

tered, exhausted, and on the verge of collapse, and was only saved by his decision to collaborate with the KMT and the injection of a considerable amount of external aid. The simple fact was that Feng, having been without a base he could call his own for so long, simply could not afford to play a big role any longer.

Feng's plight was of course shared by most other militarists. The wars of annihilation and attrition could only be sustained by a sound economy achieved through either self-development or massive foreign aid. The territorially and economically vulnerable militarists were eliminated early in the game. Even the territorially secure militarists were quite exhausted after twelve years of fighting, during which every thinkable (and unthinkable) way of milking the people had been tried. Yet, in 1927–28, they were forced to do battle on an increasing scale with an enemy (the KMT) that had hitherto been spared deep involvement in the system and that was just beginning to flex its muscles. That they should suffer in such a confrontation is simple to understand in view of their comparative economic conditions.

Thus, there seems to have been a direct relationship between the cost of war and the stability of the system. When the cost of war was low, and when war damage could be repaired within a short period of recuperation, the system was favorable to the existence of a larger number of participants. When the costs and damage of war became too high, many participants either were eliminated or surrendered.

The example of the KMT suggests a more rational alternative to the other militarists' economic policies. The KMT started with far less favorable conditions. Its success was largely the result of its ability to strike a reasonable balance between long-range objectives and immediate needs. In assessing its success, however, we must not neglect the peculiar circumstances under which it occurred. That success might well have been impossible had not the northern militarists given the KMT a relatively long period of isolation. This isolation enabled the KMT to eliminate internal obstacles one by one and to institute a series of policies that eventually strengthened its economic position while the economic resources of other militarists were being exhausted.

## Normative Aspects of Military Politics

Up to this point, our effort has been to describe the major institutional aspects of military regimes. Inevitably, we have to come to grips with the sources and basic structure of the average militarist's value system, because a man's political behavior is ultimately guided by his values. In any political system there must be a basic body of norms and principles that the actors share, if only to provide a minimal measure of orderliness in their political transactions. In this chapter we will inquire into the norms, values, and principles that shaped the militarists' political behavior. We will begin with a description of the militarists' personal values and characteristics and then outline their code of behavior, the rules that governed the militarists' interactions with each other. Finally, we will analyze the basic political values that shaped the militarists' behavior in their attempts to establish their political legitimacy.

Although there have been a few recent studies of the political culture of the Chinese people, they have all been concerned with the general political attributes of the people as a whole. So far there has been no systematic effort to investigate whether these attributes are shared by all political elites and to what extent they can explain the political conduct of any particular elite. Needless to say, we do not yet have the resources to undertake a study of such depth. What we can do here is make a preliminary effort to identify a few of the shared values that exerted a strong influence in shaping the militarists' political perceptions and in guiding their political behavior.

### *Personal Values and Characteristics*

On the question of the value system of the militarists, current opinion is divided. One group holds the view that the militarists were generally unprincipled, whimsical, and arbitrary. Others hold that the militarists did observe certain codes of behavior.<sup>1</sup> My own view is that the militarists could not and did not act in the way they wished. Our analysis later in this chapter will demonstrate that the militarists had to act under certain constraints and that they were quite aware of the consequences of their actions. To this extent, we must say that the militarists were principled people.

There is little doubt that the ideological influence of Confucianism was pervasive in traditional, or even early Republican, China. It became deeply imbedded in the Chinese mind, both conscious and unconscious, through a number of devices such as the civil service examination system, the penal code, the clan system, and the popular ideological campaigns launched from time to time. However, it is important to note that there always existed a distinction between orthodox Confucianism and its vulgarized version, the distinction between the "classic" and "folk" cultures, or the "great" and "little" traditions. As Redfield once stated, "The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities."<sup>2</sup>

China has long been regarded as having a homogeneous culture, and the little tradition contained few sharp departures from the great tradition. My personal view is that, in addition to the family and clan system and the religious practices which are believed by many people to have left a great impact on the members of the peasant community, the content of mass communication and popular forms of entertainment must also have had enormous influence on the social personality of the people in the "little" tradition. In other words, traditional stories, folk songs, and operas were probably more influential than classical Confucian writings in shaping the values and attitudes of the majority of people.

