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Evan Boyle

University of Missouri-St. Louis, eabbyv@umsystem.edu

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Gangsterism, the Urban Ruling Elite, and the Guomindang: Power Sharing During the Early Years of the Chinese Republic, 1927-1937

by, Evan Boyle

Abstract:

China's Republican era, prior to the Japanese occupation and while under the authority of Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang (c. 1927-1937), has in many respects been underexplored by historians. The Shanghai Massacre, Chiang's subsequent military campaigns against the Communists, the factious divisions within the Guomindang, and the ongoing Japanese campaign to annex parts of the Chinese mainland are often highlighted. In my presentation, rather than focusing on the various foes of the Guomindang, I plan to focus on the political alliances Chiang forged. In particular I will explore his ties to, and alliances with Organized Crime (specifically Du Yuesheng and other members of the so-called Green Gang) and the Urban Elite of Shanghai. The complex web of interested parties and political players that emerged in Shanghai during this decade serves as an interesting reflection (or alternatively, vestige) of the capitalist and colonial forces that had been shaping the city since the Opium wars. Chiang's association with Shanghai and its contingent of organized crime bosses and bourgeois ruling elites (which became increasingly indistinguishable during this period) is illustrative of the Guomindang's fundamental modus operandi for governance and power sharing from 1927-37.