Research Note

Warlordism Versus Federalism: The Revival of a Debate?

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For anyone who studies modern Chinese political thought, the revival of interest in federalism is one of the most striking features of the current scene. It has been particularly visible abroad in the wake of the Tiananmen massacre, and its most conspicuous spokesman has been the former director of the Institute of Political Science of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Yan Jiaqi. In remarks delivered to the First Congress of Chinese Students and Scholars in the United States, held in Chicago in July 1989, Yan proposed a Chinese "federation" (*lianbang guojia*) having a democratic system as the best hope both for reforming China's internal politics and ultimately for resolving the problems of Hong Hong, Taiwan and Tibet. He made similar remarks in other speeches in America and at the founding meeting of the Federation for Chinese Democracy, of which he was elected president, held in Paris in September 1989. Some other mainland Chinese intellectuals, among them Ge Yang, former editor-in-chief of *Xin guancha*, have supported such views, as have members of the China Spring movement.[1] A recent official denunciation of such views is testimony to their growing influence.[2]

These are surprising developments. Federalist programmes for China have long been seen as little more than relics of an era which ended in the 1920s. As the *Cihai* entry for *liansheng zizhi* (one of the phrases for the idea in Chinese) puts it, while certain warlord politicians of the 1920s believed that federalism was the appropriate political system for China, "after the Guangdong revolutionary government launched the Northern Expedition in 1926, no one advocated federalism again."[3]

Yet these developments also have a certain logic. In the 1920s,

1. Yan Jiaqi, "Weilai Zhongguo sibuqu" ("The four stages of China's future") (remarks delivered at First Congress of Chinese Students and Scholars in the United States), *Conference News* (Chicago), No. 3, p. 7; 29 July 1989; also the news items, "Minzhen mubiao: jianli Zhongguo lianbang" ("The goal of the Federation for Chinese Democracy: Establishment of a Chinese Federation") *Shijie ribao* (*World Journal*) (New York), 4 August 1989, p. 1; "Ruhe kandai ershishiji de Zhongguo lishi?" ("How should twentieth-century Chinese history be looked at?") *Shijie ribao*, 14 September 1989, p. 16, and the *Shibao zhoukan* (*China Times Weekly*), No. 236, 2–8 September 1989, pp. 5, 16–17; "Chinese exiles form Worldwide Opposition Group, *The New York Times*, 25 September 1989, p. A10; Zhang Gang, "Chongjian gongheguo de gangling (taolun gao)" ("Outline for reconstruction of the Republic, discussion draft"), *Zhongguo zhi chun* (*China Spring*), No. 77 (October 1989), p. 2. Also author's personal information.

2. Xu Gongmin, "Ping Yan Jiaqi de 'lianbangzhi' zhengzhi zhuzhang" ("Commenting on Yan Jiaqi's political advocacy of federalism") *Liaowang* (*Outlook*), overseas edit., No. 3 (15 January 1990), pp. 4–5. Trans. in Foreign Broadcast Information Service – Daily Report China (FBIS-CHI), 90-028-S, 9 February 1990, pp. 14–16.

3. *Cihai* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979), p. 4164.

federalism was promoted not least as a cure for the domination of the military – for "warlordism." Now, in the wake of the Tiananmen massacre, with some predicting the break-up of China once again into militarily dominated regional units after Deng Xiaoping's death, a situation in China increasingly similar to that of the 1920s is eliciting some parallel responses. This article sketches them out.

They are not responses for which western specialists on contemporary China are particularly well prepared. Neither the political events of the 1910–30 in general, nor the federalist movement in particular, have received much scholarly attention. Federalism is mentioned but once in the relevant volume of *The Cambridge History of China*, and when it has been studied, the assessment has generally been along the lines laid down by Jean Chesneaux: it was "a movement of the traditional and conservative forces of Chinese society, of the gentry of the southern and central provinces and of the local warlords...."[4]

It is true that certain military figures advocated provincial autonomy or federation: Tan Yankai in Hunan and Lu Yongxiang in the Yangzi valley are examples. But by dismissing such men simply as "warlords," and then lumping other supporters of federalism in with them, assessments such as Chesneaux's have entirely missed two crucial facts: first, that federalist ideas had been advocated in good faith since the late 19th century as the best means to renew China, and secondly that many Chinese advocated federalism above all because they saw it as a cure for warlordism.