This distinction can help us understand better the source and content of the value system of the militarists, very few of whom were steeped in classical Confucian training and some of whom were actually illiterate. It is my contention that the overwhelming

majority of the militarists in this period acquired their value system through the "little" tradition, through folklore and the vulgarized interpretation of the "great" tradition. Therefore, it is pertinent for us to investigate the values that were most widely propagated in the "little" tradition and to see to what extent they shaped the thinking and behavior of the average militarist.

The most influential cultural forms among the Chinese masses were undoubtedly the traditional stories and operas. Among the stories, the all-time best-sellers amounted to probably no more than a dozen, most of them written in the vernacular so that anyone with a minimal reading ability could understand them.\* Those who could not read at all eventually learned about their contents through the ubiquitous storytellers.† Out of these novels came the materials for the Peking operas and their local variations. Although the limited repertoire remained unchanged for long periods of time, country people still flocked to them. Stage plays were important not only because they were the only form of organized entertainment for most villagers, but also because they were taken seriously as a method of imparting moral values and of pointing out the goals to which men should aspire.‡

In these novels and legends, a man interested in military affairs could find an ample supply of heroes and exemplary behavior.

\* They invariably included *San kuo yen i* (The Romance of the Three Kingdoms), *Shui hu chuan* (By the Water Margin), *Hsi yu chi* (The Monkey King), *Hung an* (The Investigation of Inspector Shih), *P'eng kung an* (The Investigation of Inspector P'eng), *Ch'i hiau wu i* (Seven Knights and Five Righteous Men), *Yüeh chuan* (The Story of Yüeh Fei), *Hung lou meng* (The Dream of the Red Chamber), *Hsi hsiang chi* (The Story of the Western Chamber).

† In fact, storytelling became so popular that it developed into an important art form itself, called the *shuo-shu*. The popularity of storytelling is shown in this passage from Feng Yü-hsiang's autobiography: "Our squad leader Li Hou-fang was particularly fond of telling stories from the *San kuo yen i*. Whenever he started the storytelling session, a large crowd would soon gather. The audience was usually so intent on listening that nobody would even dare to cough aloud." *Wo ti sheng ho*, 1: 38.

‡ Feng Yü-hsiang's autobiography provides vivid accounts of how these plays left an indelible impact on his adolescent mind and shaped his personality for the rest of his life. *Wo ti sheng ho*, 1: 22-24. The influence of the novel *San kuo yen i* on the militarists was probably tremendous, not only because it was the most popular work but also because the period depicted in the story bore a striking resemblance to the political situation in the early twentieth century. The *San kuo* abounded in characters who embodied the best of the martial virtues. In fact, one of its main characters, Kuan Yü, was accorded the status of deity by people all over the country. Gamble, *Ting Hsien*, pp. 398-401.

There has always been a relatively strong tendency among the Chinese to choose a model personality very early in life and to orient their lifetime efforts toward approximating that model.<sup>8</sup> Once a choice had been made, a man was likely to structure his life to resemble that of his model as closely as possible. He would try to acquire an exhaustive knowledge of his hero and to interpret his own problems in terms analogous to those faced by his hero. In this process, he developed a particular frame of reference and proceeded to impose it on contemporary political realities. The Chinese militarists naturally chose military men of previous generations as their model. Thus, analogies from *San kuo yen i* and other popular works exerted extremely persuasive power over the militarists.

The novels, storytelling, and stage performances contained a few common themes that left a strong imprint upon people in the lower socioeconomic classes from which the early twentieth-century militarists came. First, anyone familiar with militarists' behavior can easily see that the traditional forces of familism operated strongly upon them. Even though they lived in an age when traditional familism had already come under scathing attack by the Western-oriented intellectuals, the militarists as a group were little affected. Even some of the most notorious generals had the reputation of being faithful and obedient sons.

