

## **Transforming Sichuan: The impact of Qing Dynasty immigration and land reclamation on regional development**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the socio-economic transformation of Sichuan Province, known as the “Land of Plenty,” during the 17th to early 18th centuries, following the Ming Dynasty’s decline and the Qing Dynasty’s rise. It focuses on Qing immigration policies, which relocated populations from Huguang, Fujian, and Shanxi to revitalise the war- and plague-ravaged region. Using historical sources such as Qing imperial records, local gazetteers, and secondary literature, the study analyses the impact of these migrations. Through an examination of demographic shifts, economic recovery, and cultural integration, the research highlights how these policies accelerated Sichuan’s development. The influx of migrants not only restored population levels but also boosted agriculture, strengthened economic stability, and reshaped the cultural landscape. This migration transformed Sichuan into a key agricultural and commercial hub, reinforcing its administrative and economic framework under the Qing Dynasty. Additionally, the study explores the environmental consequences of large-scale land reclamation, including deforestation, soil erosion, and disrupted water systems, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. By assessing these complex impacts, the research enhances understanding of state-directed migration’s role in regional recovery. The findings provide historical insights relevant to contemporary migration and resettlement policies, offering valuable lessons for sustainable development and governance.

**Keywords:** Cultural transformations, demographic challenges, immigration policies, Qing Dynasty, Sichuan, socio-economic resilience

### **Introduction**

Situated in the southwestern region of the People’s Republic of China, Sichuan Province is distinguished by its diverse and dramatic topography, including the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Daba Mountains, Wushan, and the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. These geographic features form a significant basin known for its rich soil and abundant water resources, which have historically supported Sichuan’s role as a major grain-producing area. This region’s strategic importance is underscored by its archaeological wealth, with sites like Sanxingdui and the Baodun civilisation providing evidence of one of China’s earliest urban settlements.

The province’s rivers, such as the Yangtze, Minjiang, and Dadu, have been crucial for its agricultural development and have facilitated Sichuan’s significant political and military role

within China, particularly during periods of upheaval. For example, during the Tang Dynasty, Sichuan served as a refuge under the rule of emperors like Xuanzong and Dezong. Its strategic position, bordered by the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Gansu, and Qinghai, has made Sichuan a linchpin in the stability and security of southwestern China.

Despite its geographical advantages, Sichuan has experienced considerable demographic shifts, especially during dynastic transitions. Notably, during the early Northern Song Dynasty and the early Ming Dynasty, substantial migrations from provinces such as Shanxi, Gansu, and Hubei occurred. These movements culminated in the Qing Dynasty's targeted immigration policies following the Ming-Qing transition, aimed at repopulating and revitalising the province after significant depopulation. These policies successfully attracted over a million migrants from more than ten provinces, profoundly impacting the demographic composition of the region.

Contemporary scholarship has extensively explored the mechanisms and effects of these immigration policies during the Qing era (1644-1911), yet significant research gaps remain concerning the socio-political and environmental repercussions of these demographic changes. This study seeks to delve deeper into these issues by examining the motivations behind this large-scale migration and its extensive influence on Sichuan's political, economic, and cultural landscapes, while also considering the ecological challenges that arose from the province's rapid expansion.

## Literature review

The scholarly landscape concerning the Qing Dynasty's immigration policies towards Sichuan is both rich and varied, addressing different epochs and geographic nuances within the province. Extensive literature exists on the migration from Huguang to Sichuan, a critical focus due to its profound impact on the region's demographics and socio-economic structure.

Chuanchuan and Mu (2023) utilised ArcGIS and Geodetector to analyse immigration and land reclamation during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties. Their study found that migration in the Yuan Dynasty was primarily driven by natural factors, whereas government immigration policies and transportation networks played a dominant role during the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Their findings underscore the significance of Qing central government immigration policies in shaping Sichuan's demographic and socio-political transformation.

Similarly, Qiancheng and Lin (2023) examined agricultural production and trade in Sichuan, concluding that the Qing government's immigration policies facilitated large-scale migration to the region. This influx of migrants contributed to the restoration of Sichuan's social economy and the revitalisation of grain production. By the reign of Emperor Yongzheng, Sichuan had emerged as a key province for domestic grain production. Their research highlights the crucial role of immigration and land reclamation in the economic revival of Sichuan.

