

**THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION CHANGE IN
SICHUAN DURING THE EARLY QING DYNASTY
(1644-1735)**

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by

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PERUBAHAN PEMBAHAGIAN PENTADBIRAN DI SICHUAN SEMASA DINASTI QING AWAL (1644-1735)

ABSTRAK

Dari tahun 1644 hingga 1735, Sichuan mengalami perubahan sosial, ekonomi, politik dan demografi yang paling ketara dalam sejarah awal pemerintahan Dinasti Qing (1644–1911). Dinamika perubahan ini membentuk asas penting kepada perubahan pembahagian pentadbiran di Sichuan seperti yang dikenali pada hari ini. Kajian ini memberi penekanan khusus terhadap faktor sosioekonomi dan politik dalam mencorakkan perubahan tersebut. Dari sudut geografi, bentuk muka bumi Sichuan yang kompleks dan strategik menjadi antara pertimbangan utama dalam pembentukan dasar pentadbiran Qing. Natijanya, terbentuklah model pentadbiran “Quanya Jiaocuo” (Saling bersilang bak gigi taring) yang merentas wilayah, sebagai strategi mengukuhkan penguasaan pemerintahan pusat terhadap kawasan pedalaman yang sukar dikuasai. Dari segi metodologi, kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan penyelidikan dokumentasi dengan memanfaatkan pelbagai sumber sejarah termasuk data demografi, maklumat sosioekonomi, serta rekod-rekod rasmi, sejarah tempatan dan dokumen arkib dari era Dinasti Qing. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pemberontakan yang tercetus di kawasan sempadan menjadi pencetus utama kepada ketidakstabilan politik, yang akhirnya memaksa pihak pemerintah menyesuaikan semula sempadan wilayah demi menjamin keselamatan dan kestabilan jangka panjang. Justeru, kajian ini bukan sahaja memperkayakan khazanah pemahaman terhadap strategi pentadbiran Dinasti Qing, malah turut menyumbang kepada wacana sejarah yang lebih mendalam tentang evolusi Sichuan dalam konteks pemerintahan awal China moden.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION CHANGE IN SICHUAN DURING THE EARLY QING DYNASTY (1644-1735)

ABSTRACT

From 1644 to 1735, the province of Sichuan underwent significant socio-economic, political, and demographic transformations, marking one of the most profound shifts in the early history of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). These dynamic changes laid a crucial foundation for the administrative division change of modern-day Sichuan. The study places particular emphasis on the role of socio-economic and political factors in shaping these transformations. From a geographical perspective, Sichuan's complex and strategic terrain emerged as a key consideration in the formulation of Qing administrative policies. As a result, a cross-regional governance model known as “Quanya Jiaocuo” (interlocking like canine teeth) was implemented as a strategy to strengthen central authority over the remote and difficult-to-control frontier regions. In terms of methodology, the study adopts a comprehensive documentary analysis approach, drawing extensively on a wide array of authoritative historical sources, including demographic data, socio-economic records, official documents, local histories, and archival materials from the Qing era. The findings reveal that rebellions along the frontier zones were a primary trigger of political instability, which ultimately compelled the Qing administration to reconfigure regional boundaries in pursuit of long-term security and stability. Thus, the study not only enriches scholarly understanding of Qing administrative strategies but also contributes meaningfully to the historical discourse on the evolution of Sichuan within the broader context of early modern Chinese governance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Administrative divisions are an important part of the local governance system. The adjustment of administrative divisions is closely related to factors such as the social environment, economic situation, and political situation. This research discusses the impact of social, economic, and political factors on the changes in the administrative divisions of Sichuan province during the period from 1644 to 1735 by analysing its social, economic, and political situation. It recreates the process of administrative division changes in Sichuan during this period.

Between 1644 and 1681, Sichuan province was affected by uprisings, natural disasters, and other factors; causing massive deaths, the destruction of cities, and the inability of local governments to effectively govern. However, after 1681, Sichuan entered a long period of peace. The Qing central government¹ implemented policies such as migration, tax reduction, and agricultural development, which allowed the population of Sichuan to recover and the social economy to revive, resulting in an increase in administrative affairs for local governments. Socioeconomic changes had an impact on the adjustment of the county-level administrative divisions in Sichuan between 1682 and 1735. This is the focus of this research. Moreover, “Sanfan Zhiluan (The Revolt of the Three Feudatories) 三藩之乱”² and the “Tusi (Administrators of

¹ The “Qing central government” denotes the imperial court and its policymakers. The “Qing Dynasty” refers to the historical period spanning 1644 to 1911.

² Sanfan Zhiluan (The Revolt of the Three Feudatories) 三藩之乱 refers to the military uprising against the central government of the Qing Dynasty initiated by Wu Sangui, Shang Kexi, and Geng Jingzhong. The uprising broke out in 1673 and lasted 8 years, ending in 1681. It affected many provinces such as Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. The uprising impacted the Qing government's dominance and socio-economic development.

Native Districts) 土司”³ rebellion caused political turmoil in the southwestern region, including Sichuan. In response, the Qing central government incorporated the junction of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces under its direct jurisdiction through administrative reforms, and strengthened its political and military control over the three provinces by adjusting their provincial borders. Adjusting the administrative divisions enhanced the management efficiency of local governments and as well as promoted and consolidated the power of the Qing central government.

This chapter will explain the literature review, objectives, methods, and significance of the entire study.

