

*Into the Northwest:*

*Society, economy and environment in the Hetao Area (1820-1949)*

Since the Qianlong period of Qing Dynasty, triggered by sustained population growth in North China, large numbers of landless Han peasants had broken through the Qing authorities' blockade and moved into the Hetao-Tumochuan flatlands to reclaim the grassland illegally. The land contracts signed between the peasants and the local Mongolian lords were not recognized by the Qing government. In the end, both sides of the contracts pursued the maximization of the short-term benefit from the land development, which led to large-scale deforestation and environmental change in the Hetao area. Due to the deterioration of the natural vegetation, the process of land desertification increased rapidly. The Yellow River, the basis of Hetao's irrigation system, became a severe problem because of the increasing amount of silt stored in the riverbed, which caused the riverbed to rise and turned it into a "hanging river" with serious flooding downstream. In consequence, the river changed its course its course in 1850(道光 30 年).

The new Yellow River poured into the flood land, which was more suitable for cultivation and attracted many Han immigrants. With the increase in population, the merchant class also grew rapidly and gained

control over the Hetao region.

After the fall of the stable merchant society due to the intervention of Qing officials at the end of the 19th century, the canal's silt storage and land desertification posed the area's most serious problems for more than 20 years, until the Shanxi warlord Yan Xishan(阎锡山) seized power over the entire area. After 1930, the presence of military junta and troops calmed the local situation, and the modern irrigation system was built, marking the turning point of Hetao's new development.

Businessmen, Manchurian government officials and the military had different understandings of the environmental problems. Also, the strategies for handling the environmental degradation often led to short term changes in the local economy. Han merchants, peasants, Mongolian elites, herders, Manchurian officials and the military established a local network in Hetao. By analyzing their relationships and the interaction between various groups within Hetao's society and their impact on economy and nature, the project aims to shed light on the development policies in Hetao and the environmental degradation as collateral damage due to the fast development of this remote Chinese region.

## 挺进西北：河套地区的社会、经济与环境（1820-1949）

清乾隆以来，由于华北地区人口的持续增长，大量失地少地的汉族农民突破清朝当局的封锁进入漠南蒙古游牧的河套——土默川平原地区进行非法垦荒。由于农民和蒙古领主所签订的土地协议是未经清政府承认的，因而契约的双方都简单的追求收益最大化，并导致了大量的滥砍滥伐和无序开垦。由于自然植被的退化，当地土地沙化进程加快。使得作为河套灌溉基础的黄河出现了严重的问题，即含沙量的上升。这导致了泥沙在河床的淤积和洪水的泛滥，并最终造成了道光三十年河套黄河的改道。

黄河的改道，使受洪水冲击的土地更加适宜耕作，并吸引了更多的汉族移民。随着汉族移民人口的增加，商人阶层迅速崛起，并对该地区产生了重大的影响——商人成为控制河套的实际统治者。

由于清帝国在十九世纪末的干预，稳定的商人社会崩溃了，运河淤塞、土地荒弃成为 20 余年来当地最严重的问题，直至山西军阀阎锡山控制了整个区域。20 世纪 30 年代之后，随着军政府及军队的入驻，当地局势稳定下来，现代化水利设施得以兴建，标志着河套发展新阶段的到来。

自清末以来，河套社会在其发展过程中经历了不同的阶段，商人、满洲政府官员、军方对当地环境有着不同的理解，而且解决环境退化问题的不同思路使得当地经济发展在短期内出现了多次改变。汉族商人、农民、蒙古精英、牧民、满洲官员、军人构成了河套的本地关系网，我们通过分析他们之间的相互关系，及他们与整个社会、

自然环境间的互动，试图了解河套的开发政策以及这个中国边缘地区快速发展过程所附带的环境退化问题。