Equally as important as filial piety were the reliance on particularistic ties in structuring political relations and the belief that one was morally bound to help one's less fortunate kinsmen. In our earlier discussion of the internal composition of the factions, we presented abundant evidence that primary and secondary associations constituted important criteria for membership. In fact, some military units were literally family enterprises. In the wake of the disintegration of the traditional political order, the corruptive force of nepotism became totally unrestrained.\*

\* Even a man like Wu P'ei-fu, who had a reputation for being upright and uncorrupt, was no exception. When Wu was the High Commissioner of Chihli-Shantung-Honan, he appointed his wife's brother director of both the bureau of transportation and an automobile company in Loyang. He also appointed one of her brothers-in-law director of the bureau of military procurement and another brother-in-law the deputy director of the bureau of overseas Chinese affairs of the Peking government. Chang Chün-ku, *Wu P'ei-fu chuan*, 2: 440-45.

A second characteristic of the militarists was their separation of personal loyalty from political loyalty, which is a reflection of the little tradition of a people who had remained politically apathetic over a long period of time. Generally, the militarists took personal loyalty seriously but treated political loyalty rather indifferently. They appeared to acknowledge that political interests might produce transient alliance or opposition but that these should in no way be allowed to poison a strictly personal relationship. This explains the situation where two militarists would have their soldiers engage in fierce fighting but would refrain from doing any physical harm to each other's person.\*

Another characteristic of the militarists was a high sense of drama and personal charisma. Many of them tried to cultivate a legendary past, with the knowledge that this would help enhance their legitimacy among the people. The militarists in general loved having the reputation of possessing special physical features, because according to Chinese folklore only extraordinary men had extraordinary features. That physical uniqueness or eccentric behavior was of some importance to the people can be demonstrated by the fact that many militarists acquired nicknames that magnified these points. Thus, we have "long-legged general," "dog-eating general," "red-bearded bandit," "dragon," "tiger," "dog," "fast rider," "big tongue," and "blue sky," all expressions reminiscent of characters who appeared in novels about Chinese knights-errant. Pearl Buck, who had abundant opportunity to observe the militarists at close range, was once moved to remark:<sup>4</sup>

\* This dualistic approach toward loyalty was best demonstrated by the militarists' attitude toward the deposed Manchu emperor and his court officials. The emperor continued to be accorded the respect usually reserved for a head of state; he was allowed to maintain his own court and to exercise jurisdiction within the Forbidden City. The relations between the Republican government and the Manchu court were conducted as if between two sovereign states, and the militarists still eagerly flocked to the court on holidays and other propitious occasions to pay their homage to the child-emperor in accordance with the traditional court etiquette, which included the kowtow. They also pressed the Republican government to extend favorable treatment to the Manchu court; as a result, during the Hung-hsien reign and the anti-restoration campaign, the court escaped serious damage to its position. The militarists gladly did these things, regarding loyalty to one's old master as a virtue, even though they themselves had been instrumental in bringing down the empire. Other instances of scrupulous adherence to personal loyalty abounded, and the violation of this principle could bring about extremely unpleasant results.

Without exception, the war lords I have known have been men of unusual native ability, gifted with peculiar personal charm, with imagination and strength, and often with a rude poetic quality. Above all, they carry about with them, in them, a sense of high drama. The war lord sees himself great—and great in the traditional manner of heroes of ancient fiction and history who are so inextricably mingled in the old Chinese novels. He is, in effect, an actor by nature.

Ostentatious living was another important device to mark one's superiority. The scholar-officials of the traditional society followed a life of conspicuous consumption, as much to impress their inferiors as to amuse themselves. The militarists, in general, followed in their footsteps. This was particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that many militarists had come from very humble social backgrounds and had been brought up to value hard work and frugality. Upon becoming powerful, however, they squandered money, not only because they obviously enjoyed more luxurious living, but also because they believed they had to live ostentatiously in order to command respect. Thus they maintained palatial residences, kept a large number of personal servants, indulged in excessive gambling, drinking, and other forms of debauchery, and frequently threw extravagant parties. A militarist who attempted to cut corners on these expenses would be considered cheap and would find it difficult to make friends or exercise authority.

This concern with appearances, or *p'ai-ch'ang*, also constituted an important part of the etiquette that guided the militarists' official conduct.\* In conducting diplomatic relations, their behavior had to be appropriate to their official position, and most important, they were not to do anything that might be interpreted as loss of face.

Such excessive concern with pride and image often made it difficult to achieve constructive results through face-to-face negotiations.