1.2 Definition of Administrative Division

In terms of textual representation, in this research, administrative divisions are the division of administrative regions into different levels by the state. The elements of the administrative division include level, size, boundary, shape, and geographical location, of which hierarchy, size, and boundary are central. Besides, this research adopts the viewpoints of Zhou Zhenhe, a prominent Chinese scholar, on the levels of administrative division which can be divided into a three-tier system, namely “county-level administrative divisions 县级政区”, “unified county administrative divisions 统县政区”, and “high-level administrative divisions 高层政区”.⁴ In China’s

³ “Tusi 土司” is a hereditary official position held by the leaders of ethnic minorities. The “Tusi System” is a special system of central government rule over ethnic minority areas. The main element of the Tusi System is that the central government appoints local minority leaders as hereditary magistrates. The local minority leaders were called “Tusi”. “Tusi” were appointed by the central government and paid taxes or tributes to it, but they retained their traditional governing institutions and powers within their jurisdictions. “Tusi” often fought each other for territory, which affected political stability. In this research “Tusi” of somewhere refer to the local minority leaders of this place, such as Tusi of Wusa.

⁴ For further details, please refer to Zhou Zhenhe, “Xingzheng Quhuashi Yanjiu de Jiben Gainian yu Xueshu Yongyu Chuyi (Some Fundamental Conceptions and Terms in Research on Administrative Division) 行政区划史研究的基本概念与学术用语刍议,” *Fudan Journal Social Sciences Edition* no. 3 (May 2001): p. 32, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: FDDX.0.2001-03-005>.

administrative division system, “county-level administrative divisions” are the most stable. Among the local officials appointed by emperors in ancient China, the lowest level was the “county-level administrative divisions”. In the administrative division system set up by the central government, county-level administrative divisions are governed by unified county administrative divisions, which are governed by high-level administrative divisions. Appendix A shows the historical administrative divisions in China.⁵

At the end of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Sichuan province administered 8 prefectures and 111 counties. When the Qing central government was first established, the administrative divisions of the Ming dynasty continued to be used to administer Sichuan province. Charles Hucker pointed out that the Manchus (Qing central government) perpetuated the Ming division of China into provinces. The basic units of local administration were prefectures, independent subprefectures, independent departments, and districts (counties).⁶ Figure 1.1 outlines the administrative division of Sichuan province under the Qing central government.

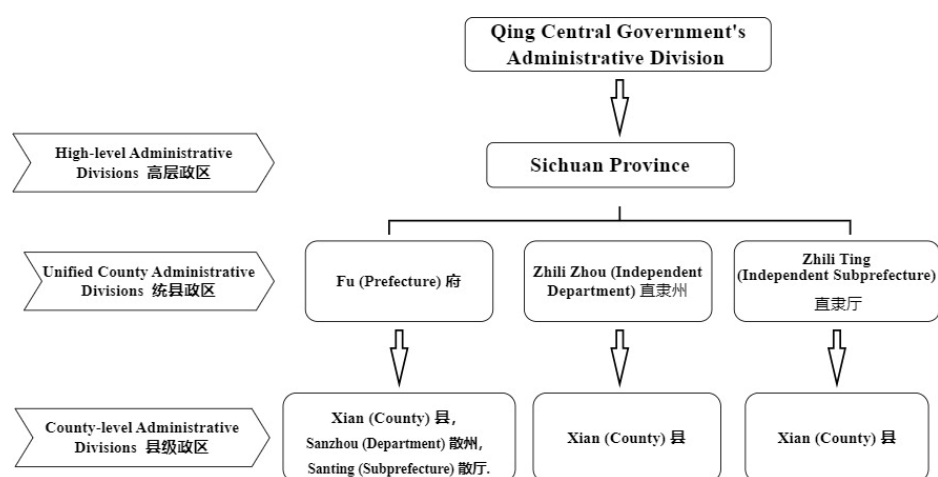


Figure 1.1 Sichuan’s Administrative Division During the Qing Dynasty

⁵ For further details, please refer to Appendix A, titled “Historical Administrative Divisions in China” on page 263.

⁶ Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (California: Stanford University Press, 1985), pp. 88-89.

Adapted From:

Zhou Zhenhe, *Tiguo Jingye Zhidao (Strategy for Governing the Country)* 体国经野之道 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2019), p. 41.

The Qing central government was the decision-maker of the administrative division reform and represented the supreme authority of the Qing dynasty. The Qing central government established policies, implemented administrative divisions, and oversaw local governance across the empire, including Sichuan province. Qu Tongzu believed that all administrative divisions, including provinces, prefectures, and counties, were established and designed by the Qing central government. The central government not only funded these divisions but also appointed their officials and oversaw their operations through direct supervision.⁷ Decisions to change administrative divisions can be found in official Qing historical documents such as “Qing Shilu (The Veritable Record of the Qing Dynasty)”.

High-level administrative divisions represent the highest tier of local government in Sichuan province. Charles Hucker noted that the term “province” serves as a generic designation for the higher units of territorial administration under the central government.⁸ Province is directly accountable to the central government, overseeing administrative matters within their designated jurisdictions. Its primary responsibilities include exercising control over local populations, maintaining political and economic stability, and ensuring adherence to central directives. Sichuan province, in particular, held strategic importance due to its status as a major grain-producing region, contributing significantly to the empire's food security. Besides, its geographical location and resources established it as a vital political and military

⁷ Qu Tongzu, *Qingdai Difang Zhengfu (Local Government in the Qing Dynasty)* 清代地方政府 (Beijing: Law Press China, 2011), p. 5.

⁸ Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p. 420.

stronghold, playing a critical role in safeguarding the central government's interests and extending influence across the region.