In a comparative study, Maoting and Dar (2024) analysed the immigration policies of the Hongwu and Kangxi emperors. They argued that during Kangxi's reign, the Qing government implemented preferential policies, such as unrestricted migration and agricultural tax reductions, which attracted a significant number of migrants to Sichuan. The resulting population growth spurred the expansion of cultivated land, further contributing to the region's economic transformation. This study illustrates the effectiveness of policy-driven migration in fostering Sichuan's development.

Additionally, Jianmei (2023) examined the long-term impact of Qing immigration policies, highlighting that migrant from more than ten provinces relocated to Sichuan. She emphasised the prolonged duration, diverse origins, and substantial scale of the migration. The influx of settlers introduced new cultural traditions and production techniques, significantly influencing Sichuan's social and cultural landscape. Her research underscores the transformative role of immigration in shaping Sichuan's cultural identity.

Collectively, these studies illustrate how Qing-era immigration policies played a pivotal role in the demographic, economic, and cultural transformation of Sichuan, with long-lasting implications for the region's development.

Despite the breadth of existing research, significant gaps remain, particularly concerning the initial drivers of immigration to Sichuan and the subsequent effects on the region's political and environmental landscapes. This study aims to fill these gaps by providing a holistic analysis of the factors prompting immigration, alongside exploring its multifaceted impacts on Sichuan's political, economic, cultural, and environmental arenas. The overarching goal is to construct a nuanced narrative that encapsulates the historical phenomenon of immigration to Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty.

## **Method and study area**

This research adopts a literature review methodology, meticulously analysing historical data sourced from Qing dynasty imperial records, local chronicles, and other pertinent archival materials. The objective is to delineate the myriad factors that instigated the migration of diverse populations to Sichuan during the period from 1644 to 1911. This analysis is structured around three principal perspectives: the administrative strategies of the Qing government, the personal experiences and motivations of the immigrants, and the overarching social context of the era.

In examining these primary sources, this study aims to elucidate the multifaceted impacts of immigration on the Sichuan region. Emphasis is placed on the role of these population movements in fostering industrial advancements and enhancing administrative management within Sichuan. This includes an exploration of how immigrant communities contributed to the development of local industries and technologies, potentially transforming economic practices in the region.

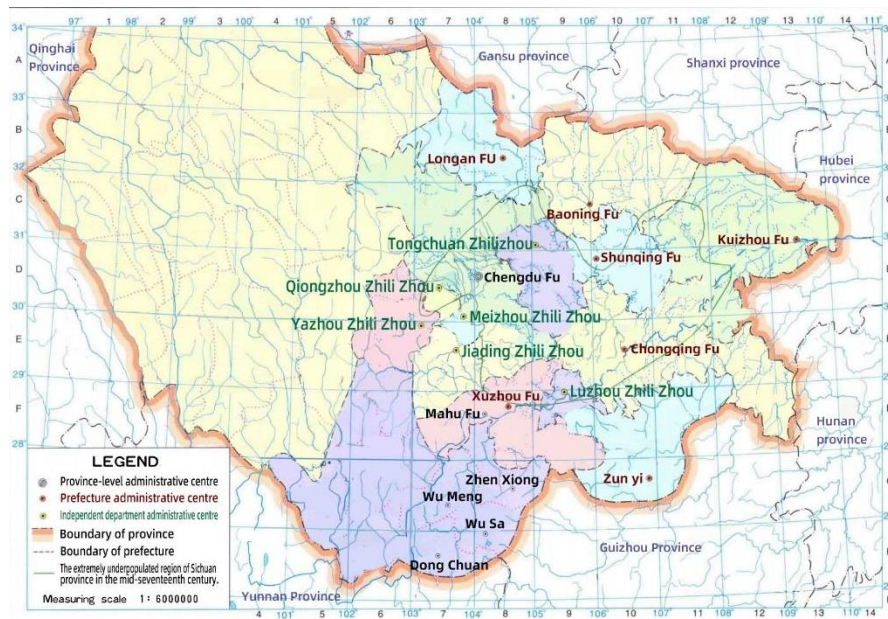
Concurrently, the research critically assesses the environmental repercussions of extensive land reclamation driven by these immigration policies. It seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the ecological degradation that accompanied Sichuan's rapid agricultural expansion, specifically focusing on the long-term sustainability challenges posed by such extensive environmental alterations.