\* For instance, when the victorious Chang Tso-lin entered Peking in 1926, ordinary traffic was halted, people were cleared from the streets, 15,000 policemen and soldiers stood guard, and the route was covered with a layer of yellow sand. "Shih-shih jih chih—Chung-kuo chih pu," *TFTC*, 23, 14 (June 25, 1926): 142. These were all honors accorded only to the emperor in the imperial days. Although Chang was small, he had in his reception hall a huge thronelike chair, decorated with a menacing tiger's head mounted on each side.

tion between leaders. Neither side could afford to yield without incurring loss of face. The usual give-and-take and the probing for intentions and resolve necessary for fruitful negotiation became more difficult. Diplomacy on the summit level had a tendency to become rigid because of the militarists' social expectations. Harmony and friendship were considered so important that militarists were often reluctant to disagree openly with each other. Therefore, either difficult problems were evaded or some abstract solution was agreed upon that in fact left the real problems very much unresolved. Most Chinese militarists much preferred to delegate diplomatic responsibilities to their subordinates.

#### *Code of Behavior Toward Other Militarists*

In this highly volatile period, during which the issues of war and peace were constantly in the forefront of any militarist's mind, the existence of some "rules of the game" assumed added importance. Every actor needed some criteria for assessing the behavior of others as well as for his own conduct. Although the rules could be modified or become obsolete when external conditions were altered, during much of the period from 1916 to 1928 the behavioral system was largely self-contained and subject to little alteration.

The following are evidence of a regular, discernible pattern of militarist behavior. When a militarist acted, his alternatives were constrained. Adherence to the major rules was necessary for a successful political career; violations entailed major costs, which might include frustration in one's career or physical sanctions by other militarists. There was no central institution to enforce these rules; they derived their force mainly from adverse consequences that followed their violation. In this respect, the system resembled an international system in which laws were enforced by individual members.

In this behavioral system, diplomacy occupied a prominent place in the militarists' relationships during peacetime. Almost all the important militarists stationed personal representatives at one another's headquarters, to perform such routine tasks as gathering information, channeling correspondence between the militarists, participating in ceremonies, and socializing. When a matter of grave importance was involved, a special envoy with greater authority

might be sent. The principle of the inviolability of the envoy was scrupulously observed.\*

On still other occasions, the militarists held conferences among themselves. The Nanking conference of 1916, the Tientsin conference of 1921, and the conference of Tuan Chi-ju, Chang Tsolin, and Feng Yü-hsiang in 1925 all involved the most powerful militarists in the system. Other conferences involving lesser militarists abounded. No participants in these important conferences were ever threatened with arrest, detention, or bodily harm by the host militarists, even when such action had apparent immediate advantage.†

There are two possible explanations for the nearly universal respect for the immunity of diplomatic personnel and the leaders of other factions. First of all, the militarists shared a particular political subculture, a spirit of political sportsmanship, because of the intricate network of diversified personal ties among them; an act of treachery would be censured by fellow militarists. The immediate advantage to the offender might be offset by almost certain social ostracism, public denunciation, and retaliation. Second and equally important, personal diplomacy was the major means of communication among the militarists, and everyone had an active interest in keeping the channels as open as possible. Thus restraint can be traced to both moral values and fear of physical retaliation.

Additional rules governed conduct in wartime. In the first place, wars were usually preceded by formal declarations; it was generally regarded as a matter of martial honor not to attack without warning. An open challenge followed by a clean fight was considered to be the minimum standard of behavior befitting a militarist. Typically, a barrage of circular telegrams of mutual denunciation would be launched by the principal opponents for quite some time.

\* For instance, prior to the second Chihli-Fengtien war of 1924, Ts'ao K'un thrice dispatched his younger brother to Fengtien to negotiate for peace. To reciprocate, Chang Tsolin sent one of his in-laws. Had there been any doubt about the envoys' safety, neither militarist would have risked sending a close relative.