Unified county administrative divisions represent the intermediate level of local government in Sichuan province. Prefectures, independent departments, and independent subprefectures are collectively classified as unified county administrative divisions and operate under the authority of the high-level administrative divisions. Charles Hucker stated out prefectures are units of administration coordinating several counties, subordinated to intermediary divisions at the province.⁹ The role of the unified county administrative divisions was to coordinate and oversee multiple counties.¹⁰ It ensures socioeconomic and political stability within its jurisdiction and is responsible for overseeing administrative affairs such as taxation, population, and agriculture.

County-level administrative divisions represent the smallest administrative units of local government in Sichuan, responsible for directly managing the population. It includes the county, department, and subprefecture. Charles Hucker described county-level administrative divisions as the fundamental formal units in the hierarchy of territorial administration. Several neighbouring counties were grouped under the supervision of unified county administrative divisions and were graded based on the size of the resident population or the prestige of their location.¹¹ The county-level administrative divisions mainly undertake administrative affairs such as taxation, household registration management, and litigation.

The aforementioned analysis of the administrative division hierarchy can be used to derive the administrative management process. Adjustments to administrative

⁹ Ibid., 216.

¹⁰ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2013), p. 261.

¹¹ Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, p. 240.

divisions often follow a bottom-up principle, that is, local governments submit opinions or reports on reforms to the central government, which decides to reform. This is supported by numerous historical documents. For instance, when the population of Sichuan increased, the governor of Sichuan submitted a report to the emperor recommending the reconstruction of administrative divisions based on the prevailing conditions in the region. However, the final decision was made by the emperor.

1.3 Literature Review

Generally speaking, as many scholars have indicated Sichuan was the scene of numerous military conflicts between 1644 and 1735, and the province was also afflicted by plagues and natural disasters, which led to fundamental changes in its social, economic, and political situation. Scholars have conducted in-depth research on the origin and development of China's administrative divisions. Scholarly discussions of the social, economic, and political situation of Sichuan province and its administrative divisions are important references for this research. However, scholars have not yet conducted an in-depth analysis of the relationships between social, economic, and political factors and the reform of Sichuan's administrative divisions during this period. Therefore, this research focuses on discussing the relationships between social, economic, and political factors and the changes in Sichuan's administrative divisions.

1.3.1 Scholars' Perspective on Administrative Division

There is extensive discussion among scholars about the entirety of China's administrative division. The scholars have focused on conducting research at the macro level of administrative divisions, but have often neglected to analyse specific

regions and particular periods, such as the Sichuan region from 1644 to 1735. According to Zhou Zhenhe, rulers divided their territories into different areas and established various levels of administration in these different areas to manage their citizens, and these different areas were the different administrative divisions.¹² He also suggested that China's administrative divisions originated in the county system of the Qin dynasty and that since then China's administrative divisions have evolved and changed on this basis.¹³ Zhou Zhenhe is an expert on the study of China's administrative divisions and has conducted detailed research on the definition and historical development of China's administrative divisions. Nevertheless, in his historical research on the administrative divisions of Sichuan during the Qing dynasty, he only showed the changes in Sichuan's administrative divisions through historical documents, without in-depth analysis and argumentation on the causes, quantity, and impact of the changes.

Most general works on China's administrative divisions mainly organise the levels or change process of China's administrative divisions in various dynasties. Similarly, discussions of the Qing dynasty in the general history of China's administrative divisions also focus on organising the change process of the administrative divisions of different provinces. The most representative work is Zhou Zhenhe's "Zhongguo Xingzheng Quhua Tongshi (A General History of the Administrative Divisions of China)". This book studies the historical changes in China's administrative divisions before the Republic of China. Based on historical documents and the available information, this book restores the administrative

¹² Zhou Zhenhe, *Zhongguo Difang Xingzheng Zhidu Shi (History of Local Administrative System in China)* 中国地方行政制度史 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2014), p. 1.

¹³ Zhou Zhenhe, *Tiguo Jingye Zhidao Zhongguo Xingzheng Quhua Yanghe (Administrative Division History of China)* 体国经野之道—中国行政区划沿革 (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2009), p. 7.

divisions of different dynasties in China. The book also points out that the administrative divisions of China have changed greatly over the years, with different changes in level, area, and boundaries at different times.¹⁴ Therefore, this book independently analyses the changes in the administrative divisions of different dynasties. In discussing the administrative divisions of the Qing dynasty, the book also traces the process of administrative division changes in Sichuan. However, the book does not further analyse the reasons for the changes in the administrative divisions of Sichuan during the Qing dynasty.

1.3.2 Relationship Between Social Economy and Administrative Divisions

In terms of the reason for administrative division changes, scholars such as Japanese scholar Yasuki Masui, and Chinese scholar Weng Junxiong, have discussed the impact of uprisings and population size on changes in administrative divisions in different periods or regions. However, these regions do not include Sichuan.

Yasuki Masui, when analysing the policy of administrative division during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, argued the reason for the sharp increase in the number of “Zhili zhou (independent departments) 直隶州” was to increase the central government’s revenue.¹⁵ This dissertation includes the necessary analysis of population and cultivated land area when discussing the impact of the economy on administrative divisions. Similarly, Zhou Zhenhe argued that the change of administrative divisions must comply with relevant laws and take into full account

¹⁴ Zhou Zhenhe and Li Xiaojie, Xianqin Juan (Pre-Qin Dynasty Section) 先秦卷, in *Zhongguo Xingzheng Quhua Tongshi (A General History of the Administrative Divisions of China)* 中国行政区划通史, ed. Zhou Zhenhe (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2017), p.5.

