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# The May Fourth Movement and Provincial Warlords: A Reexamination

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## Abstract

This article reexamines the relationship between the May Fourth Movement and warlordism by questioning the long-held assumption that the movement was from its inception as anti-warlord as it was anti-imperialist. In particular, it shows that popular nationalism before and at the beginning of the May Fourth Movement received continual support from many provincial warlords under and beyond the nominal control of the Beijing government. It demonstrates how and why these provincial warlords endorsed the patriotism of the movement at the national and international levels, even as they suppressed radical protests in their political domains. This analysis uncovers the long-obscured fact that the May Fourth Movement succeeded with crucial support from such provincial warlords because of its broad nationalism and the disunity of warlord politics. This rediscovery also reveals how military involvement in the movement changed the trajectory of both warlord politics and anti-warlordism in modern China.

## Keywords

May Fourth Movement, provincial warlords, militarism

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The May Fourth Movement derived its name from the student-led nationalist demonstration that spread from Beijing to the whole country in mid-1919 (Chow, 1960: 1, 140), a critical moment in the warlord period (1916–1928) of modern China. However, nine decades after this epoch-making event, its connections with warlord politics have not received serious scholarly attention. This is in large part because of a general assumption about the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord nature of the movement. A systematic examination of this long neglected issue is imperative for a thorough understanding of both the May Fourth Movement and warlord politics in modern Chinese history.

As early as 1926, commemorative articles on the May Fourth Movement had interpreted it as an anti-imperialist, anti-warlord, and anti-traditional popular movement led by students (Chen, 1971: 9, 198). In the 1940s, one of the earliest monographs on the movement also defined it as a part of the nationalist revolution against imperialist powers and "feudal warlords." Actually, as this early study also indicated, this formulation was a hindsight generalization of the more specific slogans of the movement, such as the students' vow to "externally preserve Chinese sovereignty and internally eliminate national traitors" (Bao, 1946: 39). In the retrospective definition of the May Fourth Movement, the replacement of "national traitors" with "feudal warlords" and the fusion of anti-warlordism with anti-imperialism have led to a misunderstanding of the important role of many military leaders in the movement.

In recent decades, studies of the May Fourth Movement and warlord politics have expanded the definition of the movement to stress the New Culture or the "intellectual revolution" around 1919, but they have still treated the "feudal warlords" in the movement as a part of the traditional culture under popular attack. As a result, there have been merely passing discussions of the "warlords" who opposed the New Culture and suppressed popular nationalism, or used the popular movement to undermine the power of their factional enemies in the central government of Beijing (Chow, 1960: 67, 111, 118–19, 127, 143, 148; Peng, 1998: 270, 274, 289–90, 354–58, 379–80, 653; Lai et al., 2000: 1.587–93). Some of these studies have continued the tendency to stress the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord nature of the May Fourth Movement (Liu, 1990: 3–4, 141, 212, 386; McCord, 1993: 8). Even the very few articles on the military supporters of the May Fourth Movement have also tended to focus on individual members or a specific faction of warlords, and to attribute their motivations to factional competition (Xie, 1989; Guo, 1993; Wang, 1994).[1]

This article reexamines the relations between the May Fourth Movement and provincial warlords by going beyond the assumption that anti-imperialism

and anti-warlordism were intimately linked. It also goes beyond the limited studies of military supporters of the movement and their factional struggles. In particular, empirical research shows how popular nationalism before and at the beginning of the May Fourth Movement received continual support from provincial warlords under and beyond the nominal control of the Beijing government. These provincial warlords continuously endorsed the patriotic pursuits of the movement at the national and international levels, even as they suppressed radical protests in their political domains. This analysis will uncover the long-obscured fact that the May Fourth Movement succeeded with crucial support from provincial warlords because of its broad nationalism and the disunity of warlord politics. This rediscovery also reveals how military involvement in the movement changed the trajectory of both warlord politics and anti-warlordism in modern China.

## Warlord Involvement in Diplomatic Crises and the Prelude to the May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 mainly aimed to "externally preserve Chinese sovereignty and internally eliminate national traitors" (Cai and Yang, [1919] 1979: 465). The Beijing government bore the brunt because it yielded to foreign imperialism as did Yuan Shikai (1859–1916), the military dictator in the early Republican period and the so-called "father of the warlords" (Young, 1977: 50, 242). In particular, during World War I, the diplomatic concessions Yuan and his successors in the Beijing government made to Japan provoked protests from both the populace and military leaders in the provinces. The active involvement of these military leaders in such diplomatic issues did not bring them public rebuke for their interference in politics. Rather, it set a precedent for their alliance with popular nationalism against the Beijing government and foreign imperialism in the May Fourth Movement.

Recent studies of modern Chinese history usually use the term "warlord" (*junfa*) to describe the military strongmen in the armies and governments of Republican China. But these studies still debate whether these military leaders cherished any nationalistic ideology, whether they had to operate in a clearly defined territorial base, whether their military rule deserves the derogatory term "warlordism," and so on (Lary, 1980; McCord, 1993: 3–4, 324n11; Lai et al., 2000: 1.8–18). However, for a study of the military's involvement in the May Fourth Movement, "warlords" can be generally defined as the leaders of personalized armies who dominated civilian administration in a state of political disunity, regardless of their ideological and behavioral differences and regardless of the scope of their activity, be it local, provincial,

or national. Indeed, radical scholars like Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu had introduced the word *junfa* from Japan into China as early as 1917–1918, but they used it to mean merely "militarists" or "the military faction." The exclusively derogatory usage of this term became prevalent mainly after the May Fourth Movement of 1919, and thus does not reflect the historical possibility of provincial warlords identifying their personal and factional interests with popular patriotism.[2]

Many warlords in Republican China started their military career under Yuan Shikai after he founded the New Army (Xinjian lujun), the predecessor of his Beiyang Army (Beiyang jun), in 1895. They provided crucial support for Yuan in his move to seize the presidency of the new Republic of China in 1912 and to establish a military dictatorship thereafter. These military leaders not only helped Yuan to dominate the civilian administration but also developed their own personal and factional powers in armies and governments (Lai et al., 2000: 1.106, 209–371). In particular, they began to interfere in the foreign policies of the Beijing government. Although their involvement in diplomatic issues reflected their personal, local, and factional interests, their challenges to the weak foreign policies of the Beijing government were in keeping with the demands of the patriotic populace, just as was the case in the May Fourth movement.

A major diplomatic issue that provoked popular and military protests before the May Fourth Movement was the "Twenty-One Demands" presented by Japan to Yuan Shikai's government on January 18, 1915. In this diplomatic document, as is well known, the first four groups of demands called upon China to recognize the Japanese takeover of the former German concessions in Shandong and to grant special rights to the Japanese in Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, the Yangzi River valley, and the southeast coastal region. The fifth group of demands insisted that Yuan's government employ Japanese advisers in the political, financial, and military realms, and form a joint Sino-Japanese administration of Chinese police forces, arsenals, and so on. Obviously, the first four groups of demands threatened the interests of provinces under the control of military governors, and the last group would have virtually deprived Yuan's government of effective control over domestic affairs. As a whole, the Twenty-One Demands would turn China into a Japanese protectorate.[3]

Yuan's Beijing government, military governors in provincial governments, and the patriotic populace reacted differently to the Japanese demands. Yuan directed that Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang and his deputy, Cao Rulin, conduct secret negotiations with the Japanese government to persuade it to withdraw the fifth group of demands, the major threat to the

power of the Beijing government (Ch'en, 1972: 156–57). By contrast, the publication of the Japanese demands by Chinese and foreign newspapers led to widespread protests all across the country, and military leaders of provincial governments also voiced their disapproval of the concessions demanded by the Japanese. Feng Guozhang, the military governor of Jiangsu province, led military leaders in nineteen provinces to petition that the Japanese demands be rejected. However, they received only Yuan's rebuke for their interference in diplomatic affairs and his order to prohibit popular protest (Tao, 1983: 1.294–97).

On May 7, Japan presented an ultimatum that China accept the Twenty-One Demands. On May 9, Yuan's government accepted most of them after the fifth group had been dropped. At the last moment during the negotiations, Cao Rulin not only allowed Japanese diplomats to review the Chinese letter of reply in advance but also yielded to Japanese pressure by adding one sentence to the Chinese document: "to allow future negotiations" over the dropped fifth group of demands. Cao's behavior enraged even Zhang Xun, the "pigtail general," whose troops still kept their queues as a symbol of loyalty to the Qing dynasty. With his army stationed in western Shandong and northern Jiangsu, Zhang felt keenly the threat from the Japanese presence in the Shandong peninsula. Zhang telegraphed Yuan to denounce Cao's deception and the harm he had done to the Chinese people, demanding punishment. However, Cao would not lose his position until he came under more serious attack from the populace and provincial warlords in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (Tao, 1983: 1.298–301; Cao, 1966: 126, 129–30).