The idea that genuine renewal must begin at the local level within the larger structure of a federal China seems to have been spelled out by Sun Yat-sen in 1897, though others shared it, among them Zhang Jian and Liang Qichao. Implicit in it was a conviction that, as Zhang Jian put it, "national strength [would be] based on local self-government." And federal ideas were so strong and sufficiently respectable by the early years of this century that they played an important role in the last-minute constitutional reforms promulgated by the Qing between 1906 and 1911, which envisioned a high degree of local self-government (*zizhi*), as well as in the 1911 revolution.[5]

4. Andrew J. Nathan, "A constitutional republic: the Peking government, 1916–28," *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 12, John K. Fairbank (ed.), *Republican China 1912–1949, Pt. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.257; Jean Chesneaux, "The federalist movement in China, 1920–3," in Jack Gray (ed.), *Modern China's Search for a Political Form* (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 96–137, quotation is from p. 136. Two important articles by R. Keith Schoppa should also be mentioned: "Local self-government in Zhejiang, 1909–1927," *Modern China*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 1976), pp. 503–30, and "Province and nation: the Chekiang provincial autonomy movement, 1917–1927," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1977), pp. 661–74.

5. Li Dajia, *Minguo chunian de lianshengzizhi yundong (The Federal Movement in the Early Years of the Republic)* (Taibei: Hongwenguan, 1986) is perhaps the best survey; see also Hu Qunhui, Minchu de difang zhuyi yu liansheng zhizhi (*Localism and the Federal System in the Early Republic*) (Taibei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1983), pp. 45 and *passim*; Schoppa, "Local self-government," pp. 504–505; Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 91–105.

But the failures of the early Republic to fulfil its ideas, like the similar failures 40 years later by the People's Republic of China, left would-be reformers without much confidence in fine-sounding ideal systems. For intellectuals of the 1920s, as for their counterparts today, perhaps the most important question was how to bring about genuine reform in an environment where force had become the ultimate arbiter of politics and seemed unlikely to be displaced. In this connection, the debate about the nature of warlordism and its possible remedies which was carried on in the China of the 1920s has particular relevance to the present.

The 1920s Debate Over Warlordism

The new word *junfa* (warlord) had been introduced from Japan into Chinese usage by leftist writers around 1917–20, and by the mid 1920s was beginning to displace *dujun* as designator for the military commanders who dominated politics. During the 1920s there was much argument about where warlords came from, whether they could ever serve reform and, if they could not, how they could be eliminated.

The second and third of these themes were thoroughly explored in a series of articles by Gao Yihan and Wu Zhihui which appeared in the pages of *Xiandai pinglun* in the winter of 1925 and spring of 1926. At the time many argued, as Wang Jizhan did in 1925, that warlords were nothing new: they appeared at times of dynastic transition, such as the Three Kingdoms and the late Tang, and tended to disappear when one of their number succeeded in reconstructing the imperial system.[6] This was a reasonable approach, but it posed a problem for anyone who hoped for revolutionary change. Today a Yan Jiaqi can wonder why it is that China seems locked in a cycle of violent and costly transitions from one autocracy to another.[7] Essentially the same question was posed in the 1920s by Wang's analysis of warlordism. For if the warlord problem should resolve itself in the cyclical manner Wang suggested, then the resulting society would necessarily be in effect another dynasty, and not a radically reformed China.

The question was how to make a transition from warlordism to reform. Gao Yihan, a political scientist, initiated the debate by arguing that a direct transition was impossible. Everything the warlords wanted was at odds with popular aspirations: the people wanted democracy while the warlords imposed dictatorship; the people wanted demilitarization while the warlords depended on

6. Wang Jizhan, "Junfa shi shenmo dongxi?" ("What is a junfa?") *Jingbao* (*Capital Daily*), 20 February 1926. I have not been able to consult the original text, and rely on Wu Zhihui, "Junfa wenti da Yihan xiansheng" ("A reply to Mr Gao Yihan on Junfa"), *Xiandai pinglun*, Vol. 3, No. 62 (1926), pp. 186–88, and Vol. 3, No. 64 (1926), pp. 225–29, the second of which quotes the relevant speech extensively.

