</sup> The ongoing militarization of Zhengzhou now reached young people, with over a thousand students corralled into attending a political-military training camp between mid-July and mid-August 1948, in preparation for the anticipated final stand.<sup>86</sup> In mid-September the army and city police together arrested several thousand people in the city who had attracted their suspicion or who did not have the right papers.<sup>87</sup>

It was also in September, though, that several key shifts ended the suspended animation of the long summer. On the fifth of the month, Liu Bocheng ordered the “total liberation of the Central Plains” (全部解放中原 *quanbu jiefang Zhongyuan*), as part of the PLA effort to prevent Nationalist forces consolidating a defensive line along the Huai River.<sup>88</sup> A few days later, an

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<sup>84</sup> “Chengfang gongshi xuyong caiwu” [City defense works need further materials], *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 25, 1948.

<sup>85</sup> “Xiwang bushi shishi” [We hope it isn’t true], *Zhengzhou ribao*, May 24, 1948; Lu, “From Kaifeng to Chengchow”; see also “Lengyan wang Bian Zheng,” *Shibao* (Xi’an), July 27, 1948.

<sup>86</sup> Wang, “1945 nian zhi 1948 nian Zhengzhou jianwen,” 113-114.

<sup>87</sup> Zhengzhou shi dang’anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang*, 36; for a sample arrest for “unclear *hukou*” (*hukou buqing*), see file *jiu* 17-002-032, September 8, 1948, Zhengzhou Municipal Archive.

<sup>88</sup> Zhengzhou shi dang’anguan ed., *Zhengzhou jiefang*, 64.

enlarged meeting of the CCP Politburo called for a shift in focus from rural areas to the takeover and governing of cities. On 24 September, Jinan, provincial capital of neighboring Shandong, fell to the PLA's East China Field Army. These advances changed the strategic calculations of Nationalist generals. While observers in the summer of 1948 had declared that they were preparing to “defend Zhengzhou to the death” (死守鄭州 *sishou Zhengzhou*), further defeats in North China shifted the emphasis of the struggle eastwards and reduced Zhengzhou's strategic importance.<sup>89</sup> In an effort to defend the route south into the Huai River plains and towards the Lower Yangzi, Zhengzhou's crack Nationalist troops of the 16<sup>th</sup> Army under General Sun Yuanliang (孫元良 1904-2007) transferred east towards Xuzhou.<sup>90</sup> Li Zhenqing was left to defend the city with a motley remnant of the 40<sup>th</sup> Army, comprised chiefly of local units which had fought variously under the banners of Feng Yuxiang, Chiang Kai-shek, and in some cases wartime collaborators.<sup>91</sup>

This maneuver of the main force away from Zhengzhou soon became what one Nanjing newspaper called an “open secret” (公开的秘密 *gongkai de mimi*), and sparked an exodus from the city to the east and south.<sup>92</sup> One eyewitness described the scene as Communist forces

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<sup>89</sup> “Zhongyuan fenghuo hua Zhengzhou,” *Shibao* (Xi'an), June 7, 1948.

<sup>90</sup> Zhang Liaoqie, “Bian Zheng cheshou qianhou” [The retreat from the defense of Kaifeng and Zhengzhou from beginning to end], *Shiji pinglun* 4, No. 19 (Nov. 1948): 8 and 13.

<sup>91</sup> See Zhao Guangyu, “Zhengzhou ‘jiefang’ hou de zhenxiang” [The real situation in Zhengzhou after ‘liberation’], *Zhongguo xinwen* (Nanjing), December 16, 1948.

<sup>92</sup> Zhang, “Bian Zheng cheshou qianhou.”

approached the city: “Zhengzhou was in total chaos, the big streets and the small lanes were all packed with people fleeing... both inside and outside the railway station was absolutely covered in people, you couldn’t even see the streets – ordinary people, officials, soldiers, the dependents of soldiers, with their baggage piled high resembling ‘disorderly burial mounds’” (*luan zangfen* 亂葬墳).<sup>93</sup> The provincial government decided to evacuate Kaifeng on 9 October, and most civil officials in Zhengzhou pulled out a few days later.<sup>94</sup> The tight control of the city finally relaxed: one observer noted that in the very last days of Nationalist rule in mid-October, “the official organs did not have the forbidding/strict atmosphere of previous days, and even the sentries had abandoned their posts.”<sup>95</sup>

The fall of Zhengzhou was only a matter of time. On 11 October, Mao Zedong approved the takeover of all towns along the Long-Hai railroad, and two days later PLA field commanders met to plan the attack on Zhengzhou.<sup>96</sup> By 21 October three columns were in position for a final assault from the northeast, southeast and due south. In the early hours of the following morning, PLA troops advanced into the northeast corner of the city. Rather than fight a hopeless battle, Li Zhenqing abandoned the city. His units headed north, in an effort to join up with Nationalist

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<sup>93</sup> Yong Mu, “Gege cong Zhengzhou lai” [My older brother came from Zhengzhou], *Daxue pinglun* 2, no. 7 (1948): 10-11.