† For instance, Chang Tsolin visited Tuan Chi-ju a few days before the 1920 war, when it was already clear that he would join Tuan's enemies. But Tuan made no attempt to kidnap or kill Chang, who went back and declared war against Anhwei.

before actual hostilities began. The war of words was, of course, primarily a psychological war intended to isolate one's opponents and to win over neutrals and waiverers. In this light it is of interest to note that most denunciations gave more weight to the opponent's alleged violation of traditionally defined personal virtues than to the merits or faults of his political stance. Filial impiety, betrayal of friendship, disrespect for seniors, or violation of kinship norms provided much ammunition for such denunciations.<sup>5</sup>

From a practical point of view, the backward state of military technology and severely restricted mobility greatly reduced any prospect of achieving drastic results by surprise attack. Besides, all the militarists kept their armies in a state of maximum mobilization at all times, and a defender could respond at almost the instant he was attacked. Thus while a militarist might have little or nothing to gain by launching an unannounced attack, he might have much to lose by omitting the formal declaration of war.

The militarists were generally rational and pragmatic politicians; they were probably the least ideologically oriented group in modern Chinese politics. They made their political calculations and decided on the important issues of war and peace, not on the basis of personal sentiments but on the basis of relative capabilities. Their behavior suggested an acute awareness that they were playing a kind of "game," that they were drawn into relationships because their respective power positions required it. It is fair to say that militarists were professionally opposed, but not necessarily personally hostile, to each other.\* Since the distinction between official and private relationships was fairly clearly demarcated, con-

\* Probably the most extreme manifestation of the lack of personal animosity was reported to have taken place in Szechwan. According to Chang Jen-min, "The Szechuanese generals were most civilized in their civil wars. For instance, while two opposing armies might be fighting to the death outside Chengtu or Chung-king, their leading generals could be playing mah-jong at the same table. The subordinates from both sides would come to the table and report on the war's progress. After the mah-jong was over, they would still part as friends, the defeated generals. If the defeated generals had parents or other senior family members residing in the city, the victorious general would make a personal visit to console them, and to see that they would receive money and gifts every month. Therefore, although civil wars occurred in Szechwan frequently, there was never any personal hatred or cruelty involved." Chang Jen-min, "T'ie tung Ch'iun Chien liang sheng t'san chia pei fa chih hui i," *Ch'un chiu*, no. 98 (Aug. 1, 1961), p. 3.

flict could be restricted within the official arena. Thus there were two other important rules of behavior: militarists did not kill each other in battle, and the victors did not kill or imprison the defeated opponents.

Consequently, one finds that although numerous big and small wars were fought, the human cost among the militarists remained exceedingly low. An exhaustive review of official records shows that as a result of the four wars fought between 1916 and 1922 (anti-Yüan, anti-restoration, Chihli-Anhwei, Chihli-Fengtien), a total of only 41 persons were accused of war crimes. Of these, only ten were military professionals; the other 31 were party hacks or personal advisers to militarists. Only three of these men were actually arrested, and they were inadvertently caught in the midst of confusion by soldiers rather than by the police or court personnel. These facts leave no doubt that most militarists tried not to be vindictive; they did not want to foreclose any possibility of co-operation in the future.

In spite of the fact that war was almost a daily occurrence, there were only a few significant cases in which a leading northern militarist deliberately eliminated another militarist by murder.\* Indeed, when one tabulates cases of violence among militarists between 1916 and 1928, one can find no more than a dozen. And if violence were committed, the pressure from the militarists' subculture could be so great that the violator would soon find that the immediate advantage was more than neutralized by the long-range disadvantages.†

In order to survive in a highly volatile political system in which

\* These included the execution of Pao Te-ch'üan in 1922 and the assassination of Kuo Chien in 1921 by Feng Yü-hsiang, the execution of Chiang Teng-hsian by Kuo Sung-lin, and the execution of Kuo Sung-lin by Chang Tso-lin. Feng's action greatly angered Wu P'ci-fu and caused himself a lot of trouble in the Chihli faction. Feng Yü-hsiang, *Wo ti sheng ho*, 2: 167. Kuo Sung-lin's action so infuriated other Fengtien generals that his rebellion collapsed in less than two months from lack of support. Shen I-yün, p. 236.