In the military protests against the Twenty-One Demands, Feng Guozhang and Zhang Xun played leading roles probably because they were not only two of the most senior generals in the Beiyang Army but also because the two provinces under their control, Jiangsu and Shandong, respectively, were under direct Japanese threat. However, the endorsement of Feng's aforementioned petition by most military governors showed at least their common concern over this national crisis. Regardless of their different motivations, their protests added fuel to popular nationalism even before they endorsed the future May Fourth Movement.

Yuan Shikai's dictatorship ended after the failure of his monarchial movement and his death in 1916. The "pigtail general" Zhang Xun made a futile attempt to restore the last emperor of the Qing dynasty, Puyi, to power in July 1917. As a result of these two monarchial movements, military leaders in southwestern provinces, especially Tang Jiyao in Yunnan and Lu Rongting in Guangxi, declared their independence from the central government in Beijing. They even allowed Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen) to form

an Extraordinary Parliament (Feichang guohui) in Guangzhou and establish the Guangzhou Military Government (Guangzhou junzhengfu) in September 1917. However, Tang, Lu, and other warlords in the southwestern provinces quickly forced Sun to leave Guangzhou for Shanghai in mid-1918 and brought the military government under their control. Meanwhile, two leading generals of the Beiyang Army, Feng Guozhang and Duan Qirui, became president and premier, respectively, of the Beijing government. But the Beiyang warlord group gradually split as Feng and Duan, respectively, pursued a peaceful reconciliation policy or a military unification policy in regard to the southwestern provinces (Li, 1956: 344–49, 370–83, 384–88). Because of the disunity of these military factions and their political rule, provincial warlords could openly challenge the Beijing government and even support popular protests against its foreign policies before and during the May Fourth Movement.

In these factional struggles, President Feng relied mainly on support from the so-called three military governors of the Yangzi River valley (*Changjiang sandu*). The three generals—Li Chun in Jiangsu, Chen Guangyuan in Jiangxi, and Wang Zhanyuan in Hubei—formed the backbone of the Zhili faction, named after Feng's native province. By contrast, Premier Duan became the leader of the Anhui faction, named after his native province. Duan took advantage of China's entry into the Great War to secure huge loans from Japan, which were instrumental in Duan's forming a political clique, the Anfu Club (Anfu julebu), in March 1918, and manipulating the election of a new parliament. This parliament came into being in August 1918, and it helped Duan's Anhui faction prevail over Feng's Zhili faction by electing Xu Shichang, a senior bureaucrat in the Beiyang warlord circle, as the new president. As a repayment for Japanese support, the Beijing government signed the Sino-Japanese Military Mutual Assistance Conventions in May 1918. This granted Japan the right to station troops in northern Manchuria and Outer Mongolia on the pretext of preventing an invasion by the Central Powers or the newly formed Soviet Union, and it also provided Japanese troops other opportunities to control the Chinese army and navy (Li, 1956: 373, 378–84; Chow, 1960: 77–79).

The pro-Japanese policy of Duan's Anhui faction quickly provoked public fury and protests from other military factions. In May 1918, the first demonstrations against the Sino-Japanese Military Mutual Assistance Conventions were launched by Chinese students in Japan. Subsequently, more than 2,000 students from Beijing University and other schools in that city held an unprecedented protest meeting on May 21, nearly one year before the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement. Thereafter, Beijing students began to

dispatch representatives to other cities, and merchants and other social classes also joined the nationwide protests (Xu Deheng, 1959: 24; Zhang, 1990: 3.975–80, 983–92).

Because the warlords in the southwestern provinces had been in a continual civil war with the Beijing government after 1916, they naturally joined the public protests. On April 27, 1918, Tang Jiyao and Lu Rongting, the two major warlord leaders of the Guangzhou Military Government, as well as its foreign minister, Wu Tingfang, sent a joint telegram to President Feng Guozhang, asking him not to sign the Sino-Japanese Military Mutual Assistance Conventions. This telegram not only reflected the common interest of the Zhili and southwestern warlord factions but also appealed to popular nationalism because it promised to end their civil war with the Beijing government peacefully and to take concerted action against foreign interference in China's affairs. Two days later, the Extraordinary Parliament in Guangzhou also telegraphed Beijing to condemn these conventions. On May 15, a dozen military and civilian leaders in the southwestern provinces and the Guangzhou Military Government circulated another telegram that called on the Beijing government to reject the conventions and end the civil war (Zhang, 1990: 3.979–80; Tao, 1983: 2.775–77).

At that time, the Zhili faction had gradually come under the leadership of Cao Kun, another provincial warlord from Zhili province, and an ambitious general in this military faction, Wu Peifu, openly attacked Duan Qirui's policy on the Mutual Assistance Conventions. Actually, both Cao and Wu initially had supported Duan's military unification policy, and the Third Division, under Wu's command, had won a succession of battles against the southern armies in Hunan province. However, Duan's blatant quest for factional power, including his use of the Anfu Club to weaken Feng Guozhang's presidency, made Cao apprehensive (Ch'i, 1976: 23–29). Duan also incurred Wu Peifu's wrath by appointing an incompetent general of the Anhui faction, Zhang Jingyao, to the Hunan military governorship, which Wu had coveted. As a result, Wu became the most hawkish member of the Zhili faction. On August 7, he sent a public telegram attacking Duan's faction in the Beijing government for forfeiting national sovereignty through agreements with Japan and using Japanese loans to finance the killing of compatriots during the civil war (Wou, 1978: 26–27; Tao, 1983: 2.792).

In reality, the Zhili and southwestern factions of warlords launched such protests when the former was intensifying its attacks on the military unification policy of Duan Qirui's Anhui faction, and the latter was seeking compromise with the Beijing government by removing Sun Zhongshan from the Guangzhou Military Government (Li, 1956: 380–88). Thus, warlords in both

factions used the protest telegrams to promote their shared policy of peaceful reconciliation. But their protest also echoed the demands for national unity and independence among the patriotic populace, especially student activists. As a result, representatives of Beijing students made contact with members of the Extraordinary Parliament under the control of southwestern warlords. They also held a meeting with Feng Yuxiang, a new subordinate of Cao Kun and a member of the Zhili faction (*Beijing daxue rikan*, July 23, 1918; Sheridan, 1966: 70–73).

Therefore, during the diplomatic crises from 1915 to 1918, many military leaders in provincial governments and armies joined the public in protesting against the foreign policies of the Beijing government, especially its pro-Japanese policies. The reason was simply because their personal, provincial, and factional interests dovetailed with popular nationalism. As a result, they added a strong voice to the nationalist protests. Moreover, their interactions with the patriotic populace gradually turned from a mere echo of popular sentiment to direct contact. Naturally, these warlords would take a more active part and play a more important role in the May Fourth Movement of 1919.

## Warlord Support of Popular Nationalism and the Development of the May Fourth Movement

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 started with students in Beijing protesting the decision taken by Japan and other Allied powers at the Versailles Peace Conference to transfer the former German concessions in Shandong to Japan rather than return them to Chinese sovereignty. It quickly spread across the country, receiving support from the public and many warlords, except for the stubborn members or military supporters of Duan Qirui's Anhui faction in Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Henan, Shaanxi, Hunan, and other provinces (Gong, 1919: 171–73; Ch'i, 1976: 244). Thus, many provincial warlords did not join the Beijing government in the suppression of the nationalist movement. Nor did they support popular nationalism merely because they were in a power struggle with Duan Qirui's Anhui faction. With intertwined motives ranging from parochial, factional, and national interests to personal sentiment about their native places in Shandong, provincial warlords from different factions, even including the ruling Anhui faction, supported the initial development of the May Fourth Movement throughout the whole country, especially southern China.

Because China had provided about 140,000 laborers for the Allied troops in European battlefields after its declaration of war on Germany in August 1917, it was able to dispatch a delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference

in early 1919 as one of the victors in the Great War (Xu Guoqi, 2005: 130, 246–47). The Chinese delegation reflected the political reality of warlord rule in China and its impact on diplomatic policies. The chief delegate, Lu Zhengxiang, was the foreign minister of the Beijing government and a signer of the 1915 treaty with Japan based on the notorious Twenty-One Demands. Among the four remaining delegates, C. T. Wang (Wang Zhengting) represented the Guangzhou Military Government under the control of the southwestern warlords. These Chinese delegates quickly learned that Britain, France, and Italy had promised to support Japan's claim to the German concessions in Shandong through secret treaties made in 1917. Moreover, through the exchange of a diplomatic document with Japan in September 1918, Zhang Zongxiang, the Chinese minister in Tokyo, had virtually acknowledged that the Japanese were entitled to inherit the German interests in Shandong. Thus, leaders of the major Allied powers on April 30 resolved to transfer all of Germany's interests in Shandong to the Japanese and rejected any Chinese pleas at the Versailles Peace Conference (Chow, 1960: 86–89).