<sup>94</sup> Shou Mei, “Kaifeng mori jixiang” [A detailed record of the last days of Kaifeng], *Shiji pinglun*, 4, No. 19 (Nov. 1948): 11-12.

<sup>95</sup> Yong, “Gege cong Zhengzhou lai.”

<sup>96</sup> Xue, “Guo Gong liangdang zhulu Zhongyuan zhanchang,” 35.

forces across the Yellow River, but were wiped out in several afternoon skirmishes along the river banks.<sup>97</sup>

Meanwhile, Zhengzhou's residents emerged cautiously onto the streets on the morning of 22 October to find the newspapers carrying Li Zhenqing's exhortatory message: "resolutely defend Zhengzhou, deal a head-on blow to the invading Communist bandits."<sup>98</sup> Instead, PLA troops were marching into the city, in a movement so unobtrusive that some residents later recalled – albeit in a trope of CCP takeover that we might take with a pinch of salt – that they had mistaken the arriving units for Nationalist reinforcements.<sup>99</sup> Even Nationalist officials acknowledged the relief of residents: Yang Zhenxing (楊振興, dates unknown), a cadre who hid in the city for several days, admitted that "in the people's hearts, they feared a ferocious assault on the city... From the viewpoint of the state, to abandon Zhengzhou without extracting any kind of price for it really is a shame; but from the viewpoint of citizens, in that there was no damage to life or property, it can be counted extremely fortunate (算萬幸 *suan wanxing*)."<sup>100</sup> Given the devastation of cities where Nationalist forces struggled to the bitter end, it is indeed fortunate that Zhengzhou's feverish militarization in 1948 ended in such a whimper.

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<sup>97</sup> Zhao, "Zhengzhou 'jiefang' hou de zhenxiang"; Mark M. Lu, "The Fall of Chengchow," *China Weekly Review*, January 15, 1949, 165.

<sup>98</sup> Zhao, "Zhengzhou 'jiefang' hou de zhenxiang."

<sup>99</sup> Keng, "Beiping: Zhengzhou di er?", 15.

<sup>100</sup> Yang Zhenxing, "Zhengzhou tuoxian ji" [A record of an escape from Zhengzhou], *Pinghan lu kan*, published across nos. 111 and 112 (Dec. 1948): 2.



### <A> Conclusion: state and society at war

If the relatively peaceful takeover of Zhengzhou came as a relief for most residents, what was its larger place in China's Civil War? On the Communist side, if Zhengzhou's capture was not quite the strategic fillip it might once have been, this was because the fate of Henan Province had already been sealed. Attention instead switched to China's other key railroad junction of Xuzhou, where the massive Huaihai campaign began just two weeks after the fall of Zhengzhou. On the Nationalist side, though, the loss of Zhengzhou became a lesson in what *not* to do: a deteriorating relationship with city residents followed by the loss of retreating forces in a botched withdrawal. By the end of 1948, Beiping, as the pro-peace magazine *Zongheng* (縱橫) put it, was itself at risk of becoming a "second Zhengzhou," neither abandoned without losses nor defended at great cost to the enemy. Only Fu Zuoyi's negotiated surrender in late January 1949 foreclosed this scenario.<sup>101</sup>

For historians, Civil War Zhengzhou provides several important pointers for our understanding of the end of Nationalist rule. For all the rehabilitation of the post-1927 Nationalist state, some of the old accusations against the regime are accurate, at least from summer 1947 onwards. In Zhengzhou, this was when post-war optimism gave way to the military authority, heavy and erratic taxation, and lack of public provision that were once used to describe the whole period of Nationalist rule.<sup>102</sup> At least from Zhengzhou, it is hard to prove that

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<sup>101</sup> Keng, "Beiping: Zhengzhou di er?", 15.

<sup>102</sup> See, most prominently, Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1974) and *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984). They may also have been accurate during the

civilian protest significantly weakened the Nationalist ability to field large forces in North China in the battles of 1948. But the slow grind of mobilization was weakening the will and ability of civilians to expend resources on a Civil War that, unlike the War of Resistance, looked like a struggle to protect only the Nationalist state, not the Chinese nation.

The authorities in Zhengzhou seem to have handled this crisis both incompetently and insensitively, but there is more going on here than local ineptitude. Once full-scale civil war had begun, it is hard to see how the Nationalist state could have avoided the tensions and alienation in their second coercive mobilization of society in a single decade, particularly in a province that had suffered so grievously during the War of Resistance. It did not have the appetite for wholesale systems of terror, and by 1947-48 lacked the ability to provide the grassroots services which might otherwise have galvanized support. The Communist Party offered something of both. In that sense, the sudden abandonment of Zhengzhou in the early hours of October 22, 1948 is symbolic of a state that could still stand and fight in the military sphere, but whose political instincts were turning to flight. To answer one of the enduring questions of China's Civil War, what had begun as a Communist conquest of North China was by the summer of 1948 turning into a Nationalist collapse.<sup>103</sup>

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state collapse of 1942-44 in Henan, but on that occasion Japanese defeat had given Nationalist rule a second chance.

<sup>103</sup> Witness Pichon P. Y. Loh, ed., *The Kuomintang Debacle of 1949: Collapse or Conquest?* (Boston: Heath, 1965).