† This can be shown by the case of the execution of Lu Chien-chang, an important member of the Peiyang Army and a former military governor of Shensi. In 1917-18 Lu waged a personal campaign to persuade other militarists to oppose Tuan Chi-jui's military adventures. His crusade produced such a serious divisive effect within the Peiyang ranks that in mid-June 1918 Hsi Shu-cheng, Tuan's protégé, set a trap and executed Lu in his own garden, claiming that Lu had committed treasonous acts. The entire military community was outraged by this act, and neutrals as well as adversaries joined in denouncing Hsi's action as unbecoming to a Peiyang member. Although Tuan had had no prior

their political interests might complement or conflict with each other rather unpredictably, the militarists had a common interest in minimizing the harshness of the political consequences of conflict. But the definition of common interest was accepted only because most militarists knew each other personally and shared certain basic values and other subcultural traits.

If this hypothesis is plausible, then its opposite should be equally plausible; that is, in the absence of these personal ties and implicit consensus, we would expect a marked increase in personal violence among the militarists.

Our preliminary examination reveals that, between 1916 and 1925, personal violence among southern militarists far exceeded that among northern militarists. Although my research was not exhaustive, it uncovered nineteen important cases of militarists who were killed by other militarists, either through execution or by hired assassins, in addition to many other cases of attempted killings.\* Overall, then, militarists in the south seemed to be more inclined to view the physical liquidation of rivals as the most effective way of removing them from the political arena.

The significant differences between the northern and southern militarists in the use of violence may be explained, at least in part, by the basic subcultural and organizational differences between the two groups. The subcultural differences among the provinces in the south were more pronounced than in the north; in the south, physical mobility was more hampered by the mountainous terrain, and differences in dialects and customs were sharper. Therefore, a feeling of mutual trust and common interest was much harder to generate among southern militarists.

There was also greater diversity in the professional backgrounds knowledge, the execution cost the Anhwei faction a great deal of support and contributed significantly to its defeat in the war of 1920. In subsequent years, many militarists felt reluctant to cooperate with Anhwei because Hsü continued to enjoy Tuan's confidence. Finally, in 1925, Hsü himself was kidnapped and summarily executed by Lu's relatives.

\* In 1924, for example, when the Kwangsi General Huang Shao-hung was visiting Canton, his residence was attacked by assassins hired by rival Kwangsi militarists. Although Huang managed to escape personally, many of his guards were killed. Huang Shao-hung, 1: 78-80. In Hunan, T'ang Sheng-chih once tried to lay a trap to catch rival militarists by inviting them to a Buddhist retreat at Heng-yang. Most militarists realized his design and declined to attend. One brigade commander from the Hunan 3d Division went and was executed. This incident touched off a civil war in Hunan. Kung Tc-po, *Kung Te-po hu lu*, 1: 149.

of the southern militarists. There was no southern counterpart to the Peiyang establishment, and as a result southern militarists did not undergo the same schooling, training, or work experience. This diversity in subcultural and professional backgrounds made it difficult for them to reach agreement upon a set of common rules of behavior.<sup>7</sup> There was less stability in their expectations; they could not confidently predict what other militarists might do under given conditions. The absence of an implicit consensus on behavioral rules created an atmosphere unfavorable to restraint, hence the propensity toward the use of violence against each other.

One may argue that the diplomatic flexibility exhibited by most militarists in this period was directly attributable to the scrupulous observance of basic rules. That the scrupulous adherence to a nonvindictive policy in dealing with defeated militarists indeed contributed much to diplomatic flexibility was apparent in the coalition patterns among the northerners.\*

However, this was not the case in the relations between the KMT and the northern militarists, especially after 1925, when the KMT had grown to be a serious power. The lack of personal ties or similarity of subculture between these two groups removed the incentive to avoid violence. A typical example of the outbreak of violence took place in December 1925, when Chiang Kai-shek sent two regiment commanders on a mission to persuade Sun Ch'uan-fang to cooperate with the KMT. In order to demonstrate to his own northern subordinates his resolve to fight to the bitter end, Sun ordered Chiang's emissaries executed. In retaliation, Chiang executed two of Sun's corps commanders who had been taken prisoner. At approximately the same time, Chiang also accused Sun of deliberately murdering three hundred KMT officers and soldiers who had been captured.<sup>8</sup> These incidents rendered it impossible for the two sides to come to a negotiated settlement and forced them to settle their differences through battle.