In order to support Chinese diplomatic efforts in Paris, leaders of the Citizens' Diplomatic Association (Guomin waijiao xiehui), a patriotic organization based in Beijing, secretly sent a telegram to the Guangzhou Military Government on April 23, which was then passed on to military governors in the southwestern provinces. The telegram called upon these provincial leaders and public associations to mobilize popular protests against the Shandong settlement at the Versailles conference and the pro-Japanese policy of the Beijing government (Zhonggong Sichuan dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1989: 46–47; Xu Guanting, 2007: 217). On May 3, when the news of the Chinese diplomatic failure in Paris reached Beijing, "various secret gatherings of Beijing residents, politicians, merchants, students and a few military men" planned protest activities (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 165). In particular, the Citizens' Diplomatic Association planned a protest meeting in Beijing on May 7, and in public telegrams to other organizations called upon them to hold similar meetings all over the country on the same day. However, in the evening of May 3, a student meeting at Beijing University decided to take immediate action the following day (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 165; Xu Guanting, 2007: 218–19).

In the morning of May 4, when student representatives from twelve Beijing colleges and universities held a meeting to prepare for a demonstration that afternoon, the cadets of a military academy were in attendance as observers (Cai and Yang, [1919] 1979: 453; Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 166). Thus, initiators and leaders of the patriotic movement in mid-1919 had looked for the support of provincial warlords from the beginning.

Individual servicemen and military students also joined the preparations for the May Fourth protest, and their activities more or less reflected patriotic sentiment in the military.

During the afternoon of May 4, about 3,000 students joined the protest in Tiananmen Square at the center of the city. The demonstration ended with a violent attack on the house of Cao Rulin, the pro-Japanese official involved in the negations over the Twenty-One Demands and other diplomatic issues. The angry students set fire to Cao's house, seriously injuring another pro-Japanese official, Zhang Zongxiang, who was a guest there. The police arrested 32 students, and the Beijing government under the domination of Duan Qirui's Anhui faction of warlords decided to punish the arrested students harshly because Duan immediately realized that he was the major target of the movement. It was only under public pressure that, on May 7, the police released all the arrested students (Chow, 1960: 102–3, 105–15, 118–19, 128; Gong, 1919: 43; Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 171; Cao, 1966: 155).

In spite of the government's suppression, a citywide student union appeared in Beijing on May 6 and launched a general strike in eighteen colleges and universities starting on May 19. It presented six demands to the Beijing government, including refusal to sign the Versailles peace treaty and the dismissal of three pro-Japanese officials, Cao Rulin, Zhang Zongxiang, and Lu Zongyu. The students further mobilized scholars, merchants, and workers in various protest activities. Their clash with the Beijing government peaked on June 2–4 when Beijing police arrested about 1,150 students. However, more than 5,000 students continued to protest in the streets on June 5 (Chow, 1960: 122, 138–42, 148–50; Peng, 1998: 306–10, 316–20). Ironically, the repressive policy of the Beijing government actually garnered the students support and sympathy from the public and provincial warlords.

The warlords in the southwestern provinces, together with the Guangzhou Military Government under their control, quickly rendered support to the Beijing student protests in early May because they had already planned to mobilize public opinion as a way to help their representative, C. T. Wang, and other Chinese diplomats at the Versailles Peace Conference. Moreover, these military and political leaders also latched onto the protests as an opportunity to attack their old enemy in the civil war, Duan Qirui's Anhui military faction and its civilian associates in the Beijing government. On April 23, 1919, the executive chairman (*zhuxi zongcai*) of the Guangzhou Military Government, Cen Chunxuan, had secretly forwarded the aforesaid telegram from the Citizens' Diplomatic Association in Beijing to military governors in the southwestern provinces, urging them to mobilize provincial assemblies and chambers of commerce for a public protest against the pro-Japanese

policy of Duan's faction and the Shandong settlement imposed by Japan and other foreign powers (Zhonggong Sichuan dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1989: 46–47; Tao, 1983: 2.768).

Thus, the May Fourth Movement received quick and strong support from the Guangzhou Military Government and its political and military leaders. On May 9, the two houses of the Extraordinary Parliament in Guangzhou sent a telegram to all military and civilian governors, provincial assemblies, and other sociopolitical organizations throughout country. This telegram denounced the aforementioned three pro-Japanese officials for sabotaging both the Chinese diplomatic effort at the Versailles Peace Conference and the peace meeting between the Beijing and Guangzhou governments that had started in Shanghai in February 1919. It praised the students' attacks on Cao's house and on Zhang himself, and asked the Beijing government to punish "traitorous" officials as an apology to the people. The leaders and members of this parliament circulated three other telegrams that further attacked the three notorious officials and lauded the student protests in Beijing (Gong, 1919: 147–48; Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 231–32).

As a major leader in the Guangzhou Military Government and the chief warlord in Yunnan province, Tang Jiyao also telegraphed the Beijing government, demanding the punishment of the three pro-Japanese officials and urging all Chinese to unite for national salvation. Another telegram from the commander-in-chief of the Guizhou provincial army, Wang Wenhua, blamed the foreign policy of the Beijing government for the Chinese diplomatic failure over the Shandong issue, and praised the student protest as the only effort to save the nation. In Sichuan province, a major battlefield of the civil war, the military governor Xiong Kewu, who had been appointed by the Guangzhou Military Government, also circulated a public telegram, expressing support for the popular protests (Xie, 1989: 79–80; Cha'an, 1919: 276; Zhonggong Sichuan dangshi gongzuo weiyuanhui, 1989: 46–47).

All the public telegrams from these warlords and the Guangzhou Military Government under their control carried a strong patriotic tone, but their attacks on the Beijing government and appeal for peaceful unification also reflected the specific interests and policy of this military faction. Due partly to the support of these warlords, students and other urban residents in the southwestern provinces were able to launch large-scale protests. On May 12, about 100,000 people in Guangzhou, including students from almost all local schools, attended the National Citizens' Meeting (Guomin dahui) in the city. Members of the Extraordinary Parliament and leaders of other organizations delivered speeches, and more than 10,000 people joined a parade and petitioned for the punishment of the pro-Japanese officials rather than the arrested

students in Beijing. These petitioners received a promise from the Guangzhou Military Government that it would "do its best" to see that their demands were met (Da Zhonghua Guomin, 1919: 645–46).

Thanks to the warlords' encouragement, the May Fourth Movement quickly spread to many county seats in Guangdong province and beyond, into the other southwestern provinces. In the capital of Guangxi province, Nanning, students' public speeches moved two regimental commanders so much that they immediately gave orders to burn all the Japanese medicine and weapons in their regiments and called upon all servicemen to boycott Japanese goods. Their contacts with other military units in the city led to a plan for the establishment of a patriotic society of soldiers. On June 30, Nanning held a National Citizens' Meeting, which attracted about 30,000 people. In Kunming, the capital of Yunnan, a National Citizens' Meeting on June 4 attracted some 50,000 to 60,000 people, according to the report in a contemporary newspaper. Officials in the Yunnan provincial government and the cadets of a military academy also joined the organizations and meetings of the popular protesters (Guangdong minguo shi yanjiuhui, 2004: 392–95; *Shibao*, June 1, 1919; *Shenbao*, July 14, July 16, 1919; Xie, 1989: 78–80).

In Guizhou province, Military Governor Liu Xianshi and his nephew, Commander-in-chief Wang Wenhua of the provincial army, initially supported the May Fourth Movement not only because they followed the Guangzhou Military Government but also because Liu and Wang were struggling against each other for power. In late 1918, a division commander and major military leader of the future Nationalist government, He Yingqin, had helped Wang found a youth organization and used it to mobilize students against Liu; the latter then retaliated by establishing a similar organization to woo student support. Thus, when the May Fourth Movement spread to the provincial capital, Guiyang, both He and an associate of Liu, Chairman Zhang Pengnian of the provincial assembly, presided over the National Citizens' Meeting in the city on June 1. General He also delivered a keynote speech and led the students in a parade (Worthing, 2007: 269–72; Xie, 1989: 78, 80).

Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, had two large protest meetings on May 25 and June 8, the first attended by approximately 10,000 and the second by more than 20,000. Military Governor Xiong Kewu dispatched representatives to the first meeting, and sent a public telegram on May 31 openly endorsing the popular demand that the Shandong settlement at the Versailles Peace Conference be rejected. With Xiong's backing, the second protest was attended by servicemen from a military hospital, the headquarters of the garrison force, and others (*Shibao*, June 24, 1919; *Shenbao*, June 10, 1919;

Cha'an, 1919: 276). In short, with the support of warlords, the May Fourth Movement quickly spread to all the provinces of southwest China.

In the Yangzi River valley, provincial warlords of the Zhili faction, which was still nominally under the control of the Beijing government, also defied the government's policy of suppressing the student movement. They rendered support to patriotic students for more complicated reasons and through more diverse means than did their counterparts in the southwestern faction. Such military support directly helped the May Fourth Movement to develop from the lower to the middle Yangzi River valley.

The power struggle between the Zhili faction and Duan Qirui's Anhui faction in the May Fourth Movement has received ample attention in previous scholarship, but the words and deeds of Wu Peifu and other warlord supporters of the movement also reflected many other concerns, including sincere patriotism. After the May Fourth Movement began in Beijing, Duan immediately urged the Beijing government to punish the arrested students and resist any challenge to Xu Shichang's presidency. However, one official in the Beijing government reported that the former president Feng Guozhang "was gathering a certain faction for irregular activities" (Zhongguo kexueyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1962: 260). Feng's colleagues outside of Beijing indeed used the opportunity to promote their factional interests at the expense of Duan's Anhui faction, but their telegrams and actions in support of the popular movement usually appealed to the patriotism prevalent at that time.

Both factional interest and patriotic rhetoric found typical expression in a public telegram issued by one of the Zhili faction's three military governors in the Yangzi River valley, Li Chun of Jiangsu province, during the May Fourth Movement:

> The students, merchants, and people of other social circles in Shanghai have been acting out of patriotic enthusiasm. Their criticism of the [Beijing] government includes radical phrases, but their activities are based on sincere desires. This is a symbol of cultural advancement in Jiangsu province, and should not be suppressed harshly . . . I'm in charge of local affairs, and I would naturally follow public opinion and hope to save [our nation] from this crisis. (Gong, 1919: 217)

It is notable that Li's telegram was addressed to the people of Shanghai, the city that had been controlled by the Anhui faction but was coveted by the Zhili faction. As early as 1917, Li's predecessor, Feng Guozhang, had already attempted to bring Shanghai under the jurisdiction of Jiangsu (which he controlled), but Duan Qirui instead put the city under the control of a warlord in

the Anhui faction, Lu Yongxiang (Tao, 1983: 1.492).[4] Thus, in this public telegram, Military Governor Li obviously took the opportunity to interfere in Lu's domain in Shanghai. Moreover, as an active promoter of the peaceful reconciliation policy of the Zhili faction, Li was the major target of attack in telegrams from the pro-war Anhui faction in January 1918 and barely avoided Duan's punishment (Tao, 1983: 2.664–65, 693–94, 705, 718–19, 734–37). Clearly, it was not only Li's proclaimed patriotism but also his resentment of Duan and the Anhui faction that made him adopt policies different from those of the Beijing government during the May Fourth Movement.

Although President Xu Shichang, the Ministry of Education (Jiaoyubu), and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Neiwubu) successively issued orders to suppress the student movement from early to late May of 1919, the Jiangsu provincial government under Military Governor Li's control simply passed on some of these orders to school principals in the province. In fact, Li's instructions to all schools in the province merely required them to keep student strikes within certain limits, and he still transmitted the patriotic demands of Jiangsu students to the Beijing government (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 184–90, 192–98, 212, 217). Thus, the popular protests in Jiangsu initially developed without much police interference. On May 9, thousands of students in Nanjing, the provincial capital, held a protest meeting, and then launched a general strike on May 28. These students also established citywide student associations and mobilized a boycott of Japanese goods. Similar types of protest activities and organizations spread to other Jiangsu cities, including Suzhou, Zhenjiang, Changzhou, Nantong, Yangzhou, and Xuzhou (Gong, 1919: 64–65, 71–75; Tang, 1989: 25–29).

Of the three military governors of the Zhili faction in the Yangzi River valley, Chen Guangyuan in Jiangxi was also an ardent advocate of a peaceful settlement of the civil war. In early 1918, his anti-war stance incurred the ire of Duan Qirui, who nominally dismissed Chen, but allowing him to remain in office (*gezhi liuren*) (Tao, 1983: 2.664–65, 693–94, 705, 718–19, 734, 737). Thus, the May Fourth Movement provided Military Governor Chen with an opportunity to resume his promotion of his faction's policy on the civil war, but he also publically endorsed popular nationalism.

Because of Chen's support for the popular protests and his hostility toward the domestic and foreign policies of the Beijing government, students in Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province, quickly established a citywide association. On May 12, more than 3,000 students from seventeen schools in Nanchang held a protest parade to express their support for the arrested students in Beijing. These demonstrators received a warm reception and encouragement from leaders and members of the provincial assembly, the civilian

governor, and the director of the educational department of the provincial government. Their representatives were received by a brigade commander and other officers at the office of the military governor, and were finally invited to meet with Chen Guangyuan himself. The meeting ended with Chen's promise to telegraph the Beijing government on the students' behalf (Gong, 1919: 92–94).

Keeping his promise, Chen telegraphed the Beijing government, urging it to take diplomatic action against the Shandong settlement at the Versailles Peace Conference. He also sent a public telegram to all provincial governments with the same message. In particular, his second telegram openly promoted the policy of the Zhili faction—calling for an end to the civil war and for the unity of all Chinese forces against foreign aggression for the sake of the nation (Gong, 1919: 220–22).

In addition to factional interests and a general sense of patriotism, native-place relations with Shandong also influenced some members of the Zhili warlord faction in the May Fourth Movement. Actually, in terms of its composition, this faction was more like an alliance of warlords from both Zhili and Shandong provinces because it included many Shandong natives, such as the remaining member of its three military governors in the Yangzi River valley, Wang Zhanyuan in Hubei (Ch'i, 1976: 74).[5] Warlords like Wang were more or less obliged to support popular nationalism in the May Fourth Movement either because of their native-place sentiment or because of pressure from their fellow provincials, although they showed more concern for political stability in their own provincial domains.

It was probably due to Military Governor Wang's primary concern for the stability of his power base that he initially followed the Beijing government's instruction to ban student protests from May 7. However, when he met with the provincial governor on May 11, they decided to telegraph Chinese delegates in Paris, calling on them to protect the nation's sovereignty in Shandong. They also used the opportunity to push for a peaceful reconciliation between the Beijing and Guangzhou governments (Zhang and Kong, 1981: 82, 85, 339; Zhang, 1990: 6.368). Thereafter, Wang and his provincial government even softened, at least for a while, their original ban on student demonstrations in Hubei.

In Wuchang, the capital of Hubei, student representatives from 26 schools held a meeting on May 17 and established a student association. When they contacted the provincial government for approval, the director of the Political Affairs Department (Zhengwu ting) expressed his gratitude on behalf of people in his home province of Shandong, although he was unable to approve their plan for a protest meeting. In the morning of May 18, four student

representatives met Military Governor Wang and secured his approval for the protest meeting and parade to be held on that day. Wang even dispatched his aide-de-camp and chief of staff to express "sympathy" with the parade, which attracted more than 3,000 students (Gong, 1919: 89; Zhang and Kong, 1981: 60–66).

Thus, Military Governor Wang Zhanyuan, contrary to what previous studies have claimed, was not simply a warlord suppressor of the May Fourth Movement (Chow, 1960: 143; McCord, 1993: 303; Peng, 1998: 380). His activities reflected a number of political and personal concerns, such as the stability of his power base, factional interests, and the fate of Shandong, which was not only the site of his home county but also a site of contested national sovereignty. Later, Wang did suppress the radicalized mass movement in Wuhan, and he defended his action by arguing that he was more than a native of Shandong: he was also the military governor of Hubei (Zhang and Kong, 1981: 98). Clearly, his concern for his provincial domain in the end prevailed over his native-place sentiment.

Wu Peifu was also from Shandong, and his home county, Penglai, was located in the Shandong peninsula, which was threatened by the Japanese (Zhang, 1990: 6.438). Partly because of his native-place sentiment, Wu became one of the most active supporters of the May Fourth Movement among the warlords in the Zhili faction. In a public telegram he sent during the movement, he justified his activities with the argument that "the love for one's native place is consistent with patriotic sentiment for the country" (*ai-xiang ji suoyi aiguo*) (Wu, 1922: 26–27). In a personal conversation with visitors at that time, Wu also claimed that he acted in the interest of national unification and against foreign threats rather than because he had earlier lost the Hunan governorship to a warlord of the Anhui faction, Zhang Jingyao (Tong, 1960: 336–37). However, his support of the student movement still targeted Military Governor Zhang and other members of the Anhui faction, as is discussed below.