7. Dali Yang, "Yan Jiaqi – yiwei juyou duli renge de zhishifenzi (shang)" ("Yan Jiaqi: an intellectual with integrity (part 1)"), *Shibao zhoukan (China Times Weekly)* No. 237 (9–15 September 1989), p. 42.

fighting to exist, and so on. There could be no change until the warlords were totally eliminated. The question was how to do that, and neither Gao nor Wu favoured democratic means.[8]

Gao staked his hope on revolutionary war led by a soldier (*jun*) who was not a warlord (*fa*). Such a person might start with revolutionary aims, and then learn warfare as a means to achieving them. His victory would bring genuine revolution. Gao makes clear his conviction that China has such a man in Chiang Kai-shek, whom he describes as *jun er fei fa* (soldier but not warlord).

Wu Zhihui disagreed. Like Gao, he was a revolutionary in his sympathies, but he had a quite different understanding of tactics. Gao's clear distinction between *jun* and *fa*, in particular, he could not accept; according to Wu the reality was far more complex. Wu noted that Gao's appraisal of Chiang Kai-shek might be too positive (and indeed within a year the left was labelling Chiang a "new warlord" or *xin junfa*, the term which has been associated with the Kuomintang in communist polemics ever since), and that of the other soldiers correspondingly too negative. But Wu's point was not to condemn Chiang, whom in fact he would strongly support. Rather it was to suggest that just as Chiang might not be all good, so the warlords might not be all bad. Certainly some were better than others; given their tremendous power, they should not be rejected out of hand.

It was worth working with them, as Wu himself had worked with Chen Jiongming on behalf of Sun Yat-sen.[9] (Wu does not mention the Soviet example, but presumably knew that Trotsky's army had employed approximately 50,000 former White officers.)[10] People could change, and it would be far easier to transform the warlords into good soldiers (*hua fa wei jun*, was how he put it) than to defeat them in a frontal assault.[11]

Although the parallels are not complete, this argument has certain resonances with the present situation. In particular, there is a tension between those who believe that the Communist Party must be eliminated before China can be reformed, and those who (a little like Wu Zhihui in the 1920s) believe that the only practical way forward is to work within the system. During 1988 and early 1989 an opinion broadly similar to Wu's even achieved some popularity: this was the so-called "new authoritarianism" (*xin quanwei zhuyi*), which was promoted by some of Zhao Ziyang's associates – such as Chen Yizi, Wang Xiaoqiang and Wu Jiaxiang – during the time when it looked as if Zhao might triumph in the factional battle then being fought.

Although explicitly reformist, the theory of new authoritarianism

8. Gao Yihan, "Pingmin geming de mudi yu shouduan" ("The goal and methods of popular revolution") *Xiandai pinglun*, Vol. 3 No. 53 (1925), pp. 2–3; "Wu Feng de sheng bai" ("The victory or defeat of Wu and Feng"), Vol. 3 No. 62 (1926), p. 1.

9. See Howard L. Boorman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1967), Vol. 3, pp. 217–420.

10. Adam B. Ulam, *A History of Soviet Russia* (New York: Praeger, 1976), p. 30.

11. Wu Zhihui, "Junfa wenti da Yihan xiansheng (xia)" ("A reply to Mr Gao Yihan on *Junfa* (part 2)").

maintained that China cannot reform all at once, but rather must move in two stages, the first economic and the second political, as the new industrializing states of Asia have done. According to some reports, Deng Xiaoping at one point expressed agreement with this view.[12]

But both sets of ideas were largely discredited by events. The unprecedentedly intense fighting of the Jiangsu–Zhejiang and Zhili–Fengtian wars of 1924 brought home to all just how futile and destructive continued military contention for power could be.[13] The Cultural Revolution, and later the Tiananmen massacre, have brought the same lessons home to a more recent generation. Chinese reformers have often been inclined to co-operate with power-holders if there seemed to be the slightest possibility of that leading to change. Such hopes, however, have repeatedly been disappointed. Neither Wu's warlords who could be reformed nor Gao's truly revolutionary generals proved easy to find in the 1920s. As for "new authoritarianism," as Dai Qing puts it, "in practical terms... China's tragedy is that we have no such new authoritarians."[14] And the naïve hopes of the early June days of 1989 when some imagined that the good soldiers of the 38th army, might sweep into Beijing and drive out the bad 27th, were, of course, disappointed.