¹⁵ Yasuki Masui, “Yongzheng Nianjian de Zhili Zhou Zhengce (Independent Departments Policy during the Yongzheng Period) 雍正年间的直隶州政策,” *Historical Archives*, no. 3 (September 1995): p. 89, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: LSDA.0.1995-03-013>.

factors such as population density and economic conditions.¹⁶ Weng Junxiong, in analysing the relationship between population and administrative divisions in the early Tang dynasty (618-907), pointed out that population and administrative divisions are inseparable because population growth, decline, and distribution are expressed through regions.¹⁷

When analysing the changes in administrative divisions in Guangxi province during the Qing dynasty, Qiu Xiaogang also believed that Socioeconomic conditions not only reflect people's living conditions but also serve as an important basis for rulers to adjust administrative divisions. For example, too many levels of administrative divisions and fragmented economic regions will affect socioeconomic development. During the Qing dynasty, the administrative divisions of Guangxi province were adjusted many times. These adjustments not only reflected the relationship between the central management authorities and local administrative institutions but also reflected the socioeconomic development and cultural differences in Guangxi.¹⁸ Jiang Junhao showed that, between 1722 and 1735, the Jiangnan region's population growth made it more difficult for the rulers to govern, and the old administrative divisions could no longer effectively manage the region.¹⁹

Simultaneously, John Fitzgerald emphasised that county-level administrative divisions are important administrative divisions. The number of county-level

¹⁶ Zhou Zhenhe, "Xingzheng Quhuashi Yanjiu de Jiben Gainian yu Xueshu Yongyu Chuyi (Some Fundamental Conceptions and Terms in Research on Administrative Division) 行政区划史研究的基本概念与学术用语刍议," p. 32.

¹⁷ Weng Junxiong, *Tangchu Zhengqu yu Renkou (Administrative Divisions and Population in the Early Tang Dynasty) 唐初政区与人口* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 1990), p. 1.

¹⁸ Qiu Xiaogang, "Qingdai Guangxi Zhengqu Bianqian Yanjiu (The Research of the Administrative Regionalization Evolution of Guangxi Province in Qing Dynasty) 清代广西政区变迁研究" (master's thesis, Guangxi University for Nationalities, 2013), p. 60, <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201402&filename=1013247645.nh>.

¹⁹ Jiang Junhao, "Yongzheng Chao Jiangsu Sheng Shengzhou Xixian Yanjiu (Study on Regional Adjustment of Jiangsu Province in Yongzheng Dynasty) 雍正朝江苏省升州析县研究," (master's thesis, Yangzhou University, 2020), p. 13, <https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202401&filename=1023746440.nh>.

administrative divisions is reasonable affects the management efficiency of the central government.²⁰

In sum, scholars agree that socioeconomic conditions are closely related to administrative divisions. For instance, areas with high population density are more difficult to manage, hence administrative divisions need to be divided into smaller units, which leads to an increase in the number of administrative divisions. Nevertheless, the scholars did not discuss the social and economic conditions of Sichuan between 1644 and 1735.

In fact, between 1644 and 1735, Sichuan society went from turmoil to peace, and the Sichuan economy went from decline to prosperity. Take the population of Sichuan as an example. Around 1644, the population of Sichuan province decreased sharply. However, after 1681, the population of Sichuan province increased rapidly again. Thus, to analyse the relationship between Sichuan's society and economy and the adjustment of its administrative divisions, we must first analyse the causes of the social and economic changes that occurred in Sichuan at the time, namely uprising, epidemics, natural disasters, and national policies.

1.3.2(a) Uprising and Disaster Lead to A Decrease in Population

Gu Jiegang and Shi Hainian briefly analysed the impact of the uprising on the population of ancient Chinese dynasties in their book “Zhongguo Jiangyu Yange Shi (History of Changes in the Borders of China)”. They stressed that the uprising was an important cause of population migration and that population migration affected the number of administrative divisions. Concurrently, areas with large populations had more complex administrative affairs and needed to establish more administrative

²⁰ John Fitzgerald, “The Province in History,” in *Rethinking China's Provinces* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2001), p. 16.

divisions. Conversely, areas with small populations did not need to increase administrative divisions.²¹ The book fails to focus on analysing the provincial and local administrative institutions and the Tusi of the Qing dynasty, and there is less discussion of the population and administrative divisions of Sichuan province.

Research results on the Qing dynasty wars in Sichuan often appear in books on the general history of Sichuan, brief histories, and uprising histories. For instance, the book “Sichuan Zhanzheng Shi (History of the Sichuan’s War)” by Ren Zhaokun and Gong Zide discusses the important wars that took place in Sichuan and their impact. The analysis of the uprisings in Sichuan between 1644 and 1735 only focuses on the process and outcome of the establishment of the Xi dynasty (1644-1647) by Zhang Xianzhong as well as the uprising between the “Kuidong Shisan Jia (Anti-Qing Military Forces) 夔东十三家”²² and the Qing army, without further exploring the turmoil caused by the uprising.²³

Sichuan was in a period of turmoil due to the uprising from 1644 to 1681, whereby it faced a population decline due to uprisings and disasters. In some cases, certain counties in Sichuan had a population that was too small to establish state and county offices. Consequently, the rulers had to abolish or merge administrative divisions to improve administrative efficiency. He Yimin acknowledged Sichuan had been devastated by the uprising and natural disasters, its population had almost been

²¹ Gu Jiegang and Shi Hainian, *Zhongguo Jiangyu Yanghe Shi (History of Changes in the Borders of China)* 中国疆域沿革史 (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2015), p. 6.