In late May of 1919, Wu's delegate in Nanjing and Military Governor Li Chun's secretary in the city successively met a representative of Beijing student organizations (Zhonghua minguo, 1979: 616). When the May Fourth Movement in Changsha, the capital of Hunan, was suppressed by Military Governor Zhang Jingyao, more than 300 students looked for help through a petition to Wu in Hengyang, the city of southern Hunan where his troops were stationed. In response to the students' petition, Wu sent a special telegram to Zhang, urging him to stop suppressing student protests and to "safeguard" schools. He also dispatched a public telegram in the name of all Shandong natives and the Chinese people, denouncing Ma Liang, a warlord in the Anhui

faction, for his bloody suppression of patriotic students and merchants in Shandong (Wu, 1922: 25–27, 41–43). After the Beijing government started mass arrests of student demonstrators in early June, Wu sent a public telegram to the government demanding the release of these students and defending their "patriotic zeal" (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 351–52).

Although patriotic rhetoric appeared frequently in the telegrams of the aforementioned warlords of the Zhili faction, it seemed to be most sincere in the case of Feng Yuxiang because he openly defended patriotic students against the aggressive Japanese. In the city of Changde in Hunan province, where Feng's troops were stationed, students mobilized a boycott of Japanese goods and even attacked Japanese shops. When the commander of a Japanese warship threatened to send marines to protect Japanese citizens, Feng deliberately stationed his own soldiers in front of all Japanese shops to protect them, and prohibited anyone from entering or leaving. Thus, his soldiers actually shut down these business establishments until their Japanese owners begged they be spared such "protection." After the Japanese ambassador to China complained to the Beijing government about the soldier- and student-led anti-Japanese agitation in Changde, Feng replied on June 11, blaming the local Japanese for smuggling opium into the city, provoking student riots there, and making false accusations against his solders (Feng, 1981: 283–86; Sheridan, 1966: 94–95; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 299–300).

Feng's consistent support of the student protests in Changde reflected his anti-imperialist ardor. However, even his patriotic acts were probably also intended to bolster his position against the Anhui faction because he had openly telegraphed his opposition to civil war in February 1918 and subsequently lost his post for a while (Sheridan, 1966: 70, 94–96, 123, 290). Thus, the ongoing power struggle with the Anhui faction induced the Zhili warlords to defy the Beijing government and support the May Fourth Movement. But they also supported the initial development of the May Fourth Movement in the middle and lower Yangzi River valleys for other reasons ranging from sincere patriotism to native-place relations with Shandong.

A sentimental attachment to Shandong, together with patriotism, even made a key member of Duan Qirui's Anhui faction, Shanghai Military Governor Lu Yongxiang, a supporter of the May Fourth Movement at the beginning. An analysis of Lu's case is especially significant because it directly challenges previous studies that have often used the power struggles of some warlords against the Anhui faction to explain their support of the student protests against the Beijing government.

Although the May Fourth Movement was immediately suppressed by the Beijing government under the control of Duan's Anhui faction, its initial

development in Shanghai actually was encouraged by Military Governor Lu. The unusual behavior of Lu, according to a contemporary report in a leading Shanghai newspaper, was based on his concern for the nation in general and for his native place in particular: "Military Governor Lu considers the current issue relevant to the overall situation of the country, and he especially cares about his home province of Shandong" (*Shenbao*, May 7, 1919).

Lu's support provided favorable conditions for the initial development of the May Fourth Movement in Shanghai. On May 6, leaders of more than 30 educational and business organizations planned a citizens' meeting for the next day as a reaction to the Beijing student demonstration. When the magistrate of Shanghai county reported the planned meeting to Military Governor Lu, the latter not only considered the meeting to be proper behavior of concerned Chinese citizens but also sent a telegram to the Beijing government regarding the Shandong issue (Chen, 1971: 74–79; Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 178–81, 708).

Lu's telegram of May 6 contained the same sort of emotional statements that characterized many of the other public telegrams coming from Shanghai schools, merchant organizations, educational associations, and the like on that day and thereafter (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 178-81). His telegram reads in part: "Although our state is weak, our people's minds remain vital. Please instruct our delegates at the Peace Conference to argue strongly [for the Shandong issue] on just grounds and according to public opinion" (*Shenbao*, May 7, 1919).

The National Citizens' Meeting in Shanghai convened at 1:30 p.m. on May 7, attracting about 20,000 people from more than 70 organizations, according to news reports. The meeting selected delegates to meet with representatives of both the Beijing and Guangzhou governments at the Shanghai Peace Conference. A meeting of student representatives from about 30 schools on the next day did the same. The two groups of delegates were received by Tang Shaoyi, the chief delegate of the Guangzhou Military Government and the warlords of the southwestern provinces. The student delegates also received Tang's advice to mobilize merchants and workers into their protest activities (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 181–83; Gong, 1919: 66; Chen, 1971: 81–82).

Shanghai merchants soon joined student protests on May 9 and launched a boycott of Japanese goods. On May 11, a citywide student union was formed, and on May 26 it led approximately 25,000 students from 52 schools in a general strike (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 192–93, 253–57). Although President Xu Shichang issued an order on May 25 banning public meetings, speeches, and parades, and the Beijing government sent a secret

telegram to Lu on May 28 ordering him to prohibit student strikes, he refrained from suppressing the student protests until the very end of May (Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 192–98; *Shenbao*, May 29–30, 1919).

Therefore, the May Fourth Movement in mid-1919 was able to achieve its initial success partly because of the support from provincial warlords of different factions, including Military Governor Lu Yongxiang of the Anhui faction. These warlords supported the nationalist movement not merely or not necessarily because of their political calculations in factional struggles, as has been stressed by previous studies. They did so also because of other factors, such as their personal relations with their native places in Shandong and their patriotism. While the support of the Zhili and southwestern warlords helped the May Fourth Movement spread throughout southern China, Lu's initial endorsement and continuing tolerance of the movement until the end of May 1919 created a precondition for it to reach its highest point in Shanghai, the largest city of modern China.

## The Dual Strategy of Provincial Warlords and the Success of the May Fourth Movement

The center of gravity of the May Fourth Movement shifted from Beijing to Shanghai in early June of 1919, climaxing in general strikes of students, merchants, and workers in the treaty ports and other cities. Meanwhile, many provincial warlords adopted a dual strategy of suppressing the radical protests within their provincial domains but supporting the patriotic acts of the populace at the national and international levels. As a result, the May Fourth Movement achieved its first major goal on June 10 when the Beijing government was forced to dismiss the three pro-Japanese officials and another major goal on June 28 when the Chinese delegates to the Versailles Peace Conference rejected the peace treaty (Chow, 1960: 162–67; Peng, 1998: 325, 399–400, 406–11). For a full understanding of the relationship of the provincial warlords with the May Fourth Movement, it is necessary to examine both the warlords' suppression of radical protests in their domains and their contribution to the final success of popular nationalism at the national and international levels.

Although many warlords from different military factions, including Shanghai Military Governor Lu Yongxiang of the ruling Anhui faction, initially supported the May Fourth Movement, they still tried to ensure the social stability of their political domain by restricting popular protests.[6] Even in the southwestern provinces under the Guangzhou Military Government, warlords suppressed radicalized protesters. When protesters in Guangzhou

forced some large department stores to burn their Japanese goods on May 30, 1919, they immediately faced police suppression. In Kunming, Tang Jiyao also expressed caution when the popular protesters started attacks on Japanese shops in early June 1919. The Yunnan provincial government ordered each school to select no more than eight representatives for any public meeting, and prohibited students from going out during individual study or regular class time. The military governor of Guizhou, Liu Xianshi, ordered that students not be allowed to graduate or enter higher grades if they missed a third of their classes (Guangdong minguo shi yanjiuhui, 2004: 393; Xie, 1989: 80; Worthing, 2007: 272).

Warlords in the Zhili military faction showed even stronger concern about social stability and adopted harsh policies toward radical protesters from early June 1919. Among the three military governors in the Yangzi River valley, Chen Guangyuan, as noted, initially supported student activities in Nanchang, but his provincial government and officers quickly decided to prohibit or dissuade students from holding public meetings and similar protest activities in Jiujiang, Ji'an, and other cities (Gong, 1919: 94). As the nationwide protests led to general strikes in many cities in early June 1919, Li Chun and Wang Zhanyuan suppressed the popular movements in Jiangsu and Hubei, respectively. On June 1 and 3, Wang's troops and police injured about twenty students in Wuhan (Zhang and Kong, 1981: 98–101, 105–7, 113, 348–50). On June 7, 24 students were also injured by Li's police in Nanjing. More students were arrested in both cities (Cha'an, 1919: 262–63; *Shenbao*, June 10, 1919).