For both the 1920s generation and that of the present, such facts have raised deep and difficult problems. Ultimately they concern why force became decisive in China, in a society where, for hundreds of years, the civil had genuinely predominated: where *wen* had been more important than *wu*. In both the 1920s and the 1980s the search for an enlightened autocracy seemed to have led to a dead end. To get beyond it would require considering where power came from. Did it come out of the barrel of a gun? Or did guns have paramount influence only in certain sets of social conditions? If the latter were the case, then the possibility existed that changes outside the military realm might be the key to bringing the guns under control.

The Problem of the Origins of Violence

Orthodox Marxists have always insisted that the power of guns is derived ultimately from social conditions. In the long-running European debate about militarism, they steadfastly maintained that the power of White generals in the Russian civil war or military dictators in interwar Europe or warlords in China was not independent, but rather rested on a social base of capitalists, the bourgeoisie, rich peasants and so on. Engels's attack on Dühring is the classic statement that power does *not* come out of the barrel of a gun.

12. "Deng Xiaoping zancheng xin quanwei zhuyi ("Deng Xiaoping endorses new authoritarianism"), *Shijie ribao* (New York), 17 October 1989, p. 16.

13. See Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Warlord Politics in China 1916–1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 135–41.

14. Geremie Barmé, "Enemy of the people," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 August 1989, p. 29.

Violence does not effect historical change: rather "the whole process can be explained by purely economic causes."[15]

This, interestingly enough, is one Marxist doctrine which seems never to have taken root in China. In "Problems of war and strategy" (*locus classicus* of this statement about power), Mao Zedong argued that the European experience where parties without armies might be able to take power did not apply to China.[16] Nor was Mao at all exceptional. Chen Duxiu seems to have seen things the same way. Although his 1922 essay, "My views on China's present political problems," presents itself as a Marxist social and economic analysis, at key points Chen veers away from orthodoxy and assigns violence an independent causal role in history. For example, when explaining the differences between countries, he looks not to their economic systems, but rather to their structures of power. Thus "feudal countries are built on the power of *junfa*... colonial countries on the basis of the mother country's power." This, of course, turns Marxism on its head: what he should have written was that "feudal countries are based on feudal relationships of production."

But from Chen's analysis emerges his prescription for China's ills. Not economic change, but rather only force (*li*) is capable of overthrowing the warlords. Therefore what China needs is a strong and centralized party which will command the power to do so.[17] As the 1920s progressed, this diagnosis, which made the existence of independent military force the root of China's ills, and the creation of some countervailing but benign military force thus their cure, came to be widely shared. Fire was the cause of fire, and fire was best fought with fire. We have seen that Gao Yihan accepted this. In 1930, even Liang Shuming published an essay arguing that warlords were China's fundamental problem.[18]

Federalism as the Cure for Warlordism

One group, however, did not agree. These were the federalists. Perhaps the most articulate of them was Hu Shi, and he argued that warlordism was no more than a superficial manifestation of a deeper

15. Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, trs. Emile Burns (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1947), esp. pp. 190–203, quotation is from p. 201; for a summary of the debate on militarism, see Volker R. Berghahn, *Militarism: The History of an International Debate 1861–1979* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), esp. pp. 21–27 on the Marxists.

16. In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), Vol. 2, pp. 219–35; his words, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun," are on p. 224.

17. Chen Duxiu, "Duiyu xianzai Zhongguo zhengzhi wenti de wo jian" ("My views on contemporary Chinese political questions"), *Hu Shi zuopin ji*, Vol. 9 (Taibei: Yuanliu, 1986), pp. 82–87, quotation is from p. 85.