#### *Values Affecting Political Legitimacy*

One of the most deeply ingrained Chinese beliefs is that their country should be unified. They view their history as an essentially

\* In 1920, Chihli and Fengtien against Anhwei; in 1922 and 1924, Fengtien and Anhwei against Chihli; and in 1925, Fengtien and Chihli against Kuomin-chün.

cyclical pattern, as expressed in the saying, "The land under Heaven will disintegrate after a long period of integration, and will re-integrate after a long period of disintegration." Most Chinese are quite convinced that this is the *only* explanation for China's history, and they cite numerous instances from the vast expanse of their past to prove the point. The principle of national unity has acquired the status of a national consensus, for scholars and peasants alike, and has become an item of unquestioned faith. It forms the frame of reference within which the Chinese mind and behavior find meaning, and no political organization would expect the people to view its authority as legitimate if it dared to challenge this national consensus.

This universal commitment to national unity created a legitimacy crisis for all militarists. They were caught between their desire to preserve their political independence and their inability to repudiate the principle of national reunification.\*

One way to legitimize authority was to preserve the institutional facade of a centralized national government and profess to exercise authority on its behalf. This explains why the militarists fought so zealously to preserve the sham government in Peking. During the twelve-year period, there were six changes of the head of state and 25 cabinet reshuffles, but the governmental structure was kept intact until 1927. All the powerful factions aspired to control the central government and fully realized the advantages to be gained from such control.

Since Peking had been the capital of China for centuries, it came to be the symbol of political unification and conferred legitimacy on those who occupied it. The control of the central government machinery with all its trappings enabled the ruling militarist faction to denounce other factions as perpetrators of political disorder. Hence, all the militarists who controlled the central government insisted, with a rare and sometimes comical tenacity, on issuing directives to other provinces even though they knew well that the directives would be defied. From time to time, they deliberately provoked the local militarists into defying them and then interpreted the defiance as unpatriotic. Another tactic was that of issuing directives with which other militarists would willingly comply. Hence, after each change of government, the new masters in Peking would renew the appointments of all important incum-

bent military and civil leaders, which usually amounted to nothing more than acknowledging the positions already held. The ritual of making these appointments was believed to give the militarists an aura of legitimacy and was always scrupulously observed.

The need to enhance legitimacy compelled all militarists with sufficient power and aspiration to strive for national unification. The existence of such a universal value made it impossible for the militarists to be satisfied with limited goals and forced them to compete until one of them achieved the absolute goal of reunification. This provides one major explanation for the great frequency of fighting in the 1920's.

Since there was only one national government and it could be controlled by only one faction at a time, the other militarists still had to face the legitimacy crisis and to find a rationalization for their autonomous status. In some cases, regional support was sought to bolster the legitimacy of their regimes. The militarists very early recognized the utility of regional sentiments and tried to use them to advantage. In so doing, some succeeded in sidetracking the issue of national unity by asserting that they were not at all opposed to national unity but that since political fragmentation was a fact, the second-best policy was to protect the region under their control.\*

Those who tried to build a political regime on regional support usually wanted to pursue two goals. Internally, they wanted to achieve autonomy for their territory, and externally they wanted to follow a policy of isolationism.† Whether these two goals could be realized depended on a number of factors. Other things being equal, it seems that regional sentiments were usually heightened

\* Reflective of this assertion was the so-called federalist movement (*lien-sheng tsu-chih*), or movement for provincial self-government, sponsored by Hunan in the 1920's. Hunan actually drew up a provincial constitution and elected its officials by popular vote. Several other provinces proclaimed their intention to follow suit. It goes without saying that all these acts were the results of manipulation by the governing militarists of each province, who acted to enhance their claims to legitimacy without a genuine commitment to improve the rights and welfare of the people.