²² Kuidong Shisan Jia (Anti-Qing Military Forces) 夔东十三家 were anti-Qing military forces in Sichuan, Hubei, Shānxi, and other provinces during the late Ming Dynasty. They were not eliminated until 1664.

²³ In this writing, the terms “uprising” and “war” are used interchangeably, depending on the scale, intensity, and progression of the conflict, reflecting how certain uprisings can escalate into wars or how wars may originate from localised rebellions. However, in the context of Sichuan, most instances of unrest were actually uprisings. Nevertheless, the term “wars” is used in accordance with the descriptions provided by scholars. For the details please refer to Ren Zhaokun and Gong Zide, *Sichuan Zhanzheng Shi (History of the Sichuan’s War)* 四川战争史 (Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 2009).

wiped out, and the Qing dynasty emperors abolished some administrative divisions in Sichuan.²⁴ Nevertheless, he did not further indicate the name and time of the abolition and merger of the administrative divisions of Sichuan.

The subject of the population of Sichuan during the Qing dynasty has always been a topic of interest in academia. Scholars have published a series of influential treatises and papers. However, due to incomplete historical records and inconsistent units of measurement, different scholars have different views on the specific population of Sichuan during the Qing dynasty, and the differences are significant. For example, in the book “Sichuan Renkou Shi (History of Sichuan’s Population)”, Li Shiping discussed the population of Sichuan during important dynasties and in modern times, in chronological order. He stated that Sichuan is a geographically isolated area that is relatively suitable for being classified as a separate administrative division but is also prone to becoming an isolated region.²⁵ He also believed that Sichuan province has experienced many large-scale migrations into the province, while large-scale migrations out of Sichuan are relatively rare. According to his research, the uprising at the end of the Ming dynasty and the beginning of the Qing dynasty led to a significant decrease in the population of Sichuan. After the uprising, it is estimated that only about 500,000 original Sichuanese survived.²⁶

In contrast, Wang Yan and Peng Zhaogui demonstrated in “Qingdai Sichuan Nongcun Shehui Jingji Shi (Social and Economic History of Rural Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty)” that Sichuan province had a population of about 80,000 in 1661 and about

²⁴ He Yimin, “Qingdai Chengshi Shulian de Bianhua ji Yuanyin (Changes in the City Number and Its Reasons in the Qing Dynasty) 清代城市数量的变化及原因,” *Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 8 (August 2014): p. 155, <http://doi: 10.13644/j.cnki.cn31-1112.2014.08.016>.

²⁵ Li Shiping, *Sichuan Renkou Shi (History of Sichuan’s population)* 四川人口史 (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 1987), p. 1.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 155.

90,000 in 1685.²⁷ The reason for the large discrepancy in Sichuan's population is the lack of detailed historical records and inconsistent population calculation standards.²⁸ Although academia has different opinions on the population of Sichuan, it is an indisputable fact that Sichuan's population decreased significantly during this period. Simultaneously, to improve the population situation in Sichuan, the rulers also moved people to Sichuan to quickly increase the population. Once the population of Sichuan increased, they re-established or restored the previous administrative divisions.

1.3.2(b) Migration and Benevolent Policies Promote Population Growth

The subject of migration into Sichuan holds both academic and humanistic significance. Scholars have maintained a strong interest in researching migration into Sichuan, especially during the Qing dynasty.

There have been many migrations in the history of Sichuan, and the migrations and migration policies have had far-reaching impacts on Sichuan. For example, the central government of the Ming dynasty increased the number of county-level administrative divisions after a large number of populations migrated to Sichuan. Thus, when analysing the changes in the administrative divisions of Sichuan, it is necessary to understand the history of migration in Sichuan. During the Qin (221BC-207BC), Western Jin (266-316), Northern Song (960-1127), and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, there were indeed waves of migrants moving into Sichuan. These migration policies not only brought population and production technology to Sichuan at the time but also became a reference for the Shunzhi (r. 1644-1661), Kangxi (r. 1662-1722), and

²⁷ Wang Yan and Peng Zhaogui, *Qingdai Sichuan Nongcun Shehui Jingji Shi (Social and Economic History of Rural Sichuan in the Qing Dynasty)* 清代四川农村社会经济史 (Chengdu: Tiandi Press, 1998), p. 68.

²⁸ The Qing dynasty had different standards for its population statistics system in Sichuan. For example, the term “Ding 丁” or “Rending 人丁” refers to men between the ages of 16 and 60 capable of carrying out labour, and the number of dings and households is roughly the same. As a rule, one ding was one household, with five members in each household. However, from 1644 to 1735, the number of “Ding 丁” on official documents was the “Dingyin (Tax) 丁银” collected by the government.

Yongzheng (r. 1723-1735) emperors when implementing migration policies. The migration policies implemented by the Qing emperors from 1644 to 1735 were successful. They increased the population of Sichuan within a short period, promoted economic development, and influenced the changes in the administrative divisions of Sichuan.

In the discussion of migration, scholars have delved into the reasons, processes, and impacts involved. For instance, Chen Shisong, using humorous language, took the perspective of migrants to discuss the internal and external factors influencing migration to Sichuan. He covered the preparations for migration, the journey, entrepreneurship, and life after reaching the destination and explored the migration situations of the lower social classes.²⁹ Sun Xiaofen extensively employed historical documents, focusing on migration policies and processes during the early Qing period.³⁰ Apart from this work, Guo Songyi used Hezhou, Jianzhou, Jingyan, and Nanxi as examples to outline the timeline of migrant entry into Sichuan. He analysed their origins and posited that the significant influx of migrants brought abundant labour and production technology, leading to the swift recovery and development of Sichuan's economy and contributing to changes in social class.³¹

Scholars believed that the migration policies and agricultural support policies implemented by the Qing central government have contributed to the growth of the population in Sichuan. For instance, Guo Songyi considered, that the special preferential policies implemented by the emperor of the Qing dynasty in Sichuan

²⁹ For the details please refer to Chen Shisong, *Da Qianxi: Hu-Guang Tian Sichuan Lishi Jiedu (The Great Migration: A Historical Interpretation of the Hu-Guang Filling Sichuan)* 大迁徙：湖广填四川历史解读 (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Publishing House, 2016).