## **Reasons for the Qing Dynasty immigrants into Sichuan Province**

From the early 17th century to the early 18th century, Sichuan experienced a series of wars, plagues, and natural disasters. The period of turmoil began in 1633 with the invasion by Zhang Xianzhong, who founded the short-lived Daxi Kingdom in Sichuan. Known for his brutal rule, Zhang Xianzhong's reign resulted in significant destruction and loss of life, marked by extreme

violence and chaos. This era of strife in Sichuan continued until 1681, which marked the end of major rebellions, including Wu Sangui's rebellion against the Qing government.

Sichuan Province experienced the battle between the peasant army and the Ming government, as well as the struggle between the Qing government and the anti-Qing armed forces. Indigenous people in Sichuan Province died in the war or fled to other provinces because of the plague and drought. In this case, the population of Sichuan Province has been dramatically reduced, and the social economy has been extensively damaged. In the south of Sichuan Province, 30 % to 40 % of the people died of Zhang Xianzhong's massacre, 20 % to 30 % of the people died of plague and tiger attack, and less than 1 % of the indigenous people in Sichuan Province survived. In the northern part of Sichuan Province, 30 % to 40 % of the people died in the massacre of Zhang Xianzhong, 40 % to 50 % of the people died in the Huangyao war, 10 % to 20 % of the people killed in the plague and tiger attacks, and less than 0.1 % of the indigenous people in Sichuan Province survived (Jingbo, 2002). It can be seen that during the period of Shunzhi (1644-1721) and Kangxi (1661-1722), Sichuan Province experienced a significant decrease in population and a social depression. Under the combined effect of war, drought, and plague, the number of natural deaths and emigration from Sichuan increased dramatically. At this time, the population of Sichuan province was about 500,000-600,000, which was more than 700,000 less than the minimum population in the Yuan Dynasty (Dengyun & Xiandong, 2019). See the map for the administrative divisions of Sichuan.



Source: Naiqiang & Xinjian, 2002

**Figure 1.** Administrative divisions of late Ming and early Qing (1601-1726)

Sichuan Province is an important agricultural province and the political and military centre of the southwest region. To restore Sichuan's socioeconomic status as soon as possible, the Qing government promulgated many preferential immigration measures to encourage Sichuan's indigenous residents and people from other provinces to return to Sichuan. In 1681, after the war in Sichuan subsided, the Sichuan natives who had fled to other provinces returned to Sichuan. At the same time, people from more than 10 provinces, including Huguang Province and Fujian

Province, immigrated to Sichuan Province for reasons such as escaping war, getting rich through business, and evading punishment.

### *Political reasons*

The Qing Dynasty's political strategies under Emperor Kangxi were fundamentally aimed at stabilising the rapidly fluctuating demographics of Sichuan Province through systematic immigration policies. By implementing the "Land Reclamation Order," during Emperor Shunzhi's reign, the administration aimed to not only provide land to the homeless irrespective of their origins but also to integrate these populations into the socio-economic fabric of Sichuan, ensuring long-term stability and productivity. This policy allowed for extensive recruitment and resettlement, which was crucial in restoring the province's demographic structure and enhancing its agricultural output (Shizu, 1985).

Further underpinning these efforts, Emperor Kangxi's policies in 1664 focused on repatriating Sichuanese who had migrated to other provinces, covering their relocation expenses to facilitate their return. This initiative not only recovered the population lost during earlier conflicts but also aimed to boost the province's economic base through increased tax revenues and strengthened Qing's governance in the region. The decree in 1686 mandating the return of Sichuan's squires exemplifies the targeted approach to reinstating the province's traditional landholding class, critical for agricultural and social order (Shengzu, 1985).

Tax incentives were another pivotal aspect of these policies. Starting in 1656, new settlers in Sichuan were exempt from corvée labour and land taxes, significantly encouraging land reclamation and settlement. These exemptions were extended by successive emperors, reflecting the direct linkage between fiscal incentives and the successful expansion of agricultural lands, which was vital for the province's recovery and growth (Zijian, 1984; Shengzu, 1985).

Additionally, the Qing government's provision of household registration and examination rights to immigrants not only facilitated their integration but also endowed them with equal rights as native Sichuanese. This inclusivity fostered a sense of belonging and loyalty among the immigrants, thereby enhancing their contributions to the local economy and society. These measures effectively increased the attractiveness of Sichuan as a destination for potential settlers, leveraging the province's strategic importance as a buffer and breadbasket for the Qing Empire (Di, 1989; Shengzu, 1985).