† For instance, the Hunan constitution contained an article specifically forbidding outside armies to pass through or be stationed on Hunan soil. Freedom from external intervention was the main feature of the constitution. Li Chien-nung, 2: 547-51.

by the presence of danger—the threat of war with a neighboring power or the existence of outside troops in one's home territory. But regional sentiments could become a liability when the militarists and their armies were foreign to the region they ruled. A survey of the geographical origins of the ruling militarists during the 1916-28 period shows that the overwhelming majority of them were northerners, especially from the provinces of Chihi, Shantung, and Honan.<sup>7</sup> While North China was always controlled by northerners, southern provinces were also often controlled by northerners. There was a sharp contrast between northern and southern militarists in area controlled: whereas individual southern militarists' territorial control seldom extended beyond one province, northern militarists' territories often extended over several provinces. Thus, of the 25 provinces, only five (Shansi, Kwangsi, Szechwan, Kweichow, Yunnan), plus Manchuria, ever had indigenous regimes; the rest were under the control of northern militarists for most or all of the time.

Two contradictory positions on the question of regional sentiments thus arose. Those consistently invoking these sentiments were all indigenous regimes whose rulers were weak and threatened by powerful neighbors and saw no realistic hope of outward expansion. In these areas, regional support was actively courted to ward off external encroachments. On the other hand, those who condemned regionalism were invariably powerful and ambitious militarists who presided over a carpetbagger regime and wanted to expand into new territories.

We need also to ask whether regionalism was indeed a viable alternative for most militarists. In this connection, one must not confuse the existence of "regional sentiments" with "regionalism" itself. Regional differences and sentiments certainly were quite pronounced in China. But it is also true that the great progress in social, economic, and cultural integration that had been accomplished in the past several centuries was, by the early twentieth century, reinforced by an emerging anti-foreign and anti-imperialist feeling.<sup>8</sup> The people's greatest desire was for nationalism through power and unity, not regionalism through continued division. Regionalism was acceptable only as a temporary device to escape the oppression of civil wars. Where the people were not

responsive, regionalism could not strike root. Thus, only in a few cases, such as Shansi and Manchuria, did the military regimes register some success in presenting a clear-cut regional character.\* To sum up, then, the national consensus in favor of unification made the legitimacy of all the militarists' independent regimes vulnerable. The international system is far more stable in this respect, because the principle of territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the actors is universally accepted and honored. In China, however, the entire system of military regimes was regarded as illegitimate. The only system recognized as fully legitimate was a unified nation with a central government in Peking. Since the militarist system itself was illegitimate, the militarists had no right to preserve either their territorial integrity or their political independence. While the smaller military units were able to command loyalty on personal grounds (because national issues were too remote), the powerful ones could not conveniently evade the issue and had to explain why they had a right to exist.

Almost all the prominent militarists at one time or another engaged in sweeping attacks on militarism, advocated disarmament, and condemned the very nature of military regimes—criticisms invariably applied to others but never to themselves. But this type of hypocrisy could not long be sustained; by denigrating others, they also denigrated themselves. In the end, therefore, everyone's legitimacy was undermined.

A direct consequence of the weak legitimacy of the military re-

\* That the militarists had no firm ideological commitment to regionalism but rather used it merely as a tactical device to strengthen their legitimacy is best illustrated by the changing attitudes of the leaders of Manchuria on this question. In terms of internal structure, Manchuria undoubtedly constituted a well-defined region. Prior to 1920, the theme that Manchuria constituted a geographically distinct entity was constantly underlined in order to protect its autonomy. Between 1920 and 1922, however, when Fengtien shared control over the Peking government with Chihli, it said little about regionalism. Between 1922 and 1924, when Fengtien was defeated by Chihli and forced to withdraw to its home base, it again declared itself an autonomous regional government and warned others not to interfere with its domestic affairs. After its victory over Chihli in 1924, Fengtien's power swept into Peking and eventually extended to the northern edge of the Yangtze valley. During this period, regionalism was again deemphasized, and the principle of national reunification was used to justify Fengtien's interventionist policy toward other militarists. But when defeated by the KMT in 1927, it once again invoked the sanctity of regional self-government, which it maintained in effect until the Japanese invasion of 1931.

gimes was that dramatic territorial changes were relatively easy. The militarists were identified with their troops more than with territories or populations. But in an age in which prolonged warfare could not be sustained without a solid territorial base, this fact necessarily had the most disturbing effect on the stability of the system.

Another consequence of the weak legitimacy of the military regimes was that of lack of respect for their political control. The weak link between the militarists and their territories, the lack of identity between their regimes and the people they ruled, made it relatively easy to destroy and eliminate them and to impose new regimes.