³⁰ Sun Xiaofen, *Qingdai Qianqi de Yimin Tian Sichuan (Early Qing Migrants Moved to Sichuan)* 清代前期的移民填四川 (Chengdu: Sichuan University Press, 1997), p. 18.

³¹ Guo Songyi, "Qingchu Sichuan Wailai Yimin he Jingji Fazhan (Early Qing Sichuanese Migrants and Economic Development) 清初四川外来移民和经济发展," *Researches in Chinese Economic History*, no. 4 (December 1988): p. 61, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: ZJSY.0.1988-04-005>.

province attracted a large number of people to migrate to Sichuan, which solved the shortage of labour, increased the area of cultivated land, and accelerated the economic recovery of the province.³²

Similarly, Xu Yun found that under the Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors' policy of promoting migration to Sichuan, a large number of people moved to Sichuan, causing the population of Sichuan to grow rapidly and the economy to develop. However, the rapid population growth and expansion of cultivated land increased the difficulty of management, and the Yongzheng emperor had to reform the administrative divisions.³³ Xu Yun's work offers a foundational overview of Sichuan's administrative shifts; however, it lacks detailed engagement with local implementation and the socio-political consequences at the unified administrative divisions (the second level), while overlooking the hierarchy in the county-level administrative divisions (the third level). Yet, county-level administrative divisions directly manage the people, and changes in population size have a direct impact on these divisions.

When Sichuan entered a period of peace in 1681, under the guidance of the ruler's policies, the population grew rapidly, which was extremely beneficial for the recovery of the Sichuan economy. According to Takatoshi Ito and Andrew Rose, demographic transformation influences economic growth.³⁴

Similarly, Sun Xiaofen proposed that the Shunzhi, Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong (r. 1735-1795) emperors believed that restoring the population of Sichuan was a prerequisite for economic development, so these emperors were all committed

³² Ibid.

³³ Xu Yun, "Qingdai Sichuan Tonxgian Zhengqu Geju de Yanbian ji Yuanyin Fenxi (The Evolution and the Reason of the Secondary Administrative Structure in Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty) 清代四川统县政区格局的演变及原因分析," *Yangtze River Civilization*, no. 2 (August 2017): p. 63, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: CJWM.0.2017-02-006>.

³⁴ Takatoshi Ito and Andrew K. Rose, *The Economic Consequences of Demographic Change in East Asia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 4.

to rebuilding Sichuan and adopted a lenient policy towards the Sichuan region.³⁵ Thus, it was necessary to adjust the administrative divisions to adapt to the new social environment. Sun Xiaofen analysed the Qing central government's migration policy and proposed that population migration during this period resulted in a significant increase in the population of Sichuan. Nevertheless, Sun Xiaofen ignored the impact of population growth on administrative divisions. In fact, population is an important factor influencing changes in administrative divisions. When analysing the change of administrative division in Sichuan, it is necessary to consider whether the country's migration policy and land policy have promoted population growth and economic recovery.

Although many scholars believed that the adjustment of administrative divisions is affected by socioeconomic factors, they have not yet analysed the relationship between the changes in Sichuan's population and cultivated land area and the changes in the number of administrative divisions during this period. For example, when Sichuan's population decreased, which administrative divisions were abolished or merged by the Qing central government, and what was their proportion? When Sichuan's population recovered and the cultivated land area increased, which administrative divisions were re-established by the Qing central government, and what was their proportion?

1.3.3 Relationship Between Politics and Administrative Divisions

Sichuan province has a favourable environment for growing crops and a closed basin topography. It is also adjacent to provinces such as Yunnan and Guizhou, making it an important province in the southwest. When political unrest broke out in the

³⁵ Sun Xiaofen, *Qingdai Qianqi de Yimin Tian Sichuan (Early Qing Migrants Moved to Sichuan)* 清代前期的移民填四川, p. 18.

southwest, the Qing central government used the adjustment of provincial boundaries to reset the scope of management. In this way, the strength of each province in the southwest was balanced, achieving the goal of strengthening centralised power. Therefore, the provincial boundaries of Sichuan, as an important part of the administrative division, have always attracted the attention of scholars.

R. Kent Guy mentioned in his book “Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796” that the Ming dynasty’s administrative divisions had already changed due to the uprising. The Qing central government adjusted the provinces’ boundaries based on the Ming dynasty’s administrative divisions.³⁶ The Qing central government’s adjustment of provincial boundaries involved the provincial boundaries between Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. This was an expression of the Qing central government’s use of administrative divisions to strengthen local governance.

Similarly, Zhao Yicai argued that boundaries serve a practical role in allocating local resources, dividing interests, and facilitating administrative processes. The Qing dynasty emperors used boundary demarcation (part of administrative division) as an administrative means of local governance. This means of changing administrative divisions was performed to clarify management authority, improve management efficiency, and respond to border crises.³⁷

In the subject of the provincial boundary between Sichuan and Yunnan, Chen Yao noted that in ancient societies with poor transport links, the regions closer to the political centre developed better socioeconomically because they received more

³⁶ R. Kent Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010), p. 47.