In conclusion, the Qing Dynasty's immigration policies were meticulously crafted to stabilise and revitalise Sichuan. Through strategic land reclamation directives, tax reliefs, and socio-political integration measures, the government successfully bolstered the province's demographic and economic profile, which in turn reinforced the Qing's administrative hold over this crucial southwestern territory.

### *Personal reasons*

In an agricultural society, land represents not only a vital resource but also a significant indicator of wealth. Throughout the reigns of Emperors from Shunzhi to Yongzheng (1723-1735), the abundant idle land in Sichuan Province served as a major draw for immigrants from other provinces, illustrating the direct impact of Qing Dynasty's policies on population movements. For example, Huang Canglong, a native of Jiangxi during Emperor Yongzheng's rule, was enticed by

the fertile plains of Jintang Xian, leading him to relocate his family to capitalise on the underutilised agricultural opportunities there (Changgen, 1992).

Similarly, Chen Ruyu from Fujian moved to Bishan Xian in response to the scarcity of arable land in his home province. The Qing government's policies that facilitated easy access to land and supported new settlements played a crucial role in his decision to establish a new life in Sichuan, where he and his family reclaimed wasteland and thrived, gradually gaining prominence in the local community (Yongping, 1992).

The government's favourable policies clearly bolstered the confidence of migrants, as seen in the actions of individuals like Liu Tingqi from Huguang and the Geng family from Hunan. Arriving in Sichuan in the early 18th century, these immigrants leveraged the commercial potential of their new environment. Liu Tingqi, initially engaging in trade, settled permanently in Zhongjiang Xian, while the Geng family, starting as butchers, eventually prospered to become influential bankers and landlords. Their economic activities were supported by the stability and opportunities created by the Qing policies, which not only encouraged land development but also facilitated the integration of immigrants into the local economy and society (Xiaofen, 1997).

The Qing Dynasty's strategic approach to populate Sichuan through incentivised immigration underpinned significant socio-economic transformations in the province. By providing land resources and creating favourable conditions for trade, the government effectively stimulated demographic and economic growth. This policy not only helped in settling vast tracts of idle land but also in cultivating a vibrant, diverse, and economically active community, which reinforced the socio-economic fabric of Sichuan Province.

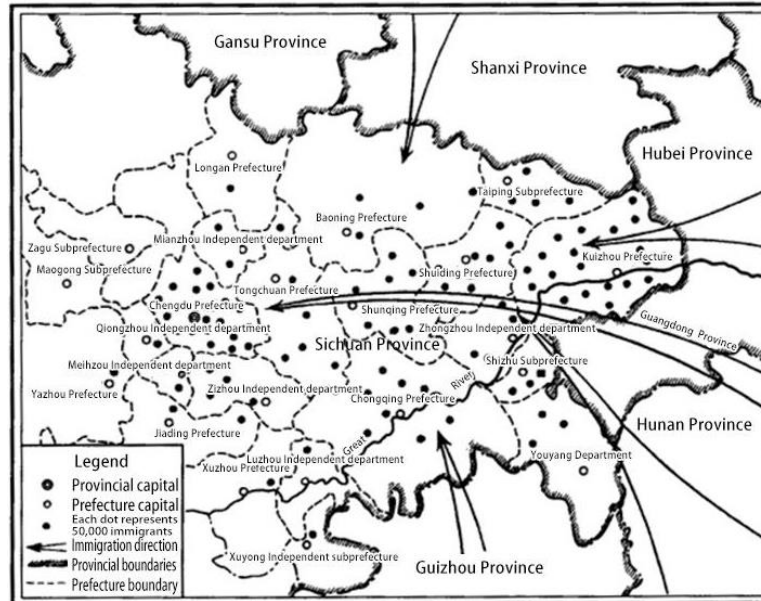
### *Social causes*

Historically, war has been a pivotal factor influencing population migration, with Sichuan Province experiencing significant demographic shifts due to continuous warfare between 1633 and 1681. During this period, local residents were compelled to flee to safer regions or seek refuge in the mountains. Once stability was restored, Sichuan became a sanctuary for people from other war-torn provinces seeking peace and safety. For instance, Zhong Xingyu from Guangdong anticipated conflict in his province and relocated his family to Yongchuan Xian in Chongqing, seeking stability and a new start (Zengyin, 1992). Similarly, individuals from Gansu, affected by the disturbances of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement, sought refuge in Sichuan, with their descendants later establishing roots and obtaining household registration in Cangxi Xian, Baoding Fu (Daoqiu, 1992).