18. Liang Shuming, "Jing yi qingjiao Hu Shizhi xiansheng" ("May I be enlightened by Mr Hu Shi?") *Cunzhi*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1930), pp. 1–8; also in Liang Shuming, *Zhongguo minzu zijiu yundong shi zuihou juewu (The final Awakening of the Chinese People's Self-salvation Movement)* (Shanghai: Zhonghua, 1936), pp. 381–91.

breakdown of civil society, a breakdown which could only be cured by causing political power to devolve to the local level.

We have seen that early advocates of a federal system, such as Zhang Jian, believed in this. But it was one thing to propose such ideas in the late Qing, when China was at least unified and seemed likely to remain so; it was something quite different to advocate them in the 1920s, when power in China proper was being contested by militarists and areas the Qing had once controlled – such as Mongolia and Xinjiang – were quietly slipping away. Under those circumstances federalism seemed likely just to make things worse.

This objection was spelled out with particular clarity by Chen Duxiu in 1922, and then rebutted by Hu Shi, in a way that has relevance for today's debate as well. The immediate polemical purpose of Chen Duxiu's essay quoted above had been to attack the federalists on just this point. It was utterly mistaken, according to Chen, to imagine that a federal system (*liansheng zizhi*) would help solve the problem of warlordism. Rather an expansion of local power would only increase and formalize that already held by the *junfa*. The answer was not further devolution of power, but rather its recentralization under new auspices.

Hu Shi responded specifically to Chen in September 1922 in his essay, "Federalism and warlord partition."[19] What, Hu asked (using Chen's words), was "the source of China's political disputes?" Chen had argued in effect that warlords caused division. This Hu would not accept: for him the *junfa* were "no more than a manifestation of the disorder, and by no means its origin." Where had the "big and small *junfa*," on whom Chen blamed China's problems, come from? Chen had perhaps given them an implicit social origin by arguing that they were "left over from the imperial system." Hu was not satisfied: this was like saying that "rice originates in rice jars."

The ultimate source of warlordism, according to Hu, was the attempt to unify China by force from above, rather than by building the kinds of strong local institutions which could alone bring about real unity. Both would-be warlord unifiers of China, and those of their enemies who wanted to create a strong party army against them, suffered from the same delusion according to Hu: the belief, which went back to Qin Shihuang, that force could bring unity.

But according to Hu, 2,000 years of history had demonstrated that China was too large for that. Imposed order, no matter how strong it was initially, would always give way not just to division, but rather to something more like disintegration. Real unity had always come only

19. Hu Shi, "Liansheng zizhi yu junfa geju – da Chen Duxiu" ("Federalism and warlord partition"), *Hu Shi zuopin ji* (Taibei: Yuanliu, 1986), pp. 75–82; see also Chen Duxiu, "Liansheng zizhi yu Zhongguo zhengxiang ("Federal autonomy and China's political situation"), *Chen Duxiu wenzhang xuanbian* (*zhong*) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1984), pp. 201–205 (originally published in *Xiangdao*, No. 1, September 1922).

when, instead of trying to impose control from the centre, the rulers began to rely on good government in the localities gradually to pull the country together. For the last 60 years the authority of the centre had steadily been shrinking, while local awareness had been steadily increasing. After 1911–12, provincial autonomy had become a fact. But these developments had not caused warlordism.

Quite the opposite. Warlordism had originated when, instead of understanding that the action of strong local institutions would eventually create an enduring union, leaders attempted once again to use force to create unity. The story of Yuan Shikai made this clear: when arguments for federalism appeared in 1913–15, Yuan had responded by deciding to unify by force, and sent Yuan "family generals" to each province.[20] But after these *junfa* had been securely enfeoffed they proved so strong as to make it impossible to eliminate the tendency towards provincial autonomy. Not constitutional federalism or civil local autonomy, but rather the attempt to impose unity militarily, had created the divisions of warlordism. And since attempting military unification had itself been the cause of *junfa* and division, therefore a federal system of provincial autonomy should be a powerful weapon in the struggle to remove them.