The suppression of radical protesters by these provincial warlords reflected their primary concern for the stability of their power base. However, these warlords also pursued this goal at the expense of the Beijing government, pushing it to accept popular demands. In particular, the suppressive policy of these warlords in their provincial domains did not prevent them from supporting the nationalist movement against their factional enemies in the Beijing government, nor did it prevent them from agitating for the protection of their native places in Shandong and of national sovereignty in general. Based on this dual strategy, many warlords in different factions took similar actions that directly helped the May Fourth Movement achieve final success.

The paradox of the warlords' dual strategy found full expression in Shanghai because this city was under the control of a major warlord of the ruling Anhui faction, Military Governor Lu Yongxiang, but it was still able to become the central arena of the May Fourth Movement at a later stage. In particular, Shanghai experienced the largest general strike in the whole country

in early June, but there was not a single student casualty at the hands of Lu's army and police (Chow, 1960; Chen, 1971).[7] The explanation for this paradoxical phenomenon lies not only in the strength of popular organizations and movements in this treaty port but also in Lu's political consideration for the issue of Shandong, his home province, for the stability of Shanghai, his power base, and for the national crisis in general. Because previous studies have usually stressed the general strike of students, merchants, and workers in Shanghai as the determinant factor for the success of the May Fourth Movement (Chow, 1960: 151–67; Peng, 1998: 325–52), it is worthwhile to look closer at how provincial warlords also contributed to the successes of the movement within and beyond the city.

In Shanghai, Military Governor Lu issued the first order to prohibit public meetings on June 1 after he had received a report that students on the previous day had tried to mobilize a merchant strike in the city (*Xinwen bao*, June 2, 1919). Thus, Lu did not begin to suppress the popular protests until the May Fourth Movement became radicalized and threatened his power base, just as the aforesaid warlords of the Zhili and southwestern factions did. In reaction to his repressive policy and to the large-scale arrest of students by the Beijing government, Shanghai students eventually led merchants and workers in a citywide strike starting on June 5. At 5 p.m. of that day, various educational, commercial, industrial, social, and political groups held a joint meeting and reached a resolution: they would not end the strike until the Beijing government dismissed the three pro-Japanese officials—Cao Rulin, Zhang Zongxiang, and Lu Zongyu (Chen, 1971: 111–23; Peng, 1998: 331–33).

On June 6, the second day of the general strike in Shanghai, Military Governor Lu decided to use both police and troops to arrest student demonstrators. The next day he imposed martial law in the Chinese districts of Shanghai. Actually, more than a hundred students had been arrested on June 5, but Lu quickly released them on the following day, and his attempt to break the merchant strike with army and police forces also failed. There were reports that the police whipped the arrested students, but bloody suppression of the protesters by local authorities did not happen in Shanghai as in other cities, such as Nanjing and Wuhan (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 380, 396–98, 711–14; Yang, 1919: 531–34; Chen, 1971: 133). Instead, the pressure of the general strike soon compelled Lu to seek a compromise with the protesters.

On June 7, the third day of the Shanghai general strike, Lu invited more than a hundred leaders of educational, business, and other organizations to a meeting. His speech at the meeting reflected his native-place sentiment about the Shandong issue:

> Since the diplomatic failure over the Shandong issue, merchants and students have risen to back the government, and called for a boycott of Japanese goods. I'm a native of Shandong, have a close relation [with the province], and am extremely appreciative of your enthusiasm. (*Xinwen bao*, June 8, 1919)

However, Lu's major concern was the disturbance caused by the general strike in Shanghai. He tried to end the strike by guaranteeing the resignation of the three pro-Japanese officials in the Beijing government, but he refused to send out a telegram demanding the punishment of these officials. Because merchant and student leaders resolved to continue their strike until the dismissal of these officials, and the strike had also attracted a large number of workers in Shanghai, Lu finally sent an "extremely urgent" telegram to the Beijing government on June 8. His telegram reported the intensification of the general strike in Shanghai and its spread to Nanjing, Ningbo, and other cities, and warned the Beijing government of greater disaster if a proper resolution of the situation did not come soon. Moreover, Lu emphasized Shanghai's position as the commercial center of southeastern China, the focus of public opinion in the country, and the key to business activities in inland cities. Thus, he petitioned the Beijing government to dismiss the three aforementioned officials, as the student and merchant leaders of the Shanghai general strike had demanded (*Xinwen bao*, June 8, June 10, 1919; *Shishi xinbao*, June 8, 1919; Chen, 1971: 138–43).

Like Lu, another key member of the ruling Anhui faction also endorsed the popular demands presented to the Beijing government because of a similar concern for social stability. On June 7, one day before Lu sent his telegram, Military Governor Zhang Jingyao of Hunan province had telegraphed the Beijing government calling on it to dismiss Cao, Zhang, and Lu. Although Zhang had initially followed the policy of the Beijing government and actively suppressed student demonstrations in the provincial capital, Changsha, his telegram argued that it would be no longer worthwhile to keep the few widely hated officials in power. Thus, he proposed dismissing them to mollify the public and defuse popular protests (Gong, 1919: 173; Cha'an, 1919: 275–76; Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 419). Clearly, both Zhang Jingyao and Lu Yongxiang tried to stabilize their power base by sacrificing the three civilian associates of their military faction. However, unlike Zhang, Lu had initially supported the May Fourth Movement in his power base, Shanghai, and did so also for the sake of his native province of Shandong and to protect national sovereignty. These political considerations probably also influenced his decision to send the telegram of June 8.

Meanwhile, the three military governors of the Zhili faction in the Yangzi River valley, Li Chun, Chen Guangyuan, and Wang Zhanyuan, finally formed a factional alliance to champion the students' patriotic demands. In response to the national crises and the Beijing government's request for mediation in domestic disputes, Li, Chen, and Wang twice dispatched joint telegrams to the Beijing government before and on June 8. In particular, their second telegram specifically demanded "dismissing Cao, Zhang, Lu and the others according to students' requests" (*Shuntian shibao*, June 9, 1919). It is noteworthy that the three warlords championed the students' patriotic cause against the Beijing government just after they had turned from support to suppression of popular protests in their own provinces. Thus, their concerted action reflected not only their factional interest and their general concern for the national crisis but also their shared anxiety for social stability in their provincial domains. In any case, their joint telegrams on June 8, together with the aforementioned telegram from Shanghai Military Governor Lu Yongxiang on the same day and that from Hunan Military Governor Zhang Jingyao on the previous day, undoubtedly shocked the Beijing government.

New shock waves for Duan Qirui's Anhui faction in the Beijing government came from other provincial warlords the next day. On June 9, Wu Peifu, the most aggressive and ambitious general of the Zhili faction, led three brigade commanders in his Third Division in dispatching a telegram to the government on behalf of all their officers and soldiers. Their telegram strongly opposed suppression of student protests and merchant strikes in Beijing, Shanghai, and other cities, and proposed holding a national citizens' meeting on the Shandong issue. On the same day, the Guangzhou Military Government under the control of southwestern warlords even issued a public statement endorsing the general strike in Shanghai. It decided to send delegates to that city, make contact with the organizations of students, merchants, and others, and promote the popular movement there (*Shibao*, June 13, 1919; *Shuntian shibao*, June 16, 1919). This statement reflected the same attitude in the aforementioned statements issued by the southwestern warlords from the beginning of the May Fourth Movement, but the plan of the Guangzhou government to champion the Shanghai strikes posed a new threat to the Beijing government. Moreover, the military governor of Shanxi province and a relatively independent warlord in northern China, Yan Xishan, had already shown his sympathy for student protesters in a telegram of May 13 to the Beijing government (*Shibao*, May 15, 1919).

While these provincial warlords endorsed the general strike in Shanghai or the popular demand for the dismissal of the pro-Japanese officials in the Beijing government between June 7 and 9, this government also received reports

about strikes in many cities from their banks, chambers of commerce, and so on, and it faced similar demands from these institutions. Under pressure from both the popular protesters and provincial warlords, President Xu Shichang on June 10 finally issued orders allowing the "resignation" of Cao Rulin, Zhang Zongxiang, and Lu Zongyu. With the release of this news, the general strike ended in Shanghai on June 12 and in other cities around that time, and the May Fourth Movement won its first major battle (Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 1960: 418–21; Chow, 1960: 161–64).