Beyond the ravages of war, Sichuan also served as a haven for those evading legal penalties or burdensome taxes. In 1699, Li Xianfu, an official from Shanxi Province, reported that numerous individuals from Baoqing Xian, Wugang Xian, and Mianyang Xian had fled to Sichuan under the pretence of land reclamation to escape legal or financial obligations. This influx was not trivial and illustrates a broader trend of using migration as a strategy to circumvent legal and fiscal responsibilities (Jinsheng, 1986).

The movement of people to Sichuan was often motivated by a combination of escaping conflict and the allure of new economic opportunities in a region promoted by the Qing government as a land of potential. The policies facilitating easy access to land and the province's relative peace compared to war-stricken areas made Sichuan an attractive destination. This pattern was not limited to individuals from Huguang, Fujian, and Guangdong but included significant numbers from Gansu and Shanxi, among others.

The substantial influx of migrants seeking refuge from war or to evade legal repercussions significantly contributed to the demographic and social landscape of Sichuan, demonstrating the complex interplay between governmental policies, conflict, and socio-economic factors in shaping migration patterns.



Source: Shuji, 1997

**Figure 2.** Distribution of emigrants to Sichuan in the beginning of the Qing Dynasty

After the cessation of warfare in 1681, Sichuan Province witnessed a significant influx of immigrants from various regions. These migrants were primarily drawn by the prospects of acquiring land and generating wealth through entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, many sought refuges from ongoing conflicts in their native provinces or moved to evade legal and fiscal penalties. This substantial migration has had a lasting impact on the demographic composition of Sichuan, with a considerable portion of the current population being direct descendants of these Qing Dynasty immigrants.

Expert analysis reveals that approximately 85% of the population in Chongqing can trace their ancestry back to these immigrants. In Chengdu, around 70% of residents have similar historical roots, while in the more remote, mountainous areas of the province, this figure varies between 50% and 60% (Xiaofen, 1997). These statistics underscore the profound and enduring influence of historical immigration on the demographic and cultural landscape of Sichuan Province.

### The impact of immigration into Sichuan Province

The influx of immigrants to Sichuan Province catalysed profound demographic expansion and socio-economic changes. This movement significantly increased the population, necessitating adjustments in administrative divisions to manage new settlements and land reclamation effectively. Immigrants introduced advanced agricultural practices and new crops, enhancing the

region's agricultural productivity and capacity to sustain its growing populace. Additionally, the intermarriage between immigrants and locals, as well as among different immigrant groups, enriched the cultural and genetic diversity of the province. However, these benefits were accompanied by challenges, including escalated land disputes due to unclear land ownership policies, environmental degradation from overdevelopment, and increased security concerns due to the varied motives of migrants, including those escaping legal penalties. These issues underscore the complex consequences of rapid demographic changes driven by immigration.

### *Political influence*

The substantial influx of immigrants into Sichuan Province during the Qing Dynasty significantly influenced its administrative organisation. With an estimated 80% of households comprising immigrants, translating to around 2,317,296 individuals from a calculation of 463,447 households, the demographic landscape of Sichuan underwent profound changes (Hongkang, 1988). This rapid population increase prompted local officials to propose the re-establishment of previously abolished administrative units (Fu and Xian) to enhance governance effectiveness. The proposal led to the reinstatement of several districts such as Shuangliu Xian, Chongqing Xian, and Peng Xian in Chengdu, among others, to manage the growing population and ensure administrative efficiency (Shizong, 1985). Additionally, from 1681 to 1734, the government restructured county-level districts 21 times and introduced 57 new ones, particularly in Western Sichuan, aligning with the peak periods of immigration (Yicai, 2023). These adjustments were crucial in accommodating the demographic surge and optimising regional governance, highlighting the direct impact of immigration on the political and administrative frameworks of Sichuan Province.

### *Economic impact*

Sichuan Province, renowned for its agricultural significance, presents a geographic dichotomy where only the counties near Chengdu boast flat and fertile land, while the remainder of the region is dominated by high mountains with plains fragmented by mountain ranges and interspersed with wastelands. The Qing government's policies, particularly during the reigns of Kangxi (1662-1721) and Yongzheng (1723-1735), leveraged these geographical features by allowing immigrants to reclaim these wastelands, coupled with periods of relaxed taxation. These incentives significantly boosted migration from other provinces to Sichuan, with immigrants initially settling in the more accessible and fertile areas. By the Qianlong (1736-1796) and Jiaqing (1797-1820) periods, the focus expanded to include the hilly and mountainous regions, reflecting a strategic shift towards maximising agricultural output across diverse terrains. These efforts were further supported by policies aimed at encouraging land exploration, which facilitated the development of these more challenging areas and helped integrate a wider expanse of the province into productive agricultural use (Chuanchuan & Mu, 2023). Table 1 presents data on the area of cultivated land in Sichuan during various years of the Qing Dynasty.