The issue came down to the social basis, if any, of military force, and of the relationship of local to central government. In the west the argument is sometimes made that military power rests ultimately on the support of one or more social classes. But none of the Chinese we have quoted in the second part of this article accepts that argument. Mao and Chen reject it, and make the gun rule the social order (with the proviso, whose implementation is never explained, that the Party must rule the gun). Hu Shi also rejects it, but the implication he draws is that if civil society can be revitalized, particularly at the local level, its vigour will quickly drive military force back to a natural place on the margin.

Hu insisted that China's most basic problem was not the strength of warlordism, but rather the failure of civil society. The root pathology was disorder:

> Warlords are a product of disorder.... As for *junfa* – can China in fact really be said to have them? All China has is some military men who defy authority [*bayi junren*] – and there is no miraculous remedy for them, but rather only the complete development of the power of civil administration [*wenzhishili*] to create a secure and peaceful situation.

What was missing in China was secure civil authority, and this lack was not the fault of the soldiers; it was the fault of the civilians themselves. Not the corruption of the military, but rather the

20. See Ernest P. Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-k'ai: Liberalism and Dictatorship in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1977), 139 ff.

degradation of the intellectual class was the root cause of China's ills. Civil authority had become dependent (*zougouhua*, literally "running-dogified") and lost its self-sufficiency. Intellectuals who were formerly the conscience of society had come to depend on bureaucratic service or slogan-writing for a livelihood. Bad individuals caused disorder; good institutions were the key to its cure. Without strong institutions, even small wars would become unmanageable. Neither government nor Party had in recent years provided institutional structures which could control internal wars by resolving the disputes which started them. Such wars, although they appeared to be the fault of military men, were in fact the product of the incompleteness of the system of civil authority.[21]

A Federalist Critique of the Contemporary Scene

Hu Shi's approach adumbrates one approach to China's contemporary problems. In *Wenhua dageming shinian shi* (1986), which attempts to account for the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, Yan Jiaqi makes essentially the same point about Mao Zedong that Hu makes about Yuan Shikai. Yan argues that the fundamental source of the disorder of those years was Mao's attempt to control everything.[22] And the same argument can be made more broadly for the whole history of the People's Republic. Its early years witnessed an enforced centralization, encompassing everything from civil authority and intellectual life to the economy, far more powerful than anything seen before. Arguably the consequences were what Hu Shi would have predicted. Internally, when unity at the centre broke down during the Cultural Revolution and in its aftermath, the localities proved incapable of reconstituting themselves, and the army had to be used to restore order. And when the people did begin to constitute themselves into something like a society independent of the government, in the spring of 1989, force was used to crush them.

That in turn removed whatever vestiges of legitimacy the regime may once have had. Critics of Yuan Shikai and his successors once ridiculed the ostensibly constitutional system over which they presided as no more than a façade for military dictatorship. Yan Jiaqi's criticisms of the political system of the People's Republic today fit into the same tradition. In his recent article, "China is no 'republic,'" Yan argues that on 4 June 1989:

> Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, and Yang Shangkun tore away the veil of the "Republic." All of China's people, and all of the world's people, saw clearly

21. "Da Liang Shuming xiansheng" ("Reply to Mr Liang Shuming") *Hu Shi luncun*, Fourth Series (Taibei: Yuandong tushugongsi, 1953), pp. 444–46.

22. Dali Yang, "Yan Jiaqi – yiwei juyou duli renge de zhishifenzi (xia)" ("Yan Jiaqi: an intellectual with integrity (part 2)"), *Shibao zhoukan*, No. 238 (19–22 September 1989), p. 47.

that the country which calls itself "The People's Republic" was neither the people's, nor a republic.