³⁷ Zhao Yicai, “Fenjianghuajie: Qingdai Xianji Zhengqu de Xifen yu Jiexian Huading (Deciding Boundaries: Division and Demarcation of County-level Administrative Divisions in Qing Dynasty) 分疆画界：清代县级政区的析分与界限划定,” *The Chinese Historical Geography* 43, no. 1 (February 2023): p. 62, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: LSLD.0.2023-01-005>.

attention and government orders were passed on more quickly. On the contrary, when dealing with urgent matters, the higher authorities had already missed the best time to deal with them after receiving reports from regions far away from the political centre. For instance, the change of jurisdiction of Wumeng and Zhenxiong from Sichuan to Yunnan was due to the need for easy governance and management.³⁸

In his doctoral thesis, Zhang Hongbin discussed the administrative changes in the border areas between Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou during the Ming and Qing dynasties using case studies. He noted that the Qing central government attached great importance to the governance of the southwest region. He believed that during the reign of the Kangxi emperor, the Qing central government's adjustment of the border area between the three provinces was mainly to place Wusa under the jurisdiction of Guizhou province.³⁹

Although scholars agreed on the importance of the border regions between Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, the adjustment of the borders as part of the administrative division should be analysed in the context of the overall administrative division changes in Sichuan. Besides, scholars concurred that the reason for the adjustment of the provincial borders between the three provinces was to achieve the political goal of the Qing central government of strengthening the management of the southwest region. Nonetheless, scholars have overlooked the fact that the adjustment of the provincial borders between the three provinces was also a measure to balance the economic strength of the three provinces. After the adjustment of the provincial

³⁸ Yao Chen, "Wumeng Zhenxiong Chuchuan Rudian yu Qingchu Xinan Xingzheng Quhua Bianqian (Wumen Town, Zhenxiong, and the Change of Administrative Divisions in Southwest China in the Early Qing Dynasty) 乌蒙镇雄出川入滇与清初西南行政区划变迁," *Journal of Zhaotong University* 42, no. 1 (February 2020): p. 20, <http://doi: CNKI: SUN: ZTSF.0.2020-01-004>.

³⁹ Zhang Hongbing, "Mingqing Chuan Dian Qian Jiaojie Diqu de Biange, Chongtu yu Shehui Zhuanxing 1368-1850 (The Transform, Conflict and Social Transformation in the Border Area between Sichuan, Yunnan and Guizhou During the Ming and Qing Dynasties 1368-1850) 明清川滇黔交界地区的变革、冲突与社会转型 1368-1850," (PhD diss., Jinan University, 2019), p. 196.

border between the three provinces, the economic strength of Guizhou province was enhanced.

As analysed earlier, scholars concurred that adjusting administrative divisions was a way for Qing emperors to achieve political goals and manage the country. Thus, the impact of adjusting administrative divisions cannot be ignored. However, this impact is rarely mentioned in scholarly research.

Moreover, it should be noted that during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor, the power of the central royal court was further strengthened, the socioeconomic situation also developed, and at the suggestion of E Ertai, the governor of Yunnan and Guizhou, several southwestern provinces including Sichuan province called “Gai Tu Gui Liu 改土归流”⁴⁰ were reformed. The Qing central government strengthened the economic and cultural ties between the various ethnic groups and contributed to consolidating the country’s unity and development by “Replacing Hereditary Minority Administrators with Government-Appointed Officials by the Central Government in Minority Areas”, and it became a prerequisite for the adjustment of administrative divisions.⁴¹

In general, academic research on China’s administrative divisions is relatively adequate, especially in terms of in-depth analyses of the definitions, hierarchies, and numbers of administrative divisions. In the study of administrative divisions in Sichuan, scholars have focused on discussing the uprisings in Sichuan, the population, or the process of change in the administrative divisions of Sichuan throughout the Qing dynasty.

⁴⁰ “Gai Tu Gui Liu” means abolishing the Tusi System in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and replacing it with government-appointed officials. “Tusi” is the leader of a minority ethnic group and was hereditary. For further details, please refer to Chen Xingchao, *Zhongguo Difang Xingzheng Zhidu Shi (History of China’s Local Administrative System)* 中国地方行政制度史 (Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 1992), p. 289.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

However, the changes to the county-level administrative divisions and provincial borders in Sichuan between 1644 and 1735 were the most extensive nationwide. For the entire Qing dynasty, Sichuan also had the most frequent administrative division adjustments during this period. Furthermore, after the adjustments to the county-level administrative divisions and provincial borders in Sichuan between 1644 and 1735, they were not adjusted on a large scale again. Scholars have not analysed the administrative divisions of Sichuan as an important period during 1644-1735, nor have they linked the social, economic, and political factors of war, population, and political objectives with the change of administrative divisions and analysed the impact of these factors on the change of administrative divisions in Sichuan.

Therefore, this research begins with the changes of uprising, population and political purposes in Sichuan during this period; analyses the influence of social, economic, and political factors on the change of administrative divisions; and summarises the overall situation and characteristics of the change of administrative divisions in Sichuan between 1644 and 1735.

1.4 Research Gap

Despite the rich body of existing research on the administrative division changes during the Qing Dynasty, there remain four significant gaps in the specialised study of Sichuan's administrative division changes from 1644 to 1735.