**Table 1.** Cultivated land area in Sichuan over different years

Date	The area of cultivated land (acres)
1578	13,482,767
1661	1,188,350
1671	1,539,338
1685	1,726,118
1722	20,544,285
1728	45,902,788
1753	45,957,449
1766	46,007,126
1812	46,979,291

Source: Fangzhong, 2008

The historical expansion of cultivated land in Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty, as detailed in Table 1, demonstrates a significant agricultural transformation influenced by immigration and policy changes. Between 1672 and 1685, the area of cultivated land in Sichuan returned to levels seen during the 6th year of Wanli's reign in the Ming Dynasty. By 1728, this area had expanded to 3.4 times that of 1578, showcasing substantial growth, although the rate of expansion slowed in subsequent years.

The arrival of immigrants from various provinces contributed significantly to this growth. They brought not only their labour but also new crop varieties which were better suited to the local conditions. High-yielding dryland crops such as maize, sweet potatoes, and potatoes, introduced during the Qing era, were extensively cultivated in the hilly and mountainous regions of Sichuan. These crops became staples for the local population, particularly in the areas surrounding the Sichuan Basin, which also marks the northernmost boundary for sugar cane cultivation in China today. The introduction of silkworms during this period further diversified the local economy, boosting the development of handicrafts and commerce, vital components of the regional economy.

Moreover, the Qing government's encouragement of nationwide migration to Sichuan through both direct and indirect fiscal policies significantly boosted the local economy. These policies were particularly effective in promoting investment and enhancing production in the well-established Sichuan salt industry, demonstrating the government's role in optimising the business environment to rejuvenate and advance Sichuan's traditional industries (Haiyong, 2022).

### *Cultural influence*

Immigration from over ten provinces significantly shaped the cultural landscape of Sichuan Province, with the newcomers engaging in agricultural labour, business, and trade. This diversity led to the creation of geopolitical ties and the establishment of mutual aid organisations known as "guild halls." These guilds served as crucial social structures that provided immigrants a space to socialise, perform religious sacrifices, and offer mutual aid, thus easing homesickness and fostering community support during hardships, such as caring for widows and orphans.

The prevalence and distribution of these guild halls, closely tied to the volume of immigration during the Qing Dynasty, were remarkable. For instance, Qianwei Xian boasted 139

guild halls, and Weiyuan Xian had 45, reflecting their vital role in community cohesion. Even in urban centres like Chengdu, the capital, there were 30 guild halls, with many more in the outskirts. Chongqing and Zigong also had significant numbers, underscoring the widespread adoption of this institution across the province (Xiaofen, 1997). These halls not only enhanced solidarity among immigrants but also strengthened their sense of belonging and facilitated social integration and ethnic interaction, thereby enriching the social fabric of Sichuan (Wentao, 2023).

Furthermore, the influence of immigrants extended to Sichuan's culinary scene. A notable contribution was the invention of Baoning vinegar by Soyiting, an immigrant who integrated local ingredients with traditional Chinese medicinal practices. This product, made from high-quality wheat and the winter waters of the Jialing River in Langzhong, has become one of China's four famous vinegars, celebrated both nationally and internationally. This culinary innovation exemplifies how immigrants have indelibly influenced and enhanced Sichuan's food culture.

### *Environmental impact*

In 1740, the Qing Dynasty issued an edict entitled "Reclamation of Idle Open Land," which encouraged the development of underutilised land by offering tax exemptions. This policy significantly impacted Sichuan, a province characterised by its rugged terrain and limited flat agricultural land. The edict facilitated tax exemptions on smaller plots of high-quality land and poor-quality soil, thereby incentivising the cultivation of even barren mountainous areas without fiscal penalties (Gaozong, 1985).

This preferential tax policy led to a substantial migration of people to Sichuan's more challenging terrains, engaging in intensive agricultural activities. Consequently, Sichuan emerged as one of China's foremost grain producers, with a major output of rice and corn, not only feeding its population but also providing surplus for other regions, thereby becoming a critical agricultural hub (Qiancheng & Lin, 2023).