To Yan, the institutions of the People's Republic of China are a sham, concealing a military domination which even Deng Xiaoping must now take into account. According to Yan, as Deng's personal power has declined, he has had no choice but to "rely on those who hold military power," though like a warlord of old posing as a Confucian statesman, he has tried to maintain a reformist façade even after the Tiananmen massacre: "In order to obtain for a power which was established on the foundation of military repression some moral force."[23]

Hu Shi's approach would furthermore suggest that even this total reliance on the military for the maintenance of authority in the wake of Tiananmen reflects not so much a military aspiration to hold civil power as it does the failure of the government to create a strong and autonomous civil adminstration, both nationally and locally. And Yan certainly follows that approach in the solutions he proposes. Not playing off one military faction against another, but rather only the creation of a true constitutional system, will open the possibility of "making the military national, and not political [*guojiahua he fei zhengzhihua*]."[24]

The same approach can be extended to the whole question of national unity. Hu Shi argued that genuine local autonomy would lead gradually to a secure knitting together of the entire country. Similarly Yan Jiaqi argues that only political division – of Party and government, Party and army, government and enterprise, and so on – can bring about national unity including Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc.[25] The argument seems confirmed by history. Externally, the forced political centralization of China in the 1950s increased suspicions among Chinese outside the People's Republic – in Taiwan, for example – strengthening their resolve to follow their own course. By contrast, in the period of liberalization following Mao Zedong's death, local autonomy increased, intellectual life revived and the influence of the military was reduced. Concurrently, solutions to the problems of both Hong Kong and Taiwan began to look possible. In China at least, the forcible creation of the appearance of unity seems to destroy the preconditions for real unity, while paradoxically enough the abandonment of force fosters them.[26] Or as Professor Yang Xianzhen (whose

23. Yan Jiaqi, "Zhongguo bing bu shi 'gongheguo,'" ("China is no 'Republic'"), *Huaqiao ribao* (New York), 24 July 1989, p. 8; concluded in *Huaqiao ribao (China Daily News)* (New York), 25 July 1989, p. 8. Orginally published in *Ming Bao* (Hong Kong), 23 and 24 July 1989.

24. Yan Jiaqi, 13 July 1989; interview with *Zhongguo shibao* (Taibei), in *Huaqiao ribao* (New York), 14 July 1989, p. 3.

25. Dali Yang, "Yan Jiaqi," No. 237, p. 47.

26. This argument is thoroughly documented and developed in M. E. Maisog, "The reunification of China: a historical perspective" (BA thesis: Princeton University, 1989).

ideas influenced Yan Jiaqi) put it in 1963, "two unite into one" (*he er wei yi*).[27]

The Future of the Debate

This recasting of political events described above suggests that we are witnessing a restoration to Chinese political thought of its traditionally central concern with problems of local versus central administration. This originated with the *junxian* and *fengjian* debates of the Qin, continued in the statecraft literature of the later imperial period and was last dominant in the 1920s.[28] After that it was largely superseded by the arguments about revolution which are now entering eclipse, although it continued to receive lip-service in the naming of areas such as Tibet as *zizhiqu* or "autonomous regions."

Discussion of how such autonomy might be made genuine – for many years after 1949 a peripheral topic associated primarily with discussion of Taiwan's future – is now becoming central. For their own political reasons, Beijing and Taibei have promoted ostensibly federal solutions to their disagreements: Beijing's "one country, two systems" and Taibei's "multi-system nation" or "one country, two governments."[29] But these proposals have flowed as much from the needs of the regimes promoting them as they have from a more disinterested consideration of general political questions like that which is now characteristic of Chinese intellectual life, at least outside China. And such officially sponsored federalism has also dealt only in passing with the concrete problems of implementation.

All this has changed since the Tiananmen massacre. Chinese resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong is now beset with problems, of which one of the most important is the question of whether Beijing will choose to station PLA units there after 1997.[30] The "Mainland fever" in Taiwan has cooled appreciably. But most significantly, the issues of Hong Kong and Taiwan have become included in a larger set of questions which involve not them alone but rather all of China. At one time Taiwan and Hong Kong could be seen

27. Dali Yang, "Yan Jiaqi," No. 237, p. 41.

28. Such questions have also dominated much recent China scholarship. See Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900–1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 1–6, 59–77.