Numerous articles and books on the May Fourth Movement have attributed the success of the general strikes to the power of the popular organizations and mass mobilization, but these previous studies have largely neglected the positive role of provincial warlords in this crucial issue. The dismissal of the three pro-Japanese officials by the Beijing government on June 10 was indeed its concession to the general strikes. However, this decision was made after six leading warlords of the Anhui and Zhili factions under the Beijing government as well as the Guangzhou Military Government had presented such demands or championed the general strikes during three consecutive days from June 7 to 9. Because these warlords, together with Shanxi Military Governor Yan Xishan, controlled Shanghai and about ten provinces that covered almost half of the territory of China proper, their political opinions would be a more direct factor, if not a more important one, than popular pressure on the Beijing government.

After initial success, the popular participants in the May Fourth Movement continued their struggle to prevent the Beijing government from signing the Versailles peace treaty, and provincial warlords still played a significant role in this issue. Although the activities of these military leaders did not always exert a direct influence on the Chinese delegation in Paris, their support of popular protests against the Shandong settlement in the peace treaty nonetheless deserves special attention because it helped shape the May Fourth Movement until its end.

As early as May 24, the leader of the Anhui faction of warlords, Duan Qirui, circulated a telegram that slandered the student protestors and urged the Beijing government to sign the peace treaty in order to gain membership in the League of Nations. Duan's telegram received support from very few provincial warlords even inside his Anhui faction (*Shenbao*, May 30, 1919; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 320–23). On the other hand, the military governors and other generals in the Zhili and the southwestern factions, such as Chen Guangyuan in Jiangxi, Tang Jiyao in Yunnan, and Xiong Kewu in Sichuan, from the beginning of the May Fourth Movement had urged the Beijing government to reject the peace treaty. As noted above, their calls even

found an echo among some warlords in the Anhui faction, such as Shanghai Military Governor Lu Yongxiang (Gong, 1919: 220–22; Cha'an, 1919: 276; *Shenbao*, May 7, 1919).

In the face of pressure from Duan's Anhui faction to sign the Versailles peace treaty and the anti-treaty protests from the populace and defiant provincial warlords, the Beijing government under President Xu Shichang telegraphed contradictory instructions to the Chinese delegates in Paris from late May to late June of 1919. These telegrams ordered them either to sign the Versailles peace treaty or "make situational arrangements" (*xiangji banli*), but never authorized them to reject it. Eventually, the Chinese delegates in Paris decided to reject the treaty by themselves, but their decision was made under pressure from the Chinese popular protesters at home and in Paris, and from the provincial warlords under and beyond the control of the Beijing government (Gu, 1983: 1.202, 206–11; Chow, 1960: 165–66; Peng, 1998: 407–10; Xu Guoqi, 2005: 262–66).

After a group of Chinese students in Japan telegraphed Wu Peifu, Li Chun, and Wang Zhanyuan, the three warlords of the Zhili faction, to call on the Beijing government to reject the peace treaty, Li, Wang and Chen Guangyuan, another member of this military faction, followed suit and petitioned the Beijing government in a joint telegram on June 8, 1919. Meanwhile, the telegram from Wu and his subordinate officers in the Third Division also demanded the Beijing government retake the former German concessions in Shandong from Japanese hands (Cha'an, 1919: 273; *Shuntian shibao*, June 9, 1919; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 351–52).

As the focal point of the diplomatic controversy, Shandong experienced especially fierce protests that even influenced the warlord army there. When students went from the provincial capital, Ji'nan, to Shouguang county to mobilize popular protests, they received a warm welcome from a company commander of the Fifth Division, which was stationed in the province. This commander even deployed guards to prevent local Japanese from sabotaging the students' public speeches. Around May 21, different companies and battalions in the Fifth Division selected representatives to hold secret meetings, and an officer named Hu Longshu circulated a public telegram on behalf of all the 10,080 servicemen in the division. The telegram endorsed the popular protests and announced the commencement of an anti-Japanese boycott in the division. This shocked the authorities, and an official investigation of the issue later led to the suicide of some officers (Hu and Tian, 1980: 224–25, 387; *Shenbao*, May 24, 1919; Gong, 1919: 135–36). Evidently, the patriotic sentiment among the army and the populace in Shandong did not win over the warlord members of Duan Qirui's Anhui faction there. However, it

influenced at least a former commander of the Fifth Division and the final decision of the Beijing government on the Versailles peace treaty, as discussed below.

In late June 1919, people in Shandong launched a petition movement for the rejection of the peace treaty. After petitioners arrived in Beijing on June 19, they issued a call for support from the military leaders of Shandong origin, including Hubei Military Governor Wang Zhanyuan and Wu Peifu of the Zhili faction as well as Shanghai Military Governor Lu Yongxiang of the Anhui faction. One unusual guest at this meeting was Ma Longbiao, the president of the Shandong native-place association in Beijing, the superintendent of the Beijing army and police (*Beijing jun-jing duchazhang*), and a former commander of the Fifth Division (Hu and Tian, 1980: 242, 302, 408–9; *Shishi xinbao*, June 28, 1919).

On June 20, Shandong petitioners paraded to the office of President Xu Shichang. However, Xu rejected their demand for an audience and instead asked General Ma Longbiao to disperse them. Ma turned out to be more helpful to his fellow provincials than to the president. After he failed to persuade the petitioners to leave, Ma talked with the president for almost one hour, and finally helped the petitioners arrange a meeting with Acting Premier Gong Xinzhan and an audience with the president over the next two days. This help from Ma was subtle, but Wu Peifu vigorously responded to the call from his fellow provincials in Beijing. He sent to President Xu a telegram, which demanded that the Shandong petitioners be protected and he also attacked the Anhui military faction and its political allies for suppressing protests in Shandong and Beijing. Meanwhile, the petitioners from Beijing and Tianjin joined those from Shandong, and they finally forced President Xu to announce that he had instructed the Chinese delegates in Paris not to sign the Versailles peace treaty (*Shishi xinbao*, June 28, 1919; *Xinwen bao*, June 30, 1919; Hu and Tian, 1980: 407–16; Wu, 1922: 32–33).

On June 25, Xu had indeed telegraphed this instruction to Chinese delegates in Paris after he had met the Shandong petitioners. But his telegram was deliberately or accidentally delivered to the Chinese delegation after June 28, the day set for signing the peace treaty (Chow, 1960: 165). Therefore, the anti-treaty protests in Beijing, together with strong or subtle support from provincial warlords, achieved success only in the sense that they prevented the Beijing government from instructing Chinese delegates to sign the treaty at the last moment.

Nevertheless, popular protesters and provincial warlords still exercised different degrees of influence on the final success of the May Fourth Movement in Paris. By mid-June 1919, the Chinese delegation in Paris had received more

than 7,000 telegrams from China, all of which demanded rejection of the Shandong settlement in the peace treaty. In particular, the telegrams from military and civilian governors requested the delegation to take a patriotic stance in accordance with public opinion and to refuse to sign the peace treaty, even if the Beijing government was ready to accept it. The telegrams from these provincial warlords accounted for only a small percentage of the more than 7,000 telegrams, but they evidently carried unusual weight in the minds of the Chinese delegates. When one of the Chinese plenipotentiaries in Paris, V. K. Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun), wrote his memoir decades later, he could still recall the general contents of telegrams from the provincial warlords (Chow, 1960: 165–66; Gu, 1983: 1.207).

Wu Peifu was especially active in telegraphic protests against the Versailles peace treaty. He finally used such protest activities to bring the warlords in the Zhili and southwestern factions into a united front against the Beijing government, although a joint telegram they sent came out too late to influence the drama in Paris. After Wu learned from hearsay that the Beijing government had agreed to sign the Versailles peace treaty in late June, he contacted military leaders of the southwestern provinces and proposed circulating a protest telegram on behalf of generals in both the northern and southern armies. Consequently, 61 military officers on both sides, including Wu and Feng Yuxiang of the Zhili faction as well as Military Governor Tan Haoming of Guangxi province, jointly issued a public telegram on July 1. In this telegram, these military leaders still expressed strong opposition to signing the Versailles peace treaty because the report on the rejection of the treaty by the Chinese delegation had not reached China by that time. In particular, they made a point-by-point refutation of Duan Qirui's telegram of May 24 that had argued in favor of signing the treaty. The joint telegram of these 61 military leaders appeared on the same day that an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 people in Shanghai were holding a mass meeting against the signing of the peace treaty (Cha'an, 1919: 276–78; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 353–55; *Shenbao*, May 30, 1919; Chen, 1971: 189). Thus, it provided the strongest military support for ongoing popular protests.