However, the environmental costs of these policies became apparent by the mid-Qing Dynasty (1736-1850), as the extensive land reclamation efforts in the hills and mountains around the central Sichuan Basin led to significant ecological damage. The intensive cultivation practices resulted in soil erosion, increased susceptibility to floods, and frequent mudslides. A notable instance of these environmental consequences occurred in Pinglongba, Wushan Xian, where aggressive reclamation loosened the soil, causing severe disruptions during heavy rains as soil and water clogged drainage systems and inundated fields (Shan, 1992). Despite multiple attempts to mitigate these effects through river dredging and canal construction from 1821 to 1908, the ecological balance continued to deteriorate, demonstrating the profound and lasting environmental impact of unchecked agricultural expansion in Sichuan.

## **Discussion**

The Qing Dynasty's immigration policies played a crucial role in transforming Sichuan into a thriving economic and cultural centre. The large-scale migration from Huguang, Fujian, and Shanxi replenished the workforce, reviving a region that had suffered severe depopulation due to war and famine. This study finds that state-directed migration was a strategic effort to reinforce Qing administrative control, expand agricultural production, and strengthen economic development, rather than merely addressing demographic crises.

One of the most significant outcomes was Sichuan's demographic transformation. The influx of settlers not only restored population levels but also led to the expansion of agricultural activities, boosting food production and increasing tax revenues. To encourage migration, the Qing administration implemented policies such as land incentives, tax exemptions, and systematic household registration, facilitating rapid economic recovery. By the mid-Qing period, Sichuan had become one of the empire's most agriculturally productive regions. Land reclamation data from 1671 to 1728 show that cultivated land nearly tripled, underscoring the direct impact of immigration on agricultural expansion. However, this rapid development came with environmental consequences, including widespread deforestation, soil erosion, and increased vulnerability to natural disasters, raising concerns about long-term sustainability.

Culturally, migration reshaped Sichuan's social landscape. The arrival of diverse ethnic groups fostered a dynamic exchange of traditions and practices, leading to the formation of a unique regional identity. Immigrants established guild halls and mutual aid societies, which facilitated economic cooperation and eased tensions between settlers and indigenous communities. This period also saw the enrichment of Sichuan's linguistic and culinary diversity, with migrant influences contributing to the region's distinctive food culture. However, social tensions arose due to disputes over land ownership, taxation policies, and resource allocation, occasionally leading to conflicts between new settlers and the local population.

This study aligns with existing research, highlighting state-directed migration's pivotal role in economic restructuring. Administrative reorganisation, particularly the re-establishment of county-level governance, was essential in managing population growth and economic activities. However, the uneven distribution of land and resources necessitated continuous state intervention to prevent social unrest and maintain regional stability.

## **Conclusion**

The migration of people from Huguang, Shanxi, and other regions to Sichuan during the Qing Dynasty significantly reshaped the province's socio-economic and administrative landscape. Driven by conflict and economic aspirations, this movement necessitated administrative restructuring, stimulated agricultural expansion, and fostered local commerce. The immigrants' preservation of regional traditions led to the formation of guild halls, reinforcing community cohesion and contributing to Sichuan's distinct cultural identity. However, large-scale land reclamation for agriculture also resulted in environmental degradation, including soil erosion and increased natural disasters. Despite these challenges, the Qing government's strategic policies played a crucial role in stabilising the province and ensuring its long-term development. Future research should examine the broader implications of historical migration patterns on contemporary governance and environmental sustainability. Insights from this study can inform policies in regions experiencing similar migratory shifts and land-use transformations today.

Future research could provide deeper insights into several aspects of this historical migration. Studying the long-term ecological impacts of land reclamation could help understand the environmental costs associated with agricultural expansion. Additionally, analysing the socio-economic outcomes for immigrants across generations could shed light on the long-term benefits and challenges these communities faced. Investigating how cultural practices from various regions were integrated into Sichuan's local traditions could offer a nuanced view of cultural assimilation and resistance. Finally, an in-depth look at the evolution of governance policies in response to

demographic changes could inform current policymaking, particularly in regions experiencing similar migratory pressures today. Through such studies, the comprehensive impact of Qing Dynasty immigration on Sichuan could be better understood, providing valuable lessons for both historical scholarship and contemporary societal management.

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