29. Beijing formally adopted the "one country, two systems" policy towards Hong Kong and Taiwan in 1984; see Li Jiaquan, "Formula for China's reunification," *Beijing Review*, Vol. 29 No. 4 (3 February 1986), p. 19, cited in Martin Lasater, *U.S. Policy Toward China's Reunification* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1988), p. 62: for "multi-system nations" see Hungdah Chiu and Robert Downen (eds.), *Multi-system Nations and International Law: The International Status of Germany, Korea, and China (Proceedings of a Regional Conference of American Society of International Law)*, Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, No. 8 (Baltimore: School of Law, University of Maryland, 1981).

30. See, e.g., Tai Ming Cheung, "Power of the gun," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 September 1989, pp. 19–20.

as temporary anomalies which would eventually disappear into a politically homogeneous People's Republic of China. Today it is clear that issues involving them are parts of a larger question about the future political shape of China as a whole.

The new interest in federalism represents a challenge to the most basic political structures of the People's Republic. Nor are such challenges limited to China. In the Soviet Union as well, federalist ideas are becoming popular. Andrei Sakharov advocated a federal solution to Soviet problems of democracy, nationality and, significantly, overmilitarization of society. Such views have received some semi-official support, notably from an article in *Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i pravo* for October 1989, which argues that a new, federalist, "Union Treaty should be concluded to replace the Treaty on the Formation of the Soviet Union of December 1922.".[31] Parallel developments in China and the Soviet Union may prove mutually reinforcing.

Since neither China nor the Soviet Union at present has an effective legal system, implementation of federal solutions will require addressing some new and broader questions. Within what sort of institutional framework, for instance, could power be devolved? Soviet republics have hitherto dormant local parliaments, and so forth, some of which are now beginning to show signs of vigorous life. But in China local and provincial institutions are weaker; systematic division of authority would therefore require the creation of new lower-level institutions. Probably more likely in the short-run, however, are *de facto* agreements between centre and localities over the division of power, based primarily on personalities, and perhaps associated with greater local political participation, at least in some areas. Such devolution would not need to be uniform over the entire country.

How far the debate developing among Chinese mainland and emigré intellectuals will reproduce the discussion of warlordism and federalism of the 1920s remains, of course, to be seen. Will Yan Jiaqi argue along with Hu Shi against the new authoritarians' Chen Duxiu, while Deng, Yang *et al.* provide the warlord backdrop? Probably not precisely. But it is nevertheless striking how long-dormant themes have recently reasserted themselves. The anti-warlord rhetoric of the 1920s, in particular, has come once again to vigorous life. In the days after the Tiananmen massacre wall-posters in Nanjing called Yang Shangkun a "butcher" (*tufu*) and Li Peng an "executioner" (*guizishou*). Students protesting outside Chinese diplomatic missions overseas shouted "Down with the Yang family warlords!" (*Dadao Yangjia junfa*) and "Down with the fascist new warlords!" (*Dadao faxisi xin junfa*).[32] In Paris, Wuer Kaixi "called the Communist Government "a batch of reactionary warlords and fascists' while

31. Paul Goble, "Towards a new kind of Soviet Federalism?", *Radio Liberty Report on the USSR*, 8 December 1989, p. 5; also see "Sakharov's alternative view," *Soviet Analyst*, Vol. 18, No. 13 (28 June 1989), pp. 2–4.

32. Author's personal information.

predicting its demise in six months to three years."[33] Editorial writers in once pro-communist overseas Chinese newspapers increasingly refer to parallels between the recent student demonstrations and anti-warlord demonstrations of 1910–30.[34] And the programme proposed for Chinese political reconstruction are increasingly federal in approach.

Many Chinese people clearly feel the same sort of revulsion at political violence that an earlier generation did in the 1920s, and they are increasingly seeking intellectually to understand both its origins and its cure. The contemporary debate, just now getting under way, will develop in its own fashion. But it will be surprising indeed if it does not make the past serve the present by revisiting much of the analytical ground first covered in the debates of the 1920s.

33. *The New York Times*, 30 June 1989, p. A6.

34. See, e.g., Yin Yen, "Hutong shenchu ting xinsheng" ("Heartfelt wishes heard in alleys and side-streets"), *Huaqiao ribao* (New York), 10 July 1989, p. 6.