The southwestern faction of warlords had actually exercised stronger influence on the Chinese delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference because the representative of their Guangzhou Military Government, C. T. Wang, was one of the five Chinese plenipotentiaries. Since the military leaders in the southwestern provinces had consistently opposed the Shandong settlement in the Versailles peace treaty from the beginning of the May Fourth Movement (Gong, 1919: 220; Cha'an, 1919: 276), the Guangzhou Military Government, which was under their control, on June 9 resolved that "China should not join

the League of Nations and must withdraw from the Peace Conference unless the Shandong issue can be solved fairly" (*Shuntian shibao*, June 16, 1919). As the government's representative in Paris, Wang naturally refused to sign the peace treaty, and he later received support from Wellington Koo and other plenipotentiaries. The Chinese students and workers in Paris also prevented Lu Zhengxiang, the foreign minister of the Beijing government and the chief Chinese delegate, from attending the signing ceremony on June 28 (Cai and Yang, [1919] 1979: 450; Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan, 1980: 341, 345; Chow, 1960: 166; Gu, 1983: 1,202, 206–11).

After the dismissal of the three pro-Japanese officials by the Beijing government on June 10, the Chinese diplomats' refusal to sign the Versailles peace treaty symbolized the final success of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. Evidently, this nationalist movement succeeded not only because of public pressure from the patriotic protests of students, merchants, workers and other urban residents but also because of the varied support from provincial warlords of the Zhili and southwestern factions as well as the ruling Anhui faction.

## Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the support of provincial warlords helped shape the May Fourth Movement and contributed to its final successes, including the removal of the pro-Japanese officials from the Beijing government and the rejection of the Shandong settlement in the Versailles peace treaty. It raises a number of questions about the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord nature of the May Fourth Movement.

The link between warlordism and imperialism in modern Chinese history has already come under scholarly criticism because the warlords in Republican China did not always depend on the foreign powers, collaborate with them, or benefit from their support. However, the dual formulation of anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism in previous studies of the May Fourth Movement has rarely been questioned by scholars (McCord, 1993: 7–8). As a result, previous scholarship tends to treat the warlords in Beijing and various provinces, apart from a few exceptions, as common targets of the patriotic movement and even as supporters of Japanese imperialism and other foreign interests (Peng, 1998: 352–54, 357–58).

To some extent, the May Fourth Movement indeed manifested both anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism because it targeted the Beijing government under Duan Qirui's Anhui military faction and its members, and denounced their pro-Japanese stance and diplomatic concession to the foreign powers at

the Versailles Peace Conference. However, based on personal, provincial, and factional interests as well as patriotism, more provincial military leaders lodged repeated protests against the pro-Japanese policies of the Beijing government from 1915 and strongly opposed diplomatic concessions in the Shandong issue in mid-1919. Thus, these provincial warlords were not targets of the May Fourth Movement but its supporters, and that was especially true at the beginning of the movement.

Many provincial warlords from different military factions, including the ruling one, supported the May Fourth Movement at the beginning, and they continued to support its nationalist demands in spite of their suppression of radicalized protests within their own jurisdictions. This paradox indicates that these warlords acted on different interests, including their personal relations with their native places in Shandong province, a practical concern for social stability in their provincial domains, political calculations in power struggles among military factions, and patriotic sentiment. These warlords could identify their different interests with the May Fourth Movement because native-place sentiments and regional identity in Chinese society could underpin nationalism (Hsieh, 1962: 242; Lary, 1974: 2–3, 12–20; Goodman, 1995: 260–77, 312–14), and the nationalist movement in mid-1919 mainly meant opposition to the pro-Japanese policy of the Beijing government and the Shandong settlement crafted by the foreign powers.

Therefore, the May Fourth Movement could obtain crucial support from the different factions of provincial warlords and achieve its final successes because it incorporated their varied personal, parochial, and factional interests into a broad nationalist platform. This understanding of relations between the May Fourth Movement and provincial warlords has important implications not only for scholarly debate over the historic movement but also for the advancement of warlord studies, especially for future research on historical changes in warlord politics and anti-warlord nationalism at the juncture of the May Fourth era and the warlord period.

In an interesting study of "warlords against warlordism," Edward A. McCord reveals how the popular discourse of anti-warlordism arose as a result of civil warfare and political fragmentation from 1916 and led warlords themselves to launch a telegraphic campaign against military intervention in politics before the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement in mid-1919. However, his data also show that the newly introduced word "warlord" had not yet become a universally derogatory term in China because one provincial military leader still used "warlord comrades" (*junfa tongbao*) as an affectionate form of address in a public telegram. Because McCord's discussion of the military leaders' telegraph campaign against warlordism stops right after

the outbreak of Beijing student demonstration on May 4, 1919, it is unclear how provincial warlords continued and changed the campaign through their involvement in the May Fourth Movement (McCord, 1996: 796, 798, 811–21, esp. 816n48, 820n55).

Actually, the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement gave provincial warlords a new opportunity to increase their influence in politics, especially in diplomatic issues, but their telegraph campaign and political activities in the movement intensified both warlord politics and anti-warlordism. In their protests against the domestic and foreign policies of the Anhui military faction and its Beijing government, the provincial warlords of the Zhili and southwestern factions eventually formed an alliance, and their conflicts with the Anhui faction became more intense. As a result, the Shanghai Peace Conference between the Beijing and Guangzhou governments broke off in mid-May 1919, and the Zhili faction openly split with the Anhui faction and made political preparations for a showdown with the latter in the following year (Chow, 1960: 127; Lai et al., 2000: 1.616–26).

Although these provincial warlords temporarily intensified warlord politics in their favor, their involvement in the May Fourth Movement accelerated the demolition of the political foundation of warlordism. The conflict between the Zhili faction and the Anhui faction in the May Fourth Movement directly led to the disintegration of the Beiyang Army, the first and the major military warlord force in the early Republican period. More important, the participation of provincial warlords in the public attack on "the national traitors" in the Anhui military faction and its Beijing government helped initiate a new nationalist challenge to the legitimacy of warlord rule. Thus, in the May Fourth Movement, these military leaders continued what McCord called "warlords against warlordism," but they shifted the focus of their telegraphic campaign from condemnation of military intervention in domestic politics toward denunciation of "traitorous" warlords. Meanwhile, provincial warlords like Wang Zhanyuan also came under public censure for "national betrayal" (*maiguo*) after their suppression of radicalized protests in their domains (*Hankou xinwenbao*, July 4, 1919). Thus, even though the May Fourth Movement did not target all warlords as a whole, it still helped anti-warlordism to merge with anti-imperialism and to obtain new momentum from popular nationalism.

As a result, the term "warlord" became increasingly derogatory not only because of the social violence and political fragmentation caused by military leaders, but also because the public—especially leftists—viewed their activities as a betrayal of national interests. Even warlord supporters of the May Fourth Movement, such as Wu Peifu, earned a bad reputation as running dogs

of imperialism in the 1920s, regardless of their actual relations with foreign powers (Wou, 1978: 262–65; Waldron, 1991: 1088). Thus, military strongmen became victims of the anti-warlord nationalism that they themselves endorsed in the May Fourth Movement. In this sense, the May Fourth Movement of 1919 was indeed a turning point in modern Chinese history.

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## Notes

1. Guo's article on Wu Peifu, a warlord supporter of the May Fourth Movement, touches lightly on Wu's patriotism and native-place sentiment about Shandong province, but it mainly stresses his power struggle with the Beijing government and regards him as the only exception to the military suppressors of the movement.
2. This conceptual analysis takes into account the discussions on Chinese warlords in Lary, 1980: 441; Sutton, 1980: 2–8; Waldron, 1991: 1080–86; McCord, 1993: 2–4; Lai et al., 2000: 1.8–18; Xu Yong, 2001: 1273–76. Xu shows that Li Dazhao first used the term *junfa* in August 1917.
3. On February 14, 1915, the Japanese government released a significantly different version of the document under the pressure of other Allied powers. For a comparison of the two versions of the Japanese demands, see Ch'en, 1972: 152–55. But Ch'en misdates the Japanese presentation of the secret version to January 8, 1915.
4. Lu's title was *hujunshi* (literally, military protector), a term that has been generally translated as "military governor" in previous studies in English.
5. Wang's home county, Guantao, was located in what was then northwestern Shandong but is now part of Hebei.

6. Starting from May 10, 1919, Lu had already ordered an army company and his police force to increase patrols in the Chinese districts of Shanghai; see *Shenbao*, May 10, 1919.
7. In Shanghai, only the British and French police forces caused casualties among students and other urban residents in the International Settlement and the French Concession in early June 1919 (Haishang Xianren, 1919: 413–17).

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