In terms of research themes, most existing studies have primarily focused on the macro-level definitions and hierarchical evolutions of administrative divisions. For instance, Zhou Zhenhe's comprehensive analysis of the hierarchical structure of Qing Dynasty administrative divisions, and Weng Junxiong's examination of the

administrative divisions and population during the Tang Dynasty. However, there is a notable lack of in-depth exploration within specific temporal and spatial contexts, particularly a focused investigation of Sichuan from 1644 to 1735. The period from the reigns of Shunzhi to Yongzheng was a crucial phase witnessing drastic transformations in Sichuan's social-economic and political landscape. Socio-economically, the region transitioned from post-war decline to recovery and prosperity, while politically, it shifted from turbulence to stability. Nevertheless, the interrelations between these systematic changes and the adjustments to Sichuan's administrative divisions have not been adequately explored, resulting in an unclear understanding of the continuity and distinctiveness of administrative division changes during this period.

Regarding the analysis of influencing factors, existing research often separates the socio-economic changes in Sichuan from administrative restructuring, failing to uncover the deeper mechanisms of interaction between the two. The adjustments to county-level administrative divisions in early Qing Sichuan were direct outcomes of a series of historical events, including wars, natural disasters, and large-scale migrations. For example, prior to 1681, due to the sparse population in Sichuan, many original county-level administrative divisions became depopulated, prompting the Qing central government to reduce their number. This situation was logically linked to the governance demands arising from the population surge during the Yongzheng period. However, such connections have frequently been overlooked in existing research, hindering a comprehensive analysis of the overall changes in Sichuan's administrative divisions.

In terms of data utilisation, current studies predominantly rely on primary official historical sources such as “Qing Shilu (The Veritable Record of the Qing Dynasty)” and “Sichuan Zongzhi (General History of Sichuan)”, while relatively

neglecting local archives, unofficial documents, and local gazetteers. Although official historical sources provide detailed accounts of policy implementation, they rarely reflect on-the-ground practices at the local level. In contrast, records of local officials' governance in local gazetteers, feedback from ordinary people on socio-economic conditions in folk documents, and the memorials of local officials in “Zhupi Zouzhe (Compilation of Chinese-Written Memorials to the Throne with the Emperor's Comments in Cinnabar-Ink)”, where they actively requested the establishment of new county-level administrative divisions on the grounds of "rapid population growth and governance difficulties," all demonstrate bottom-up impetus for reform. Unfortunately, this aspect has been significantly underestimated in existing research.

Regarding research methods, existing studies mainly adopt traditional documentary research approaches. While this method preserves historical details through textual citations, it struggles to present complex historical data in an intuitive manner. For example, the changes in Sichuan's population and cultivated land area from 1644 to 1735 are scattered across various historical sources and archives. Previous studies, which merely cited raw data through textual descriptions, fail to provide concise and accessible visual representations, thus limiting a clear understanding of the trends of change.

This study focuses on Sichuan from 1644 to 1735, linking population changes, socio-economic transformations, and political developments with adjustments to county-level administrative divisions and provincial boundaries. By integrating relevant records from official historical sources, unofficial documents, and local gazetteers, and employing visual tools such as tables and line charts, it systematically explores the driving mechanisms behind administrative division changes. The study argues that the adjustments to Sichuan's administrative divisions were essentially the

result of the combined influence of central policies and local governance needs, profoundly embodying the principle of bottom-up change. This perspective not only addresses existing research gaps but also introduces a new analytical framework for understanding the complexity of local governance during the Qing Dynasty.

1.5 Research Questions

This research examines the impact of social, economic, and political factors on these changes, analysing why the Qing central government adjusted Sichuan's administrative divisions, how these adjustments were implemented, and the subsequent effects of these changes. The research addresses the following key research questions:

First, how did Sichuan's administrative legacy, economic conditions, and strategic importance shape the Qing central government's decisions to reorganise its administrative divisions after 1644?

Second, what were the reasons for the population decline, urban destruction (due to uprisings and natural disasters), and economic collapse that led to the reduction of county-level administrative divisions in Sichuan the period 1644–1681?

Third, how did state-led interventions, such as migration, tax incentives, and agricultural rehabilitation, facilitate demographic and economic recovery, thereby necessitating the re-expansion of county-level administrative divisions during 1681–1735?

Fourth, why and how did rebellions in the Sichuan-Yunnan-Guizhou borderlands prompt the Qing to redraw provincial boundaries using the “Quanya Jiaocuo (Interlocking Like Canine Teeth)”, and what were the implications of this strategy for centralisation and frontier control?

1.6 Research Objectives

This research systematically analyses how social, economic, and political forces intersected to transform Sichuan's administrative landscape from 1644 to 1735.

Its specific aims are:

First, to assess the historical foundations of Sichuan's administrative divisions by analysing how its economic history and governance traditions shaped the Qing dynasty's territorial reorganisation strategies, while clarifying Sichuan's strategic importance in imperial governance.

Second, to investigate the relationship between demographic and economic collapse, resulting from the Ming–Qing transition, rebellions, and natural disasters and the reduction of county-level administrative divisions during 1644–1681.

Third, to evaluate the Qing dynasty's migration policies and economic initiatives that spurred demographic and agricultural recovery in Sichuan, and to analyse their causal link to the expansion of county-level administrative divisions during 1682–1735.

Fourth, to examine the political dynamics of the tri-border region encompassing Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, as well as the formation and impact of the Qing central government's establishment of the “*Quanya Jiaocuo* (Interlocking Like Canine Teeth)” provincial boundaries.

1.7 Research Methodology

This research adopts a comprehensive approach, using methods such as literature research, induction analysis, and dialectical analysis to investigate the changes in the administrative divisions of Sichuan province between 1644 and 1735. The impact of social, economic, and political factors on the changes in administrative